

Report on Faculty Development Grant
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The Faculty Development Grant I administered in the 2018-2019 academic year examined current theological pedagogy, surveyed most students enrolled in BTS-B/T classes, and provided impetus for colleagues to develop further grant proposals to benefit pedagogy for religion and theology at the college. I am grateful for the grant and for the opportunity to support teaching religion at the college.

Six colleagues worked together over the course of the year: L. DeAne Lagerquist, Jamie Schillinger, Anthony Bateza, James Hanson, and Kiara Jorgenson. I convened the workgroup. We used the funds awarded to purchase three volumes that addressed teaching theology and teaching diverse students and to provide stipends for the faculty work undertaken.

We researched and developed criteria for thinking about the many axes of pedagogy to consider when teaching religion in this situation, reflecting on our own situations and on the general education curriculum. Of these essays, the most provocative ones were: Bianca C. Williams, “Radical honesty: Truth-Telling as Pedagogy for Working Through Shame in Academic Spaces” in Race, Equity, and the Learning Environment, Tuitt et al, eds. (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2016), 71-82 and Willie James Jennings, “What Shall We Teach? The Content of Theological Education” in Teaching for a Culturally Diverse and Racially Just World, Eleazar S. Fernandez, ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock 2016), 109-125. These two essays offered us reflection on the instructor’s self and actions in the classroom and the architecture that theology classes have that has often been fit to seminary education. They offer ways forward to inviting students into theological work and sustaining strong places of learning.

We found that creating an assessment tool for pedagogy in a diverse classroom was too unwieldy for our work and that the template provided by Nelson Laird is more than sufficient. We considered our own teaching in light of Nelson Laird’s analysis. That article is Thomas F. Nelson Laird, “Measuring the Diversity Inclusivity of College Courses,” Research in Higher Education (2011) 52:572-588. Nelson Laird establishes nine axes for consideration: purpose/goals, content, foundations/perspectives, learners, instructor, classroom environment, assessment, pedagogy, and adjustment. We identified these areas as relevant for our work and created a short list of goals for our teaching rather than developing an assessment regime. I attach this list at the end of the report. I am the author, drawing it from workshop conversation. The list of goals has currently no standing for the Religion Department though we developed an incipient strategy on how to meet these goals.

Kiara Jorgenson and Anthony Bateza had prominent roles in the survey and developed a further grant proposal to consider syllabi in our department, recording whether the syllabi include gender and ethnic diversity as well as other inquiries and department work. They have had this grant, which includes more dimensions than the syllabi, awarded through the To Include is To Excel program on campus.

Appendix 1.

Religion Department Pedagogical Goals:

1. Students learn how their study of theology has bearing on contemporary concerns and events.
2. Students learn how theology is done by and for diverse people.
3. Instructors use a variety of pedagogical methods to create an equitable and accessible classroom.
4. Instructors vary their use of evaluation tools (tests, papers, projects).
5. Instructors inquire after the effectiveness of the course and make adjustments as needed.

Appendix 2.

Assessment Tool for Inclusion and Diversity in Christian Theology

Mark Items (1-5). Can be rewritten as a rubric with ascending descriptions.

Course Outcomes

Students gain an understanding of how to connect their learning to societal problems or issues

Students develop skills necessary to work effectively with people from various cultural* backgrounds

*Cultural can be reworked throughout this assessment tool to refer to other matters of diversity, such as ethnic or racial identity.

Content

The course content emphasizes contributions to the field by people from multiple cultures

Foundations/Perspectives

The course covers topics from multiple theological perspectives

Instructor

You explore your own cultural and intellectual limitations as part of class preparation

You address your potential biases about course-related issues during class

Learners

You try to learn about student characteristics in order to improve class instruction

You learn about student familiarity with religious and Christian communities, tradition, and practices

Pedagogy

You vary your teaching methods to encourage the active participation of all students

You work on creating a classroom atmosphere that is conducive to student learning

You try to empower students through their class participation

You discover background knowledge sufficient to put students on the same footing

You find problems of inquiry that require reasonable efforts for background knowledge

You make implicit background knowledge or skills explicit and part of the course

You build on other skills or knowledge gained in further problems of inquiry in the course

Evaluation

You evaluate student learning using multiple techniques

You use low-stakes writing to prepare students for more significant writing projects

Adjustment

You adjust aspects of the course (e.g., pace, content, or assignments) based on student learning needs