

## **Teaching Colloquium #1: Grading Papers**

### **Learning Objectives**

- Gain practice grading real student papers
- Discuss how to ensure efficient, fair grading within the framework of Celtic studies/related disciplines
- Discuss how to provide substantial feedback in a manner sustainable to the TF, and usable for the student

### **Activity #1**

1. Pass out a short student paper; do not attach the prompt.
2. Highlight single passage; have participants read it.
3. Ask them to spend 5–10 minutes marking up the paper regarding *everything* that each participant believes should be changed in it.
4. In group, discuss how to distill this into a handful of relevant, concrete recommendations
  - a. What should this look like?
  - b. What is the right tone to use, especially with a disappointing paper?
  - c. If possible, the instructor should prepare their own commentary ahead of time, to use as a potential template.

### **Activity #2**

1. Pass out short student paper, from the same assignment, still *without* accompanying prompt.
2. Have participants read paper in silence for 10 minutes. The leader can suggest questions for the participants to answer, such as
  - a. What was the prompt asking?
  - b. What is your overall impression—do you have a gut sense of what the grade should be?
  - c. If so, what gave you that sense—and if not, what else would you need to consider to make a decision?
3. Discuss the results of these questions—what attributes are the participants picking up on that led them to those decisions? If different participants have different ideas of what grade a paper ought to get, and why, make sure to discuss this in detail.
4. Reveal the prompt: what difference does the prompt make to your assessment of the quality of the writing? How much of a difference *should* it make?
5. Using these discussions, have the participants (collectively/in small groups, depending on group size) turn these impressions into a stable rubric

### **Activity #3**

1. Pass out third paper, from the same assignment, now with rubric in place.

2. Give participants 20 minutes (or as much time is available/needed) to read and mark it, and assign a final grade.
3. If time, discuss.

At the end of the session, the leader should also mention resources offered by the Bok Center in how to construct rubrics and grade assignments fairly, available at:  
<https://bokcenter.harvard.edu/grading>

## Teaching Colloquium #2

### Developing a Section Plan (1: The Big Picture)

*Objective: Learn the broad strokes of how to ensure sections we teach are useful and rewarding, especially for courses taught in our field.*

#### 1. The Big Picture

Leader will ask several large-scale framing questions, e.g.

- a) What does a good literature seminar discussion look like?
- b) What sorts of questions are asked, how does the conversation flow, who is participating, how are people participating—is it one big conversation? many little conversations?
- c) What should a student get from such a discussion: how is it different from a lecture/office hours/self-teaching?

Before asking these questions, the leader should have prepared a few concrete examples—preferably culled from their own experience—to help guide and drive forwards the conversation.

Throughout, leader will take notes—preferably publicly, whether by projection from a laptop screen or by writing on an available whiteboard, to serve as a point of reference.

#### 2. Making the Big Picture real

In a traditional framework—and we will stick to this framework for now—there are the texts the students are expected to read; then, there is the knowledge the TFs are expected to have; and the skills, concepts, and information the TFs will try to instill in their students.

Therefore, for a given section, we should ask

##### **1. What should the students be reading?**

The professor will have given the students a list of assigned readings, with the expectation that they read them. This leads to the following question:

- a. Do the students have the necessary skills/knowledge to *understand* that reading?  
If this is a senior seminar on contemporary literature, they probably do. In our field, however—with its bizarre and self-contradicting plots, unexplained backstories, and long poems in which good-sized chunks often pass untranslated—the answer is very likely to be ‘no’. (It is unlikely, moreover, that an average student will be able to effectively parse any field-specific piece of secondary literature assigned; this is another skill that will need to be taught to them).
- b. How can, therefore, the TF give it to them?  
Discuss with participants *how* basic reading competence in the genre of medieval literature/folklore/etc. can be instilled. A sample line of questioning by the leader could be “Everyone in this room can read this literature well—how, then, did you learn this skill?” or “What is the best way to pass on the basics efficiently in an

introductory classroom setting, to make sure the texts seem engagingly strange, instead of incomprehensible?”

## **2. What will the TF be reading to prepare?**

Presumably the TF will read, in addition to the assigned work, other materials that help elucidate the features and themes of the primary material at hand. The question, then, is “How can the TF effectively condense this information, for their own benefit, to present it in class in a structured and useful format?”

Ideally, a member of the department who has already taught will be present. If not, the leader can give an example of their own strategies (notecards, documents with relevant quotes/citations, bullet-point arguments from secondary sources; definitions of difficult words in their original foreign-language context). Discussion/brainstorming can then follow based on what other participants have found best; reference to relevant scientific studies may be appropriate here.

## **3. What will the TF be teaching them?**

Presuming this information is not spelled out directly in course materials (and it is often the case it is not), the leader should ask also the following questions:

- a. What are the key concepts/skills/information that will help students succeed in the course?
- b. How do you make sure you land on these key points while leaving room for flexibility?
- c. How do you determine what these key concepts *even are*? (The professor may not spell them out; or the assignments may reflect a different set of priorities.)

Here, if there is time, it may be useful to consider the course description and syllabus of a real course—one the leader has taught before, ideally—and have the participants attempt to translate the priorities suggested there into a rough plan of action for a hypothetical section within that course.

## **4. Engagement**

After the three first steps outlined above, the TF has done a substantial amount of work; it will all go to waste, however, if they confront a room thick with the silence of bored disinterest.

To some degree, instilling interest in the students is not the role of the TF. There is still some good work a TF can do, though to ensure student participation, engagement, and interest. Basically, it comes down to a solid lesson plan, and an ability to read the room. The latter is a skill that requires live practice; the former—how to build an individual lesson plan for a given section—will be the subject of the following section.

## **Teaching Colloquium #3**

### **Developing a Section Plan (2: A Concrete Example)**

*Objective: This colloquium will model how to produce a teaching outline for a particular section of a class.*

#### **Materials:**

The leader will need a syllabus from a class (preferably, but not necessarily, one they have taught for), as well as readings (both mandatory and optional) assigned for a given week, and—if possible—lecture notes from the same week.

All these materials should be passed out well in advance to participants, who should attempt to read, or at least skim, the distributed materials. The trial run of this colloquium benefited immensely from the presence of department members who had taught previously; if possible, they should be encouraged to attend.

#### **How to Build a Section:**

Once everyone has gathered together, then, the participants—working together under the guidance of the leader—will attempt to create an engaging and flexible lesson plan within the time provided.

The actual form this discussion will take will vary considerably based on the leader and the participants. The previous week's questions, however (see Colloquium 2), and materials from the Bok website (<https://bokcenter.harvard.edu/sections>), can help to provide structure.

For instance, a section plan developed in a trial run of this colloquium (using materials from Celtic 101) devoted 1) 10–15 minutes to answering student questions about the material, followed by 2) the TF explaining any last loose ends or connections with other texts/readings they thought would be useful to bring up. 3) The next 45 minutes or so, then, were devoted to the meat of the class.

Based on the readings, the participants noted that the material could be organized into several themes. One proposal was to break the class into groups, and have each group search for examples of those themes in the assigned reading, and then report them back to the main group (a useful way of ensuring everyone has at least some familiarity with the assigned material!). This would probably take another 20–30 minutes. Some participants then suggested that the remainder of the time be left unstructured—so as to take advantage of any important thoughts raised earlier, or to give students room for new questions. Others thought more structure could be useful here—perhaps (since the section chosen was the week before the mid-term) some work on how to turn these insights into a compelling short paper would be more useful to the students.

The last few minutes of class were left open, for administrative announcements, etc.

As this colloquium is heavily contingent on the materials the leader has brought in, detailed instructions on how to run it are not provided here. The leader should strive, however, to incorporate the takeaways from the previous discussion on how to make an engaging section (see Colloquium #2), reminding participants to ask e.g. whether the students would be able to understand the assigned readings without TF support; how to identify correspondences between the readings and lecture, etc.