LARC 2.0 Inquiry-Based Course Innovation Proposal

**PARTICIPANT/DEPARTMENT**

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English

**CURRICULUM INNOVATION TYPE**

Course Redesign

**COURSE**

College Colloquium: Human Rights and Literature

**NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION / GOALS**

I am applying for an Inquiry-Based Course Innovation grant to undertake a Course Revision for my college colloquium seminar, “Human Rights and Literature.” This interdisciplinary course investigates the history of human rights from the perspective of literature. Students explore how rights are represented and narrated in novels such as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*and J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* and how their founding declarations—famously, the Declaration of Independence (1776), the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789), and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)—rely on fictional structures. The revision to this course will involve designing three new assignment modules to introduce research practices into first-year writing-based curriculum.

In the past, my college colloquium class has been organized around modules that each encourage the refinement of scholarly writing: 1) the historical and philosophical background to human rights theory; 2) an investigation of the literary structures applicable to human rights claims; and 3) the exploration of two assigned novels that allow for student discussion of problems of human rights at thematic and theoretical levels. Each of these units has featured an essay assignment in which students unpack a problem they encounter in one or several theoretical readings and then apply this problem to a work of literature from the course syllabus. While these assignments have allowed students to organize arguments for their essays using insight from class readings and discussion, they have not encouraged the development of scholarly research practices expected in political and literary fields. I have also noticed that these assignments encourage a regurgitative model of writing where insights from class discussion are repurposed in the thesis of an essay.

To help students make better arguments in their formal essays, and to thus prepare them for a capstone or senior research project, I would like to redesign my college colloquium class to act as an introduction into research methodologies as well as critical writing. My redesign is guided by the following questions:

* What kind of assignments will help students utilize the research protocols of both literary studies and political science at an introductory level?
* How can strong and original research be solicited from students without also prescribing topics or subjects?
* How can original research be used to exemplify or test theoretical or philosophical ideas from the course syllabus?
* How can students take ownership of their research in a way that feels generative rather than regurgitated?

To address these questions, I would like to scaffold a set of assignments that encourage different research skills in conjunction with critical writing. This trajectory might, tentatively, look something like this: the first assignment has students research a component of a novel they are writing on (the author’s life, for example, or the historical events depicted in the novel). The second assignment asks students to test out some of the theoretical and fictional writings in class by researching a particular demonstration (the sans-papier movement in France, for example, or the ACT UP demonstration at the Montreal AIDS conference). The third assignment involves a group research project that asks students to create an annotated bibliography for the course. Students in future versions of the course will then revise and expand this on bibliography as part of an evolving and transgenerational research project.

Goals of Course Revision:

1. to help students become passionately and critically engaged with the research process early in their undergraduate education.
2. to model several protocols for interdisciplinary research that show how literary research can be strengthened with historical research and, vice versa, how political arguments benefit from close attention to literary structures.
3. to introduce students to basic methods of literary and historical research and to have them test insights from one set of methodological claims to an entirely new object.
4. to help students learn how to organize the insights of original research into shareable formats and evidence for philosophical claims.
5. to help students understand the evolution of research; how research is based on innovating and testing prior research, etc.

**WORK PLAN / IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE**

* June-August 2016:
  + Consultation with Doreen Simonson at Hatfield Library to discuss research possibilities and student access to offsite resources
  + Consultation with select instructors in the Politics and English departments to decide how best to solicit original research topics and questions without determining content or subject matter.
  + Meeting with Writing Consultant to discuss ideas about to incorporate their assistance into the research, as well as writing, process for the course.
  + Revision of syllabus to reflect three new research assignment modules.
  + Development of rubrics for assessment of research components in course
* August-January 2017:
  + Implementation and assessment of course

**FORM AND SCHEDULE FOR ASSESSMENT OF THE INNOVATION**

* August-January 2017:
  + Invite faculty from Politics and English departments to sit in on class and gather feedback for revision
  + Assess each student assignment according to rubrics developed over the summer and note necessary changes for future versions of course
  + Conduct interview with course Writing Consultant to assess nature of research support conducted alongside writing support

PROPOSED BUDGET

Faculty stipend: $4000

**TOTAL: $4000**