

Making Deliberate Choices: Revising a Literature Course with SoTL in Mind

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As a faculty member at a teaching-focused university, I often think about my teaching and how I can improve student learning. However, despite a decade of teaching experience, I was relatively unaware of the scholarship of teaching and learning until recently. At around the same time that I started editing *InSight: A Journal of Scholarly Teaching*, I became involved in a three-year, multi-institution, multi-discipline grant project called the Collaborative Humanities Redesign Project. Each faculty member involved in the project redesigned one of their undergraduate courses to enhance student learning, and the course I chose to revise was EN201: Introduction to Literature. In order to determine whether my revisions were successful, I had to approach my teaching and the students' work in a much more systematic way than I had done previously.

The scholarship of teaching and learning is described by most scholars as a deliberate, systematic inquiry into student learning.¹ For example, Randy Bass claims SoTL occurs when "faculty undertak[e] systematic inquiry of learning in his or her own classroom." He also describes teaching as an experiment that requires evidence to close the loop, a description that is mirrored in Pat Hutching's reference to SoTL work as "a cycle." Mary Taylor Huber emphasizes that one must start by asking questions, and Nancy Chick expands on that point by indicating a scholar's methodology will be based on those questions but also the specific disciplinary expertise of the scholar. Joanna Renc-Roe and Dan Bernstein explain that inquiry is based on evidence of student of learning and the reflection that follows. And Sherry Linkon asserts that she is a better teacher as a result of doing SoTL work, because she has to think carefully about what student learning actually looks like.

For my Introduction to Literature course, I followed this process of asking questions/looking for opportunities for improvement, making interventions and redesigning assignments, analyzing student work for evidence of increased learning, and then reflecting on the revisions and determining whether more revisions were necessary. This portfolio presents three iterations of the course: the first iteration (Year 1) took place in Spring 2015 and demonstrates the baseline, the second redesigned iteration (Year 2) took place in Spring 2016, and the third revised iteration (Year 3) was completed in Spring 2017. Overall, this study was successful in making small improvements to the course, especially to one specific assignment, but the most valuable aspect was the trial and error I went through as a teacher implementing a SoTL methodology.

¹ In a video created by the Center for Engaged Learning at Elon University at the ISSOTL Conference in 2013, several scholars gave short interviews on the topic "Key Characteristics of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning." The examples included in this paragraph are taken from that video: [youtube.com/watch?v=yvDKHHyx7YY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yvDKHHyx7YY)

Background

EN201: Introduction to Literature is an elective in the liberal education core, and students range from freshmen to seniors. The course often serves as a recruitment course for the English major/minor. However, the course is also required for all English majors and minors and is intended to be taken first in their major/minor curriculum sequence. As such, most students who take the course have some interest in reading or literature, but their literary analysis skills are usually minimal. Most students are also native English speakers, although there are usually one to three international students enrolled, as well. The course is offered every semester in both online and face-to-face modalities. The size of the course fluctuates year-to-year and varies depending on the days/time offered, but it typically ranges from eight to 20 students. In Spring 2015, 15 students were enrolled, eight students were enrolled in Spring 2016, and 11 students enrolled in Spring 2017.

According to the course description in the undergraduate catalog, EN201 aims to help students develop skills in reading, interpreting, and evaluating literature, and surveys some of the major concerns and movements in literary criticism. Therefore, just as the course title implies, EN201 is an introductory survey encouraging students to explore and analyze different literary genres and periods. As a result, the readings I select include poetry, short stories, and at least one play, one novel, and one graphic story. I usually choose the readings with an overarching theme or topic in mind; for example, past topics have included obsession, relationships, and madness. The theme provides students a starting point to interpret the texts and potentially make connections among other texts. I assess the students' learning according to class participation, regular blog posts, several short writing assignments, a midterm creative presentation, and a final essay, which also acts as the core assessment.

My personal intellectual goals for the course center on improving students' skills in reading and writing about literature, but I also want them to see connections across temporal, cultural, and generic boundaries. To encourage students to learn the methods of literary scholars, I introduce them to relevant terms, model the strategies and moves to make, and then ask them to practice those moves, both in class and in more formal assignments.

In 50 to 75-minute classes, time is divided into short lecture, discussion, group work, and in-class writing. A typical day in the classroom begins with me writing the homework for the following class on the board along with definitions of one or two literary terms/elements. I find that if students are going to think more like literary critics, they need the appropriate vocabulary to participate in the conversation, thus creating a discourse community within the classroom and helping them join the larger field. I spend a few minutes discussing the homework and collecting any assignments that are due. If students are turning in an assignment, I ask several students to share what they wrote about, again providing an opportunity for students to reinforce the community of learning. When introducing a new reading, which the students read in preparation for class, I provide five to ten minutes of contextual information, including biographical details about the author, historical or cultural context, and details about genre or form. During this time, I might show a short video or

interview, play a clip of music, or display visual representations or art. Sometimes, I will take an extra ten minutes to model how to close read a text, going line by line. The majority of the class period, though, is focused on student discussion and engagement with the texts, usually in pairs/small groups or larger class discussion. I provide students with prompts or questions to guide and focus the discussion. I attempt to break up this structure sometimes with an activity, such as drawing the setting based on details from the text or staging a scene from a play. Before each of the larger assignments, I also build in time to discuss writing strategies and rhetorical choices.

The writing that occurs outside of class tells me how well students are grasping the concepts of reading and analysis. The blogs offer a low-stakes environment for students to practice articulating a response to the readings. The short writing assignments give students the chance to practice writing more formal essays. The creative midterm encourages students to explore the readings in new ways by producing a creative project/artifact related to the readings, writing a reflection piece about their choices, and presenting their project to the class. The final six to eight page essay demonstrates the students' construction of a focused thesis statement and development of ideas using specific examples from the primary texts as well as supporting points from secondary sources. These assignments hopefully lead to students improving their reading and writing skills as well as emphasizing the variety of ways one can engage with literature.

In redesigning my literature course, I attempted to follow the deliberate process utilized in SoTL. I first determined my baseline by describing my course as it currently existed and collected sample student work (with IRB approval). Then I started asking questions about what I really wanted students to learn and where I might improve the course. My questions straddled two of the kinds of SoTL questions Pat Hutchings famously describes in *Opening Lines: Approaches to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* (2000): what works? and visions of the possible. In closely considering my students' work, I decided I wanted to particularly focus on:

1. strategies for reading more critically/actively
2. making connections among texts
3. creating scaffolding toward the larger projects

I hoped the first two goals would help students to dig more deeply into the literary texts and to stretch their imaginations and critical capacity. The third goal was aimed at providing students with more support and structure as they moved toward the larger assignments, which hopefully would result in more thoughtful and sophisticated writing and analysis.

Implementation

In order to achieve my three goals, I built in more guidelines and rubrics for both low-stakes assignments and larger projects that emphasized the skills I wanted to see. In addition, I implemented some small changes to provide students more guidance as they read, and I modeled the kinds of analysis and connections I wanted them to make. Throughout the semester, I collected student work and distributed anonymous surveys. Afterwards, I analyzed

the evidence to determine whether each redesigned component worked or still needed tweaking.

Daily Readings and Discussion: In the past, I always spent some time in class discussing how to read closely/actively, but I decided to create a handout listing tips and steps for students to take as they read [YEAR 2 ACTIVE READING HANDOUT]. The content of the handout is a mixture of my own experiences and preferences and tips from other sources. I referred to this handout throughout the semester, as well as modeled for students how to read, and attempted to ensure through repetition that the students move beyond a quick, superficial reading of the material. While I regularly guided students through analysis of texts, I don't remember ever explicitly modeling for them what I wanted them to do. Therefore, in the first week of the redesigned course, I walked them through my own reading process by closely reading a short poem or passage. I projected it onto the board, and we went through it line by line, marking it up as we read. I repeated this process periodically throughout the semester, showing students how to move from basic plot points to critical thinking to independent thinking. Related to the handout, which starts with "what expectations do you have about the text based on the title and genre," I spent the last five minutes of each class preparing students for the next reading. In *Engaging Ideas*, John Bean suggests a pretest to prepare students for what they might encounter in the text, but I think that simply asking them the above question and urging them to consider the title and genre in advance helped. In addition, I added a reading question to each text listed on the course calendar. So while students were reading the assigned text, they tried to answer the reading question, which provided even more direction on what students should be paying attention to when reading. This allowed us more time in class to delve deeply into the texts rather than spending the whole hour going over basic plot points. The questions also gave the students a possible topic to discuss in their reading blogs, which satisfied those students who were uncomfortable writing without a clear topic prompt.

Blog Posts: The written assignment that most closely corresponds to my goal regarding students' engagement with the texts is the (bi-)weekly blog posts. In Year 1's weekly blogs [YEAR 1 BLOG PROMPT], students sometimes revealed astute insights into the readings, but overall I found that students fell back on plot summary, how the readings remind them of their own lives, or simply repeated class lecture. While these approaches offer minimally valid responses, I realized that I wasn't receiving the kinds of critical thinking I hoped for. Similarly, the medium I selected, online blogs, offers the opportunity for visuals, multimedia, and hyperlinks, but students rarely incorporated more than a basic Google image. The blogs also offered the opportunity for students to make connections to other readings, but again they rarely did this. However, based on the rather broad instructions I provided to students, they did quite well overall, with most students receiving full credit each week. In grading, I focused on whether they achieved the word count, engaged with the text on some level, used one example, and avoided major grammatical and proofreading mistakes. As demonstrated in this BLOG EXAMPLE by a student performing at a medium-low level, the student simply shares what happens in the play with some rudimentary analysis about the gender conflicts, which we had discussed in class. The student provides no new thinking and does not discuss the examples in any depth. Likewise, the addition of the image adds nothing to the analysis. This particular

post also represents work submitted well into the semester, so I also wasn't seeing the posts improve that much over time. In contrast, this BLOG EXAMPLE by a high-performing student reflects a good grasp of the overall themes of the texts and points to connections among them. Yet, the post also begs for more explanation and some use of multimedia.

In examining students' work, I realized that I needed to make my expectations clearer and to provide them with more space to achieve what I wanted. Thus, I:

- expanded the word count from a minimum of 200 to 300 words
- took out "personal" from the options
- specifically asked students to avoid plot summary and use more specific examples and details
- encouraged more sophisticated connections among texts (beyond the theme I already gave them)
- made the multimedia component a requirement instead of an option; and
- added the opportunity for extra credit to students who read classmates' posts.

Not only did I clarify these points in the assignment prompt, but I also created a detailed grading rubric to accompany the assignment. Most of the rubrics I created for this redesign are adapted from the value rubrics offered by the AACU. [YEAR 2 BLOG PROMPT AND RUBRIC]

At the end of Year 2, the student responses (in the end-of-semester course evaluations) revealed that they felt the expectations were too high for a weekly response, and I have to agree that may well have been the case. Several students suggested lowering the number of required blogs so students could choose which readings to respond to. Moreover, the language/style of the blog was apparently not student-friendly; one student suggested, "Write the rubric as if you are dumbing it down. Sounds awful but is actually helpful," while another student said, "On rubrics or instructions be specific about what is expected to get an A and what you mean when you use certain words." However, several students also said that they really enjoyed the blog posts and that they made it easier to write the short papers. As a result, for Year 3, I again revised the blog assignment. I changed the blog due date back before the class discussion. While it might result in less nuanced (or even inaccurate) readings of the texts, which is why I set the due date after class discussion in the first place, it does guarantee the students think about the texts to a certain degree before we discuss them in class. I also decided to provide the rubric but not use it to actually grade. What I mean by that is I gave it to students to see what I expect, but I didn't fill out a rubric for each blog each week. I don't think the students found them very useful. Instead, I gave them their grade and a few short comments. Most importantly, instead of having students write a blog each week, they alternated between writing and reading blogs. Thus, the class was divided into two groups: Group A and Group B. Group A wrote individual blogs on even-numbered weeks and then read blogs on odd-numbered weeks. The opposite was the case for Group B. Thus, each week half the class wrote blogs, while the other half read the blogs and reported back to the class what they read. I also shared a couple good examples of student blogs from a previous class to show the students what they should be aiming for. [YEAR 3 BLOG PROMPT]

Midterm Creative Project: The midterm creative project is always a favorite with students [YEAR 1 MIDTERM PROMPT AND RUBRIC]. With this assignment, students have the opportunity to engage with the literature in a more imaginative way, and projects have rarely disappointed, ranging from life-sized art projects to fan fiction. An example from a high-performing student [STUDENT 1A PROJECT and REFLECTION] displays not only the creative project but also her reflection on the piece. The reflection answered all of the prompt's questions, explaining her choices, how it helped her to gain a better understanding of the reading, and why the project was significant to her personally. This earned her an A, but the reflection really emphasized how important that explanation is to the overall success of the project. A project could be amazingly creative, but if a student cannot articulate how it adds to their overall understanding then it misses the point. An example from a mid-level student [STUDENT 1B PROJECT and REFLECTION] exemplifies this issue. The student's project was not terribly impressive, and the reflection did not adequately convince me that his movie poster helped him see the text in a new or nuanced way. He answered most of the prompt's questions, but he didn't explain his choices in any depth.

As a result, I realized I should focus on the reflection aspect more in order for students to consciously see their own engagement with the texts. The major revision I made for the Year 2 redesign was to revise the rubric into a table form and emphasize how students saw their creative project in the context of the course and the other readings. [YEAR 2 MIDTERM PROMPT AND RUBRIC] While I believe this increased the quality of the reflections, in discussing the assignment with other CHRP participants, I realized that I was missing the scaffolding leading up to the assignment that I worked so hard to add for the other major assignment. Thus, for the third iteration of the course, in the early months of the semester I added several in-class activities that engaged with the readings in more creative ways and gave students the option of writing creative responses for their short papers. I also provided students with example student reflections from previous years, which we discussed in reference to the rubric/my expectations. Finally, in the spirit of making my goals and expectations more explicit, I rearranged the prompt and attempted to explain why I felt the creative project was important in the larger process of students becoming better literary scholars. In essence, I see the project as a blend of traditional analysis and the imaginative pleasure one gets from reading literature. [YEAR 3 MIDTERM PROMPT]

Short Papers: Initially, I was relatively satisfied with the students' short essays [YEAR 1 SHORT ESSAY PROMPT]. A mid-level performer might identify quotes and examples from a text to illustrate a point but have trouble with her thesis and focusing her close reading in service to her thesis. Meanwhile, a low-level performer might display very little substance or critical thought. The short papers were fairly successful in providing students with an opportunity to practice crafting thesis-driven arguments, but I realized that I needed to make a more concerted effort to use these essays as scaffolding/preparation for the final essay. Moreover, if I wanted students to make more connections among texts, that should be reflected in the prompt. So for Year 2, instead of providing several possible topics, I gave students one broad comparison topic. They had to compare two texts we read by exploring an aspect they have in common. I revised the existing rubric to mirror the changes and to accentuate the skills I

wanted them to be building, including focus, development, organization, and mechanics. [YEAR 2 SHORT WRITING PROMPT AND RUBRIC] For the third iteration of the course, I kept the comparison aspect, but I added an option for a creative response to provide another level of potential scaffolding/practice for the midterm. [YEAR 3 SHORT PAPER PROMPT AND RUBRIC FOR CREATIVE OPTION] I also provided more specific topics for the second and third papers, focusing on genre for the second (in order to link directly to a course outcome), and *Frankenstein* and a secondary source for the third (in order to prepare for the use of secondary sources in the final essay). [SHORT PAPER 2 AND SHORT PAPER 3]

Final Essay: The final core assessment essays are often mediocre, partly because students turn them in at the end of the semester when they know exactly how many points they need to earn an A/B/C in the course. I do provide incremental deadlines for the topic proposal, rough draft, and final draft, but students have a difficult time writing six pages when the rest of the writing for the class is much shorter. [YEAR 1 PROMPT] As the final essay also operates as the core assessment for the class, I wanted to build as much scaffolding toward the essay as I could. The blogs led into the short papers, and the short papers were intended to lead into the final essay. After fall break, I briefly and very superficially introduced several critical approaches to the students. Two weeks later, I explained the final essay assignment, and I spent at least half a class period reminding the students what we read during the semester and urging them to find connections among texts. Then, two weeks after that, the students turned in a topic proposal, which I returned with comments. Based on what I saw in the topic proposals, I uploaded more information on each of their chosen critical approaches in order that they should do the reading by the next class period. I was hoping the extra material would provide some more ways to explore their texts. I also went over thesis statements and articulating stronger connections among their texts. The students then had some time to think through my comments/questions on their topic proposals before they created a small poster about their topics. Each student shared their poster and told us about their topic, and then the rest of the class made comments and/or asked questions of the speaker. I hoped that this would give students a chance to think through their topics a bit more, see what others are writing about, and get some preliminary feedback (see IN-CLASS POSTERS [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), and [5](#)). We spent a week discussing writing strategies, including thesis statements, organization, transitions, and incorporating research and quotes. They each met with me individually to discuss their papers and show me a draft, and then they had a formal peer review in class where they received feedback from peers. The paper was due the following week. I replaced the existing rubric for the final essay with the one I created for the short writing assignments, simply expanding some of the requirements to account for the longer word count, incorporation of secondary sources, and use of critical approaches. I made small changes to the division of points and format of the topic proposal. [YEAR 2 FINAL ESSAY PROMPT AND RUBRIC] For the final version of the course, I made only small changes to the prompt, primarily adding a few more requirements to the topic proposal [YEAR 3 FINAL ESSAY PROMPT].

Student Work and Reflections

In deciding on a methodology for assessing how successful my redesign was, I used a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. As a literary scholar, however, I rely more heavily on the qualitative data, the essence or nature of the work.

Blog Posts: In the first revision (Year 2) of the course, the blog assignment was not as successful as I hoped. The students did not consistently turn in good blogs. The scores across the semester fluctuated from week to week. The first post was the anomaly as I gave everyone full credit for simply turning it in. I used that first blog as an opportunity to give substantial feedback and explain what I was looking for, using the students' own work as examples. But overall I am pretty sure they weren't paying attention to the graded rubric I returned each week, or maybe they just didn't care. None of the students were English majors or minors, and there were only seven students who turned in work (one student never turned in an assignment).

EN201 Grades for Blog Posts (Year 2)

Column1	Post 1	Post 2	Post 3	Post 4	Post 5	Post 6	Post 7	Post 8	Post 9	Post 10
Student A	20	14.5	14.5	0	13.5	11	10.5	12.5	13.5	16.5
Student B	20	12.5	13.5	17.5	10.5	16	14	14.5	15.5	14
Student C	20	15	15.5	18.5	18.5	15	14	17.5	16	13.5
Student D	20	15.5	13.5	14	14.5	15.5	12	12.5	17.5	14
Student E	20	18	0	15.5	19	18	15.5	15.5	19	13.5
Student F	20	15	12.5	19	18	18.5	14.5	14.5	18	15.5
Student G	20	14.5	15	19	16.5	0	0	18	17	16

That is not to say that students were not capable of writing good posts. Here are two examples of posts that received an A grade: STUDENT C and STUDENT E. Both posts discuss details from the texts and attempt to make a larger point about theme. They also both incorporate images, with Student C making an effort to integrate the images into his discussion. In contrast, however, a post from well into the semester by STUDENT A does not follow directions and makes a convoluted and tangential argument about poverty as it relates to *Frankenstein*. On the other hand, I incorporated the same blog assignment into my EN316: Survey of Later British Literature course, and they consistently produced great blogs and they got better as the semester progressed. (They signed consent forms as well.) The caveat, of course, is that the course is a 300-level course and comprised almost entirely of English majors and minors.

I hypothesized that the small class size might have resulted in fewer perspectives and less diversity as well as less pressure to keep up if more students are mid-level achievers. Moreover, the extra credit point was not sufficient inducement to persuade more than one or two students a week to read other blogs. And as might be expected, it was almost always the same students. However, Year 3's class ended up being small as well, and most of these students turned in consistently good posts. This might be a result of the fewer number of required posts, or because I showed them examples of what I considered good posts, or because the students were simply more conscientious about following directions, or a combination of all three.

EN201 Grades for Blog Posts (Year 3)

Student	Blog Post 1	Read Blog 1	Blog Post 2	Read Blog 2	Blog Post 3	Read Blog 3	Blog Post 4	Read Blog 4	Blog Post 5	Read Blog 5
Student 1	18	10	19.5	10	19.5	10	19	10	20	10
Student 2	17	7	18	0	17.5	10	16	10	17	10
Student 3	19	10	19	0	20	0	0	10	20	0
Student 4	19.5	10	20	10	19	10	19	7	20	10
Student 5	17	8	18.5	9	15	7	20	0	17	10
Student 6	18	9	18.5	10	19	10	18	10	20	10
Student 7	16	0	17.5	0	0	0	0	10	0	0
Student 8	10	0	17	0	15.5	0	17	3	0	0
Student 9	18	8	14.5	0	19	10	0	0	0	0
Student 10	18	7	18.5	10	0	8	0	0	0	0

Regardless, the posts that received full credit demonstrated a clear understanding of the text, used specific quotations and/or details from the text, made an appropriate connection to another text, and incorporated some form of multimedia. The students mostly seemed to take my comments into consideration and by the final posting, when students were reading literary texts associated with war, four of six students who turned in a blog received full credit. In addition, not only were they making connections between the literary text and other readings from class but also to current events [Student 1 Blog Post and Student 4 Blog Post]. The students who struggled with the blog posts also struggled with the class in general, and several ended up dropping or failing, not because they were incapable of doing the work but for reasons outside of class.

Midterm Creative Projects and Presentations: For the Midterm Creative Project and Presentation, there were three A's and four B's in Year 2. [EXAMPLE MIDTERM REFLECTION A PAPER and Project Presentation and B PAPER] The part of the assignment I most wanted to improve upon was the reflection paper. The A paper set itself apart, because it provided a good explanation of all the choices she made as she created the project. Likewise, she explained what she learned about the original piece of literature through the creative process. The B paper was also good overall, but he included some unnecessary information, which I considered tangential, and the paper had several surface errors. In Year 3, there were six A's, two B's, and two F's. While I would normally be worried about this kind of top-heavy distribution, in the context of the redesign it makes me very happy. The A projects demonstrated a clear imaginative engagement with the course readings, and their reflections of how their projects related to the texts illustrated students' ability to think critically and deeply. [EXAMPLE MIDTERM PROJECTS AND REFLECTION: STUDENT 5 Project Presentation and Reflection, and STUDENT 3 Project and Reflection] Both students' projects are lovely and unique, but their reflections are what give the projects meaning. They both describe their process and the choices they made in creating the project. The only thing I wished they had done differently is go into even more detail; for example, I wished Student 5 had explained her interpretation of the poem in more depth and Student 3 had specifically explained why she chose portraits as opposed to any other kind of painting. I could infer the students' answers to these questions, but their reflections would have been outstanding if they had explicitly stated them. The students who received F's on the midterm did not turn in reflection essays.

Short Writing Assignments: For the first short writing assignment in Year 2, there were only B's. For the second short writing assignment, there were four B's and three C's. Throughout the semester, I was very worried that I was grading too strictly or was expecting too much from the students. But when I look back at the papers produced in the previous iteration of the course, I realize that this Year 2 group of students were either not as prepared initially or they had less motivation or less interest in the course. There were also half as many students. The example student papers I am including show the range of B quality work, with one paper demonstrating a unique comparison but missing specific quotes from the stories and the other paper lacking a clear thesis up front and needing more specific examples. [STUDENT SHORT PAPERS: B+ PAPER and a B- PAPER] In Year 3, the first short paper resulted in four A's, which is quite an improvement from Year 2. But as with the blog posts, these results might suggest that the students in Year 3 were simply more prepared initially for a literature course rather than anything specific that I did. The second paper had only one A and the third paper two A's, which is perhaps a more accurate representation of the quality of student work. Whereas in Year 2, when the students had the same comparison prompt (just using different texts) for each paper, the Year 3 students had three distinct prompts. The first was the basic comparison paper, but the second paper dealt with genre, and the third asked students to incorporate a secondary source into their paper. While the papers maintained the same basic essay structure and expectations, the focus changed. Students could not simply repeat the formula they used in the first paper. There are good arguments for both year's prompts, but I ultimately think that the third is more useful because it offers more variety of practice. The examples from Year 3 showcase the students' abilities to integrate textual examples and maintain a controlling thesis

statement, regardless of the prompt. And while the example Paper 1 incorporates the student's personal life, which I try to move students away from, the student uses the personal example to provide a fresh interpretation of two seemingly dissimilar texts thereby negating my initial resistance. The example Paper 2 shows a creative response to the genre prompt by reimagining Oedipus the King as a poem. [STUDENT SHORT PAPERS YEAR 3: PAPER 1, PAPER 2, and PAPER 3]

Final Essay Final Essay/Core Assessment: With the increased scaffolding, I offered students as much support as I could to prepare for the final essay, and yet the final papers were still a bit of a disappointment with two A's and five B's in Year 2. The four A's, two B's, one C, and one F in Year 3 was a much happier distribution. Just as with previous semesters, I wonder if the students simply aimed for the lowest grade they could get to maintain their course grade. However, I was happy that the students took more risks with their topics and connections among texts, and I think they made good faith efforts to engage with the critical approaches. For example, in the Year 3 example I've included, the student attempted to connect Derek Walcott's "A Far Cry from Africa" and Shakespeare's "Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day?" While I wasn't entirely comfortable with some of the racial dynamics the student ignored, the student did make some innovative connections in this unlikely pairing. [YEAR 2 FINAL ESSAY A PAPER and B PAPER; YEAR 3 FINAL ESSAY A PAPER]

Overall Student Responses: While I put most of the weight of my assessment on work students produce in the course, I do think that getting a sense of students' understanding of what they learned can be valuable. In the end-of-semester course evaluations, the six Year 2 students who filled out the survey all indicated that the course objectives were accomplished. And despite one comment on "harsh grading" and another on "grading not clear," they all said that they always knew what was expected of them. There was one student who stated they found the "clear grading system" helpful, which contradicts the other remarks but is fairly typical of these types of surveys. The students also indicated that their critical reading skills improved (moderately to significantly), their analytical skills improved (moderately to dramatically), they can now make connections among texts (somewhat to absolutely), and they all felt well prepared for the final essay apart from one who said he "wasn't a good writer." Some of the aspects of the class they found most helpful were the peer reviews, conferences with me, blog posts, different points of view, and my obvious love for literature. In Year 3, only four students completed the course evaluation (a problem of the new online evaluations), but they agreed with the previous year's students in that they always knew what was expected of them, and they appreciated "how much she prepared us" and the "very structured" and "organized" class. They also felt as if they could make connections among texts at the end of the class. And again, a student commented that I am "passionate about teaching and student learning." From this very small sample, at least it seems as if my efforts at scaffolding assignments and preparing students and encouraging connections is being noticed by the students.

Overall, I have found the Collaborative Humanities Redesign Project (CHRP) to be challenging and infinitely valuable. My redesign has resulted in some good revisions to the structure of the course and more targeted assignments. However, it was not all smooth sailing. The small class sizes often prevented me from gathering a range of data, and Year 2's class did not seem as

invested in the course. Likewise, the initial revision of the blog assignment was not a success, but I learned more from that particular experience than from the other more successful revisions I made. And it is a perfect example of the ups and downs of teaching; if you want to make changes, it inevitably means some trial and error. However, I think overall most of the students did learn the skills I wanted them to (at least to some degree). In addition, I learned so much about my own process as a teacher. I had been acting on instinct and informal knowledge when making pedagogical choices, but this project has shown me how I can and should apply a more systematic, scholarly approach to my teaching.