

Research-Led Teaching in the Liberal Arts Classroom

Center for Teaching and Learning Final Report

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This report briefly explains the project I undertook as a CTL Fellow in the 2015-2016 academic year and offers a series of strategies for colleagues considering similar projects.

Project Goals and Background:

This project considered how I could create more ‘research-led’ classes that would shrink my perceived conflict between research and teaching while enhancing students’ own learning experiences. The main goals were:

- For me:
 - Balance and harmonize competing demands of research and teaching;
 - Find ways to think about my research more often, even if weeks pass by without “research time” in my schedule;
 - Get more insight and feedback into research material and questions by discussing them.
- For my students:
 - Expose them to new and exciting issues in my field;
 - Make them better independent researchers and better critical thinkers, both by becoming more familiar with the research process and by undertaking their own research.

Research-led teaching is a major buzzword in UK academia, where I undertook my graduate study and also taught before coming to Trinity. In the case of the UK the term has become ubiquitous in large part due to the recent introduction of tuition fees for undergraduates, and with those fees the argument that publicly-funded universities must demonstrate how research directly benefits students (since research, or at least research leave, is now indirectly funded through tuition). For professors in the humanities, arts and social sciences, this generally amounts to the creation of upper-level classes structured around their current research. In History, this is often called a “senior seminar”, and the structure sometimes exactly replicates a book-in-progress, with syllabus weeks corresponding to draft chapters and the students studying the professor’s trove of primary material. This provides students with deep insight into the research professor, and sometimes the professor with free and unacknowledged research assistance; it can create a very lopsided and overly-specialized curriculum for the seniors. For these reasons of practicality and ethics I do not think this models transfers smoothly into the liberal arts environment; my goal is not to justify my research, but to enhance it and to enhance my teaching. My goal, then, was to think more broadly and practically about what a research-led course should look like at Trinity.

The Project

Although I am thinking carefully about incorporating my principles across all my classes, I focused on the course design for my popular upper-level seminar, HIST-327 *World Histories of Wine*. This is a course taken mostly by seniors, across a range of majors, investigates the history of wine as a global commodity, post-1700. I taught it for the first time in Spring 2015 and then offered a revamped version in both Fall 2015 and Spring 2016.

The research angle to the course is that I am also writing a book, tentatively entitled *Imperial Wine: The British Empire and the Making of Wine's New World*, which examines the growth of wine industries in (former) British colonies since 1800. The book draws on my established expertise in British and imperial history and on human and capital networks, but the “wine studies” angle is new for me, and is indeed a new and growing area of research and where there is much work to be done. This meant that students wishing to learn about wine history in a particular region may be forced to undertake their own research, not simply as a class requirement but because the literature available is quite patchy. These two aspects – my own growing expertise, and the opportunities for “real” research by students – convinced me that the class would had potential to be research-led.

The first time I taught this course I tried to offer broad coverage, with set readings chosen to expose students to the wine history of a different country or region each week. Students then wrote research papers and gave presentations. I decided to change this for a few reasons. First, the themes across regions became repetitive; second, I lost student engagement as they moved into the final stages of writing their papers; third, I did not enjoy leading discussion on regions I didn't know extremely well; and finally, the research papers felt too stand-alone, with repetition of topics and material across the students. I wanted to create more of a research community feel, where students recognised that their own findings are dependent upon others', and that researchers communicate with each other to advance the field.

The revamp involved me focusing the first half of the course on theoretical and foundational readings, focusing on the literature on commodity history and the historical record of French wine. Rather than do many micro-case studies, then, we used France as our major case study. This was also a reflection that there is more historical literature on French wine than on any other country, so it was a deep and referential case study. I then divided the students into regional research teams and tasked them, in these teams, with designing the readings for the second half of the course. This shifted responsibility onto the students, gave them research colleagues if they were struggling to find sources, and minimised overlap in paper topics. The course then concluded with research papers, which were due well before the end of classes and returned to students on the last day of classes, and research presentations, which were organised by research team so that each 'panel' had a clear theme. An excerpt from the syllabus, attached, shows how I structured this course in practice.

Suggested Strategies for Research-Led Teaching

This is a summary of the strategies I found effective in my project.

- **Try to develop a course around your research field, but push beyond your own specific topic.** Although my department is quite flexible about upper-level course offerings, I had ethical reservations about basing an entire class around a narrow aspect of my research: it didn't seem fair to the students in terms of coverage. In my case, this meant offering a course looking at the global history of wine, and not simply in the British Empire case studies I am using in my book. Happily, this has been research-enhancing for me, because students' research and interests have introduced me to literature that I may not otherwise have come across or considered. The experience has broadened my perspective on the larger field, and that in turn has strengthened my research.
- **Revisit the 'canon' or foundational work in your field.** I so often think of research in terms of discovery, and in designing research-led courses I felt the need to offer students something new. The idea of reading classic and theoretical texts – some thirty or forty years old – initially seemed stale. I decided, though, that students needed this methodological introduction as a foundation at the beginning of the course, and the unexpected perk was that I gained new insights into these texts through teaching them. I don't know why this did not seem obvious to me earlier. The moral is, don't let the pursuit of the new dictate the entire course design.
- **The other 'flipped classroom': put students in charge of seminars.** This innovation could still use some tweaking, and its success can vary to a degree with the motivation of the particular individuals, but I am glad I put the students in charge of choosing readings and guiding discussions in their research teams. I had initial reservations that I was perhaps short-changing the students and making them do my job, but the exercise proved to be an important skill-building one for them. The student led-seminars required students to remain more attentive, to think carefully about what makes a good reading, and to get feedback on the sources they would be using in their papers.
- **Share your own work – but focus on methodology.** I had a very good experience of giving my seminar students a copy of an article I was writing. This was when the article was in a draft stage, soon to be sent to an academic journal. I introduced the article by talking about what I wanted to achieve, how I had carried out the actual research to date (being specific about time spent in archives, trawling through databases, and so on), and what my concerns still were with the argument. I explicitly said that just as students were struggling with research, so was I, and that getting feedback on one's unpublished work was a critical phase of the research process. I think students felt privileged to read draft material – I was very clear that it was not to be shared or distributed – and because I emphasized the methodology rather than the conclusions, I placed myself in a position of solidarity rather than authority. I got some precise and useful feedback from a few students, which I

incorporated into a rewrite, but more importantly I modeled to students the iterative process of improving one's work, which I think led them to take the peer-review writing class more seriously.

- **Create a tool which you can develop in future classes.** I did not successfully do this but I think it is an important goal and one that I will pursue in the future. In my case, I had hoped to create an annotated, Zotero-based bibliography of the sources students used in their research papers. I plan to do this in future, both so that I can personally keep track of the helpful readings students found that I intend to incorporate into my own research, and also so that I can refer future students to this database as they research their projects. I regret that, having produced so much knowledge in my classes, I haven't been able to organize it in a sustainable way. I would encourage colleagues designing research-led courses to build a tool like Zotero into the course from the beginning and to structure it into assignments.

Acknowledgements and Beyond:

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HIST 327: World Histories of Wine

Professor Regan-Lefebvre

Spring 2016

Mondays and Wednesdays, 10.15-11.30am, Seabury N-129

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 2-4pm, Seabury N-029

Course Description:

This seminar explores the history of wine, a new and growing research field. We will consider how wine has been produced, traded, and consumed in both continental Europe and the "New World" since circa 1600. We will try to view wine through comparative and world history approaches. Topics will include: approaches to commodity history; wine, terroir and the construction of national identity; protection and global markets; technological change and modernisation; networks, trade and information exchanges; and the creation of consumers and experts. There will be some kind of extra-curricular wine event, at a date to be determined.

This is not a wine-appreciation class: it is an upper-level history seminar. You will have the privilege of reading challenging scholarly work and you will experience the joys of undertaking independent research. The first half of the class will involve close reading of the set texts and analysis of primary sources, focusing on the history of wine in Northern Europe. Because this is an emerging field of scholarly research, the second half of the course will be collaborative in nature: all students will undertake a major research paper on different regions of the wine world, and they will provide readings and other material for class discussion.

Syllabus Experiment: HIST-327 World Histories of Wine

| Date | Topic | Readings and Assignments |
|---------------|---|---|
| Mon., Jan. 25 | Introductions | Introduction to the class. Discussion of primary source material, distributed in class. |
| Wed., Jan. 27 | An introduction to wine - Lecture. | This is the only formal lecture of the semester. There is no reading today but the reading is quite heavy for next week - start on it now. |
| Mon., Feb. 1 | Introductions, cont'd. | Leah Anderson, "Wine's New World," <i>Foreign Policy</i> , No. 136, May - June 2003, pp 46-54. |
| Wed., Feb. 3 | What is commodity history? | Bruce Robbins, "Commodity Histories," <i>FMLA</i> , Vol. 120, No. 2, Mar. 2005, pp 454-463. Sidney Mintz, <i>Sweetness and Power: the Place of Sugar in Modern History</i> (Viking, 1985), Ch. 3, "Consumption." |
| Mon., Feb. 8 | Why start with France? | Deborah Valenz, <i>Milk: A Local and Global History</i> (Yale, 2011), Ch. 6, "Milk Comes of Age as Cheese." |
| Wed., Feb. 10 | Britain, France and the wine trade | Luke, <i>Inventing Wine</i> , pp ix-xv and pp 33-94 Lukes, pp 93-126 |
| Mon., Feb. 15 | Port, Sherry and the British market, 1855: Appellations | Charles Ladington, "Claret is the Liquor for Boys; Port for Men": How Port Became the "Englishman's Wine" 1750s to 1800, <i>Journal of British Studies</i> , Vol. 48, No. 2, (Apr., 2009), pp. 364-390. Simpson, chs. 4, 7 and 8 |
| Wed., Feb. 17 | TRINITY DAYS | Lukes, pp 127-166 Simpson, ch. 1, 5 and 10 |
| Mon., Feb. 22 | Watkinson Visit | Message from Watkinson Library. We will investigate primary source material on wine and wine history. |
| Wed., Feb. 24 | Midterm Test | Midterm Test in class. |
| Mon., Feb. 29 | Team sessions | An in-class workshop where you work in your research teams to hone your agenda, refine your individual topics and update the class bibliography. You may |
| Wed., Mar. 2 | | |

**Conceptual/
Methodological**

Research Prep

| Date | Topic | Readings and Assignments |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| Mon., Mar. 7 | Champagne | bring laptops to this class. Team agenda due. Submit your plan for the team session. Simpson, Ch. 6 |
| Wed., Mar. 9 | Phylloxera | Kolleen Gey, <i>When Champagne Became French</i> (Olebs Hopkins, 2003), Ch. 1 Introduction and Ch. 2 Consuming the Nation. Lukes, pp 167-238 Simpson, Ch. 2 |
| Mon., Mar. 14 and Wed. Mar. 16 | | Proposal and annotated bibliography due for your individual research project |
| Mon., Mar. 21 | The Business of Wine | Lukes, pp 239-277 Simpson, ch. 9 |
| Wed., Mar. 23 | Southern Europe team | Reading set by the team. |
| Mon., Mar. 28 | Antipodean team | Reading set by the team. |
| Wed., Mar. 30 | "Other" team | Reading set by the team. |
| Mon., Apr. 4 | South America team | Reading set by the team. |
| Wed., Apr. 6 | North America team | Reading set by the team. |
| Mon., Apr. 11 | Peer review writing session. | Bring your paper draft and review it in teams. |
| Wed., Apr. 13 | TBD | Fallback option: Lukes, 278-314. |
| Mon., Apr. 18 | Documentary screening. | Research paper due in class. |
| Wed., Apr. 20 | Presentations | Watch <i>Mondovino</i> (Jonathan Nossiter, 2004) in class. Student presentations |
| Mon., Apr. 25 | Presentations | Student presentations |
| Wed., Apr. 27 | Presentations | Student presentations |
| Mon., May 2 | FINAL CLASS | Concluding discussions and evaluations. |

**Student-
led classes**