

Report re: Course-Embedded Research Grant, CLAS 1309, Fall 2015  
Nicolle Hirschfeld

I decided to try incorporating a Course-Embedded Research module into my survey of seafaring in the ancient Mediterranean world (CLAS 1309). The class is designed to introduce undergraduates to the histories of the ancient Mediterranean, the various kinds of evidence and methodologies scholars use to study its civilizations, and, finally, to the tools of scholarship. I chose this course because I have taught it often and feel comfortable manipulating it, and because I am working on a research project directly pertinent to its subject matter.

My intent was to model the process of scholarly research, with special emphasis on information literacy and the benefits of interdisciplinary inquiry. My hope was to identify students to collaborate with me in writing the scholarly report on this aspect of my larger research project.

Neither my intention nor hopes were fully realized. The reasons I can define at present (perhaps I'll have more ideas after reading student evaluations) are as following:

- Students want to tackle the Big Questions but scholarly progress is usually made by parsing large issues into smaller, detail-rich inquiries. I carefully moved from introducing and contextualizing my research to defining the starting point for a specific inquiry. I explained why I had chosen that particular point of departure and how/why it could eventually lead back to the bigger questions. But when I set the students to find viable directions of inquiry from the defined starting point, they proposed ideas too big to handle. They found it difficult to understand that it was not possible to find answers to questions, as they had formulated them, somewhere on the internet, that the data they needed to address their questions either did not exist or existed in languages and media unavailable or far beyond the time and capabilities available. Many students asked good questions and had good ideas about directions to explore in general but even the best were not able to define an effective, specific plan of further research. I was unable to model/explain convincingly the double challenge of, first, identifying the kind of information available and, second, formulating a question that that data could effectively address. In fact, I had hoped rather to inspire creative approaches, e.g. ethnographic parallels, but the students would not go there (which still puzzles me). We all got tired of me seemingly constantly redirecting their ideas. They couldn't know how much they don't know.
- The module was spread out too much; it should have been concentrated. In my previous experience, discussing information literacy has been more effective when presented in a series of exercises, and so I decided to introduce the various sources of information for this research topic over the course of the semester, rather than in one or two concentrated sessions. Also, I had imagined that this approach would give students time to think and

pursue leads in the intervals. Finally, this punctuated schedule represents how much of my research actually happens, i.e. in the moments in between other responsibilities. But the unfortunate result of this strategy is that the students lost momentum. I hadn't managed to get them invested enough. If I were to do this again, I would plan for a concentrated introductory and launching period, during which they could formulate their question and agenda sufficiently to have a clear plan of action for continued work on their own. In other words, instead of dribbling the tools out over a period of time, we would spend a short but intensive period assembling the toolbox and drafting the design.

- A further consequence of dragging out this project is the misconception by some students that the class was 'about' this question. This was, rather, one module of several.

I think that the emphasis on information literacy is well-placed; unprompted, the upper classmen knew that Google scholar is one smart way to explore the internet – but other ideas for finding or evaluating sources were rudimentary. When I first mentioned the information literacy goals of this module, there was a general nodding of heads to signal appreciation.

If I were to try this again, in addition to modifying the schedule to an intensive period of source orientation, the biggest change I would make would be to devote much more class time to discussion of the sources, and to examining and revising proposals and ideas. In practice, I think that to do this effectively and still cover enough of the course's substance otherwise, I would have to go to a 4-hour course.

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