Teaching Philosophy

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As an educator I have adopted a teaching model that connects the classroom with world cultures. I have taught interdisciplinary and specialized introductory and upper-division undergraduate courses in literature, history, film, and cultural studies. I hold two pedagogy certificates from the Univ. of Michigan's Center for Research on Learning and Teaching: one on teaching methodologies, and another on theories and applications of digital technologies in the classroom. In June 2014, I was competitively selected by U-M's Institute for the Humanities to receive a National Endowment for the Humanities Grant to train at the Univ. of Victoria Digital Humanities Summer Institute (one of three Institutes of its kind globally). I have also continued to collaborate around new research in new media through Univ. of Michigan's Third Century Initiative.

Digital media opens up possibilities for new ways of documenting perspectives that can help shape students' critical thinking about the world. In "Hacktivism and the Humanities" Elizabeth Losh reflects upon a concept of Critical Information Studies that folds prior experiments in new media and activism from outside of the academy into a notion of digital learning that appears more like a "hypertext." She describes the pedagogical shape of this text as "a multilayered networked narrative linked to evidence of the discursive practices of different communities." Images, sounds, videos, and other sensorial displays can lend immediacy to information that brings it into sharper focus. Collecting, organizing, and then designing how information is presented changes the ways students view their role in shaping the academy.

In one course I've designed, "Practices of Oral History" students navigate through the preparation, best practices, activity, and documentation of conducting and archiving an oral

history interview for a digital archive. Students contribute their own reflections and select materials from interviewees to contribute to their individual blogs, linked to the course blog. Students gain skills in scanning, uploading, and cataloguing diverse cultural artifacts on paper and other "analog" mediums. Attenuation to gaps in the historical record of women's experiences, for example, are counter-balanced by students' decisions about what details and materials to include in the catalogue. Theoretical readings on the processes by which historical narratives are legitimized/delegitimized in the historiography of marginalized groups also shapes students' own, first-person narratives of their course readings. By emphasizing the value of their work in the present and future writing of women's history, this activity lends agency to students as archivists. This agency, in turn, encourages students to see themselves and what they accomplish in writing within the classroom as having meaning and importance in their everyday lives. Ultimately, their contributions in class become part of transforming information into knowledge.

The above activity is only one example of the critical practices within the digital humanities that have been described as "semiotic democracy": "CIS asks questions about access, costs, and their sometimes chilling effects on, within, and among audiences, citizens, emerging cultural creators, indigenous cultural groups, teachers and students. Central to these issues is the idea of 'semiotic democracy,' or the ability of citizens to employ the signs and symbols ubiquitous in their environments in manners that they determine" (Siva Vaidhyanathan cited in Losh). As teachers, we can learn from activists, programmers, and other practitioners in media and the arts to address the politics of the tools we use to produce, categorize, and disseminate information. In doing so, we equip our students with the guidance to formulate their own questions around the power hierarchies within which information is interpreted.

It is important that my students view their work in our classroom as an example of their leadership. Twice per semester I take digital polls in which students "vote" on course activities. This gives students an opportunity to anonymously suggest topics, themes, or specific areas they need extra help with while providing me with ongoing feedback on their progress. I also use social media to integrate content with topicality. For example, when I facilitated a unit on minority discourse in Russian politics, I arranged for my students to interview a colleague on a Fulbright in St. Petersburg over Skype in which they wrote, moderated, and posed questions about her research with regard to our unit on 19th century Russian history. By linking course content to "live" research, I helped my students to think critically about the production of scholarship. Better able to conceptualize cultural history as an interpretive practice, students were able to more clearly articulate their own voice in in their expository writing, bringing more nuanced questions to the topics at hand.

I believe that adopting a communicative approach to inquiry opens a more inclusive space for students from all backgrounds by helping to integrate a wider range of perspectives into our discussions. I've found the multimedia aspects of digital media to be an especially effective tool for addressing diverse learning styles. Whether we are discussing urban subcultures in late Soviet film, Holocaust memorials in Poland, culpability and acquittal in *The Grand Inquisitor*, or the connection between Pussy Riot and Plato, I always encourage students to question the modes of argumentation within the texts we examine together. To further our dialogue outside of class, I require students to post daily questions and comments about the readings to blogs I design for each course. Having an online record of our course discussions helps students prepare for assignments while imparting a sense of responsibility to their own individual writing process. It also provides opportunities for students to hone their editing and

tech skills by requiring them to frame and digitally share key points from their daily notes. This reflective work also helps to facilitate student-to-student discussion in the networking, commenting, and posting between students' individual blogs and their interaction on the main course site.

Throughout my teaching, I aim to create a spirit of collaboration that inspires students to think of themselves as inventors in a structured laboratory. To expand students' technical writing vocabulary and editing skills, I usually assign short writing assignments based on different styles of writing. These may take the form of journal responses to current events, literature reviews, or close readings of a significant passage from an assigned novel or poem. I often begin class by grouping students into selected pairs and then asking them to write two to five detailed questions about the readings. I then have students trade questions and present their responses in their original pairs. Oftentimes, when presenting their findings to the rest of the class, I will ask students to "teach" each other by summarizing their statements about a specific passage in two or three different ways. Being able to translate their interpretations of a text in multiple contexts aids students' ability to clarify abstract ideas in concise terms, while also encouraging them to test, apply, and debate their ideas with one another.

I know that my teaching is successful when my students have discovered a passion for the difficult questions that arise from reading well, and the confidence to attempt those questions in writing. Above all, I aim to communicate to my students that learning entails responsibility to a larger community. I give my students the tools to keep building their interests by helping them discover and navigate points of understanding across cultures, bridging their confidence in themselves as learners inside the academy, with their own lifelong pursuit of knowledge about the world.