

## End-of-Course Reflections

**Course:** FWS 1101.102 – *Mapquest: Space, Place, and Movement in Medieval Society*

**Semester:** Fall, 2014

**Institution:** Cornell University

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### Overall Impressions / Takeaways

- This is the first full course that I've taught. I have taught single academic classes, and I've coached full seasons. But not planned out a class. There are, however, a surprising number of similarities between teaching and coaching, in terms of sketching out learning objectives for multiple time blocks (days, weeks, semester sections, etc.) and scaffolding lessons to best facilitate lessons. Having to game-plan out the whole season/semester is another point of commonality, as is needing to make tactical adjustments *in situ*.
- Overall, I was happy with this class. I had fairly good student engagement throughout. That said, I didn't move the students around enough
  - Primarily discussion-based lessons, and not enough variety of active learning activities
  - There were several students who never really participated in class. I would like to experiment with more robust requirements for pre-class Blackboard posts to see if this helps to engage these students
- The classroom itself was not great...a basement room in Uris. Very small and dark, without many options for rearrangement. Most problematic, the AV only worked sporadically.
- I set up Blackboard to show grades as numbers (0-100) with two decimal points. This was a mistake, because it led to a number of end-of-semester complaints about grades that were close. In the future, set grades to show *only* as letter grades.

### Things That Went Well

- The Knight Institute crash course (Writing 7100) did a good job of getting me enough materials to get started
- The two primary grammatical lessons that I wanted to hammer home – overuse of the verb “to be” and the passive voice – gained traction with most of my students
- Good interactions between, and with, students

### Things That Need Improvement

- I spent too little time on writing during the semester, and put too much emphasis on the readings. I think a more systematic approach would be preferable.
- I need to find a better way of teaching the specifics of citation. We spent a fair amount of time on how to work in Chicago citation style (a full day, and then several refreshers) and I was still getting a wide range of styles by the end
  - Is it worth accepting any citation style so long as they are consistent with it? Does this run counter to the premise of learning to write within a discipline?
- In our last-day discussion, the class seemed pretty unified in wanting study questions to help them guide their readings.

- Is this worth doing? I'm not sure. It will help them to look for what I want them to see in the text, but I worry that this will be limiting to *only* the things I want them to look for. Possibly something to do early in the semester, and then move away from?

### **Problems**

- I had a student who was plagiarizing work for much of the semester, but I did not realize it until the second-to-last essay. This was not (as far as I can tell) an issue of cheating, but rather one of cultural difference. She believed that I did not want her original thoughts, because, as a first-year college student, her thoughts were uninformed and unauthoritative. There was a great deal of consternation on her part about actually writing the final 10-12 page essay. I told her that I would give her a grade of a C so long as the essay she turned in was original and on topic, but even at that she panicked and tried to convince me to just let her pass. She eventually wrote a (bad) original essay and got her C. But I needed to be more attentive to questions of style in student writing...looking back, I should have wondered earlier.
  - It is worth thinking about using Turnitin, even though I have some hesitation about the morality of its model.

### **Thoughts on Specific Lessons**

- The lesson playing a game of telephone to help explain the importance of proper citation went well, as secretly asking one student to make intentional mistakes
- The lesson on different levels of formality, asking the students to write about Marco Polo's *Travels* using different modes of authorship, went well
- In our last-day discussion, students highlighted the two assignments requiring them to write in using only "to be" and the passive voice as the most useful of the semester
- The Marco Polo class jigsaw was a good idea, but not well-enough done. Also, one group presentation went way too long
  - I need to be more clear about time limitations ahead of time, and more willing to cut teams off