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Proposal

Race, Gender and Power: A Dialogue Between History and Anthropology

Teaching Partnership Description:

This teaching partnership will be conducted between three faculty members at the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth with the ultimate goal of sharing main challenges and practices as they occur throughout the Spring Semester, 2005. This proposed partnership will take place between a professor in the History Department—Cristina Merthens, and two from the Sociology/Anthropology Department—Isabel P. B. Fêo Rodrigues (affiliated with the Women’s Studies Program) and Lisa Maya Knauer (affiliated with the African/African-American Studies Program). We have identified common teaching/learning goals, constructed new course activities, and expect that throughout the process of this partnership we will have the opportunity to assess, discuss, and improve our teaching styles and methods.

Despite the disciplinary divide between history and anthropology, our courses share topical and geographical areas and as a result we expect to face similar challenges, questions, and reactions from our students. We have several overlapping intellectual and theoretical interests: race, gender, transnationalism, urban public space, and diaspora. This semester, Dr. Merthens will teach *History of Latin America*, Dr. Knauer will teach *Race, Culture and National Identity in Cuba* and a research seminar on New Bedford, and Dr. Rodrigues will teach *Readings in the Anthropology of Women*. All four courses engage topical areas and regions of the world that tend to be exoticized in American culture and often conceived through racial and ethnic lenses that are challenged by the course material. As such, this partnership has the dual goal of asking ourselves how do we inspire our students to envision and learn about a world that is largely unfamiliar to them? And how and through what mechanisms do we teach our students to *un-learn* many of the categories through which cultural and historical relativity are understood *or mis-understood*?

How to Engage Our Students?

As new faculty members, we have yet to adjust our teaching styles to the specific student population we have encountered at UMD. Our students come from varied backgrounds, and also have a variety of expectations about their college education and about their professors. Most of our students struggle to balance their course work with their other commitments: low wage jobs (often full time) and family obligations. Our pedagogical styles, approaches and our previous teaching experiences may often be inadequate or disarticulated from the ways through which our students learn and the conceptual frameworks they bring to the classroom. As new faculty members our main challenge is to continuously develop flexible teaching tools and classroom teaching styles, capable of motivating and engaging our students. Thus, through this partnership we will be able to carry out the following work plan:

- a) Review syllabi

We have already exchanged written syllabi. We will meet to discuss them. Each of us will explain her syllabus to the others, and review her goals. Together we will help evaluate how well our syllabi meet our objectives.

a) Teaching Experimentation

Create room for teaching experimentation by practicing class swapping (Each of us will teach one of the other two professors' classes). In each class we will ask students for assessment/evaluation and in the end will compare notes.

b) Peer observation

Each of us will be observed by the other two. We will make every effort to schedule the observations so that the observers attend the same session. Once we have completed the three observations, we will meet to share notes and provide constructive feedback. Each of us will be both observer and observed.

c) Compare Course Assignments in Relation to Course Goals

Using colleagues outside of our field of expertise is often the best way to identify the difficult link between assignments and the conceptual purposes they entail.

We will critically examine how we construct assignments and discuss the goals we hope to achieve through them. We will also compare their outcomes.

d) Tackling difficult issues like race and gender

Sometimes our subject matter makes students uncomfortable. How do we address these issues in constructive ways?

e) Bringing our research into the classroom and the classroom into our research:

The balance between teaching and research is often difficult to attain. Teaching is often seen as an obstacle to research and publication. We hope to find together innovative ways through which we can involve students in our emergent local research projects.

This work plan can promote constructive criticism about our teaching strengths and weaknesses. Our plan is designed to be mutually encouraging whereby sharing and assessing teaching experiences is practice oriented enabling us to re-think types of assignments, course expectations, and class activities.

Contributing to Future Plans:

We hope this experience will promote a continued dialogue not only about teaching, but how through--what we teach and how we teach-- we can significantly impact our student's intellectual development and creativity. We believe that these goals, as well as our own teaching effectiveness, are not the most congenial to measurement indicators based on tests, exams, statistical methods and similar mechanisms. Therefore, this partnership opportunity will provide a unique venue to gaze at our teaching styles through the eye of the other partner, in order to begin to paint a more realistic picture of

who we are as teachers. Similarly, by sharing classroom experiences and observing one another, we can generate a more direct and interactive approach to constructive criticism by sharing the indicators of our successes and failures with a collegial attitude.

Furthermore, this partnership will also facilitate the construction of bridges between anthropology and history. There is a growing interest in both our departments in Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa and without doubt this partnership will be one more venue through which we can envision future curricular developments of mutual interest as well as develop venues for the exchange of research experiences and interests. We can envision many possible directions that our personal collaborations might take: jointly planning courses in the future to maximize resources (books, audiovisual materials, outside speakers); team-taught classes; guest lectures in each other's classes; collaborative research. As newly arrived faculty at University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth our teaching styles have yet to be fully developed, identified, and refined. This teaching partnership will allow us to begin developing the necessary critical awareness to identify teaching styles and teaching tools appropriate to the realities we are just beginning to discover and in which we expect to succeed.