

Fall Academy 2011: How to Teach in the Spring Term without Killing Yourself

Course example:

ECON 304: Health: A Social Science Exploration (Blunch)

From the Course Catalog:

ECON 304 - Health: A Social Science Exploration

Credits: 4

Planned Offering: *Spring 2011 and alternate years*

Prerequisite: ECON 203.

Much of the work done by consulting companies, banks, insurance companies, think tanks, non-governmental organizations, government agencies, etc., is based on applied statistical and econometric analysis. This course helps prepare students for careers in these environments using a hands-on approach and emphasizing the use of data and student-directed research in the specific context of health-related issues. Example of these issues include obesity, vaccinations, pre- and post natal care, contraceptive use, or child mortality; possible determinants include poverty, education, or distance to the nearest health clinic or hospital. An interdisciplinary perspective is highlighted, as is the use and importance of quantitative analysis for public policy.
Blunch

Class component considered here: Using **group work** to help both on:

- (1) building up skills/knowledge/material AND on
- (2) grading

Set-up: 18 students → 9 groups of 2 students

Two presentations per group:

- (1) Results from a published article (i.e. *others'* research)
- (2) Research findings from *own* project

Time-line:

- (1) Review of “what is research?”
- (2) Review of check-list on how to make a powerful power point presentation
- (3) Each group picked one paper from a roster of papers
- (4) Each group picked one research topic from a roster of research topic
- (5) Each group presented “their” published article (with others watching/listening – and learning! – both in terms of **factual knowledge** AND **presentation skills/style**)
 - ➔ Afterwards, we’d have a general discussion, using the presentation of the “group of the day” as a point of departure, in terms of potential strengths & weaknesses of the article in question vis-à-vis the “what is research?” components reviewed earlier (research question, theory, data, empirical methodology, etc)

Grading component(s):

- (i) The “**group of the day**” assessed on their presentation (of “the article of the day”)
- (ii) **Remainder of class** assessed on their **turned-in review sheet** of “the article of the day”
 - ➔ **Keeps everybody better engaged that way...!**
- (6) Each group presented their research findings (again with others watching/listening – and learning! – both in terms of **factual knowledge** AND **presentation skills/style**)

Grading component(s):

- (i) The “**group of the day**” assessed on their presentation (of “the research topic of the day”)
 - ➔ Notably, here assessed by their peers (who received review forms based on the points on “PowerPoint Best Practice,” reviewed earlier)
 - ➔ **Again, this help enforce “full engagement” for the entire class at all times, presenters and non-presenters alike**

English 243: Performing Shakespeare
Spring 2011
Dramatic Performance Assignment: Staging Hamlet

The dramatic performance assignment is designed to allow you to offer an interpretive reading of Shakespeare from the perspective of the theater. It will bring into play all of the elements of Shakespeare that you have been studying: performance workshops, staging practices, poetic analysis, character interpretation, and much more. I have chosen eight major scenes from Hamlet, in a progressive sequence, thus creating a kind of run-through of the major moments of the play. The number of roles in each scene is listed in parentheses. It is the responsibility of the students to determine who will play which roles. I will expect to see a broad range of performance from each student—in other words, parcel out the large and small roles in as equal a manner as you can. All of you will take a part in terms of concept, direction, interpretation, etc. The idea is that you will work through each scene in a “workshop” manner, using the Theater Lab time as well as other times outside of class to develop each scene and how to link them into a continuous show. You do not necessarily have to memorize the lines (you may be “on book”), but certainly the lesser parts with fewer lines should be memorized.

The aim is to generate your own interpretive vision of the scene: how it fits into the play as a whole, what its commentary might be on the larger action of the play, what sorts of views of character it reflects, etc. On the night of **Thursday, May 19** in the **Johnson Theater**, you will present the scenes in consecutive order, as a well-rehearsed dramatic reading of this great play. The scenes are as follows:

I.i.1-72, 128-180: Barnardo, Francisco, Horatio, Marcellus, Ghost (5)

I.ii.: Claudius, Cornelius, Voltmand, Laertes, Polonius, Gertrude, Hamlet, Horatio (8)

I.iv-v.: Hamlet, Horatio, Marcellus, Ghost (4)

II.ii.171-317, 365-375, 417-601: Polonius, Hamlet, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, 1st player, two more players (5)

III.i.: Claudius, Gertrude, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Ophelia, Polonius, Hamlet (7)

III.iv.: Gertrude, Hamlet, Polonius, King Hamlet (4)

IV.v.: Gertrude, Horatio, Gentleman, Messenger, Ophelia, Claudius, Laertes (7)

V.i.1-215: 2 gravediggers, Hamlet, Horatio (4)

V.ii.193-365: Lord, Osric, Hamlet, Horatio, Claudius, Laertes, Gertrude (7)

Theater Lab: Concept and Instructions

Dates and Times: Each Thursday, from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m., the lab space is available to you

Location: The Dance and Theater Rehearsal Space, DuPont 301 (see rules for use of space)

Concept: This block of time and dedicated space is set up for the students to work independently on the various performance and interpretation elements of the course. The primary function is to be able to get together in a workshop-like space in order to work on the Dramatic Performance assignment. The time can be used for conceiving and brainstorming ways to play the scenes; working on costume, prop, and staging issues; running lines and working together to develop character; setting up blocking and action scenes; and much other performance-related work. These times will not be supervised by the professor. This is independent student work, and its successful completion constitutes a major part of each student's grade in the course.

To help give some structure to this time, and to spread the leadership roles out as evenly as possible, I've assigned different students to be responsible for the day's organization and procedures. These students will offer a framework for the day's work, though in cooperation with the other students in the class. Helpful, cooperative effort on behalf of everyone is crucial to making this project come off successfully.

First Lab: Thursday, April 28 ~ Isabella, Luis, Emma, Sarah, Chris

Second Lab: Thursday, May 5 ~ Zoe, Lauren, Kaitlyn, Jake

Third Lab: Thursday, May 12 ~ Katharine, Harlyn, Margaret, Stephen, Maureen

Fourth Lab: Thursday, May 19 ~ Bridget, Sally, Linnea, Caroline, Mary

The time can also be spent working on the performance reviews from the previous night's play, or discussing the readings in Kaiser's book, which we will not be able to look into much during regular seminar meetings.

Each Thursday we will also begin with a 10 a.m. video for one hour in DuPont 202, so time could be spent talking about that material as well.

In sum, the Theater Lab time/space is an opportunity for the students to explore on their own the multiple elements of the course, pushing their understanding of what it means to "Perform Shakespeare."

English 243: Performing Shakespeare
Major Writing Assignment:
The Performance Portfolio

Your major writing assignment for the course will consist of three parts: first, it will include your six performance/film reviews; second, it will have an ongoing “performance log” in which you will keep track of the ideas, challenges, teachings, and concepts of performance that become increasingly important to you as you work on the course; and finally, it will open with a 7-page essay that analyzes three key elements of your performance of Hamlet that you think are particularly useful in your conception of what it means to perform Shakespeare. There may be some overlap between the three components of the assignment, but the featured essay should also be able to stand on its own.

The final portfolio will look like this:

- * Title page, with table of contents corresponding to numbered pages
- * Essay, with title on first page
- * Your performance log, running as long as it needs to, including both typed and handwritten work, where applicable
- * 3 theater reviews
- * 3 film reviews

The whole should be contained in some sort of binder or notebook.

Final portfolios are due to me by 12 noon on Friday, May 20, the final day of the term.

Performing Shakespeare

Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you overstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature . . .
(Hamlet III.ii.17-22)

Character: What sort of character is speaking? Is he or she self-assured, morose, passionate, bumbling, etc.? From a high or low social class? What age or gender? What particular clues does your character give in the scene that suggest his or her personality? How can you convey this characterization through the language?

What does the person want? How can you convey the character's desire ("motivation") through the language?

Movement: How does the person move? How does the person position himself or herself in relation and response to the other characters on stage? What gestures might the person employ?

What can you suggest about the character through his or her physical movements?

Scene: How many people are on the stage? Where should they be standing in relation to the scene and in relation to one another ("blocking")? How can their positions be important to the ideas and actions of the scene?

How, when, and why do characters change their positions? How can these changes be related to the action and ideas of the scene?

Language: What pace, intensity, pitch, and volume are suggested by the lines? Are there any cues to indicate pauses or silence? (Remember that silence is as important on the stage as it is in a musical composition.)

Are the lines end-stopped or run-on? Are there half-lines, or shared lines? Are there shifts from prose to verse, or vice-versa? Are the lines rhymed? Which verbs drive the line forward?

Ideas: What seem to be the major conceptual elements in the scene? How do these concepts fit with the overall play? How much of the play's total meaning can you find within, and express through, this scene? How can you use the tools of the drama (above) to express these ideas?

Spring Term: How I Survived & Lived to Tell the Tale



ENGL 307: Poetry Workshop: “Fresh, Wild, Local.” Course Description: Like organic produce and wild-harvested plants, poetry is particularly tasty and potent when it is both local and fresh. Since mindfulness about sensory input and the ways language stretches to name the unnamable are a key issue in the study and craft of poetry, the class visits fresh/local/wild food venues each week, where exploration focuses on all aspects of foraging, creating, adapting and eating food. Students do guided writing exercises based on the landscape/geography of food both in the field and classroom, with a chapbook of student poems as our final product, to be donated to Campus Kitchen. It is, of course, difficult to consider food without the alternative: hunger. The absence of food has been at the heart of much great literature, yet few of us have had that experience. Thus, students will serve two shifts with Campus Kitchen (Walmart Recovery, and Meal Service).

Creative writing is like any other art, or like a sport, in that writers must spend much more time warming up, practicing, missing the mark, and revising, than they do actually presenting a finished object or winning a soccer tournament. You wouldn't wake up and expect to know instantly – even if you read up on it - how to sculpt a hunk of marble, or have the honed muscles and drilled-into-your-head plays to excel in soccer. You would plan to start from scratch, experiment with tools, work at passes for days if not weeks; and you would have to accept a lot of advice, criticism, and plain old exercises from an instructor, a kind of dialog in which information is exchanged and ideas are clarified. For a Spring Term 4 week class, I ask that you finish 8 poems, where a full term would require 10; not much of a downsizing on the surface, but given the 20 hours of homework a week, an eminently do-able task. My job, as your workshop leader, is to provide you with the experiences and practice skills that will get you into the best shape of your artistic life. Don't worry: you will write poems, good poems, this term. But expect to sweat! Our schedule asks us to do a week's worth of work every time we meet. DM

It was terrific! Here's how we did it:

1. I demanded more work than I thought students could handle, but less than a usual semester: 8 new poems rather than 10; close reading assignments but posted on course blog rather than turned in to just me; many intense directed free-writes both in class and outside of class that led to multiple poem possibilities and did much to avoid writer's block; required a blog but allowed them to create it communally so no one person was burdened.
2. I shifted a significant amount of prep and class time onto the student's shoulders: students were responsible for daily blog posts, which were included drafts of new poems, critique of each other's drafts, and close readings of poems by published poets (which were also presented in class), as well as building the blog by finding and adding poetry/creative writing related websites, blogs, links, videos, etc. Students were also responsible for planning and performing in the final poetry reading, and creating their own hand-made chapbooks of their new poetry. check it out at: <http://freshlocalwildpoetry.blogspot.com/>. In addition, each week carried a

significant reading requirement related to our field trip, and students were required to respond to the reading in unusual ways (creating a poetry assignment for class using the material in a chapter about bee diseases, for example, or creating a list of words/phrases to be used in a poem from conversations overheard at a Senior Citizen's Center during lunch service). By the second week, students were generating their own poetry exercises and exchanging them as homework.

3. I made out-of-class-work highly visible to the entire class (and, in the case of the blog, to the larger W&L community), thus upping the motivational factor: Campus Kitchen featured our blog on their blog, and our blog was also featured on W&L main webpage. In addition, students created handmade chapbooks of their work, bringing their designs and ideas to class to share throughout the process, and presenting the finished project at the final poetry reading.
4. I took advantage of local talent to help carry the teaching load, with significant free-writing and poem drafts required afterwards (sometimes on site, sometimes posted on the blog, often both). We visited a local beekeeper, who opened his hives for us and even gave one sore baseball player some bee-sting therapy (then we went on to my house for a honey-tasting event and writing), traveled to Wade's Mill to see how corn is ground, then had a baking lesson with the miller's wife (and devoured the resulting cornbread), had a wild-harvester come visit class with samples of local wild foods; students also served two sessions with Campus Kitchen – the first time, making a Walmart run to pick up donated food, the second time to serve meals to low-income folks around Rockbridge County. We had a final stupendous field trip planned to Polyface Farms (a local sustainable farm that is internationally famous), but were rained out. If I had been thinking fast, we could have redirected to the Lexington Farmer's Market but I missed the boat on that one. Have a back-up planned. These experiences were all hands-on, tasting, smelling, touching, listening, re-visioning of food, with writing exercises designed to capture some part of it that was intense and fresh. Participation was not only mandatory, but unavoidable – even the guy allergic to bees went to the apiary and got a poem out of it, and even the other student allergic to practically all foods had a great collection of poems by the end of the term.

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