

A Collection of gifts



Issue 19, Fall 2019

Great Ideas For Teaching

19.1 In This Issue...

Denise Stephenson

I want to begin this issue by thanking Lodestar Coordinators of the past: Leola Powers née McClure and Jim Sullivan. Once upon a time, Leola took the title of this publication, thought about it culturally, and initiated a GIFT-giving exchange at the December gathering of lodestars and new faculty. Jim Sullivan continued this tradition, even as he gave the gift of time, transitioning the practice to the January meeting so that finals and the holidays both got their due before GIFTing our colleagues. Jim also gathered a set of GIFTS from the meeting and provided them to me so that I could invite a wider sharing through publication. The Great Ideas For Teaching that you'll find in these pages all come from last year's cohort of new tenure track faculty and their shining lodestars. As Bruce Hoskins takes over the program, I can only hope he will continue this tradition which keeps on giving.

This issue begins with an opening ritual from a just-retired and beloved faculty member, **Susan Herrmann**. For years, Susan started her classes with a brief reading, mostly of poetry. This daily opening created community, validated reading, thinking, and intellectual curiosity, and allowed a pause between the world outside and the world of ideas. Consider continuing this practice in your classroom.

Connecting the classroom to the world is equally important. **Dominique Ingato** explains how connecting her biotech students to the community provided them an opportunity to develop the soft skills required by employers. That's a triple win for students, the community, and local biotech firms.

The opportunities available on the first day of class never come again. Getting beyond the mere unpacking of the syllabus is vital! For some courses, inviting students to be curious about rather than fearful of the material is crucial—read how **Christina Johnson** makes chemistry inviting.

19.1 In This Issue...

Denise Stephenson

19.2 An Opening Ritual

Susan Herrmann, English

19.3 Solidifying Concepts and Developing Soft Skills Through Community Outreach

Dominique Ingato, Biotechnology

19.4 Engaging Students on the First Day

Christina Johnson, Chemistry

19.5 Becoming an African Griot: Building Community through Family Oral History

Don Love, Umoja Counselor

19.6 Let There Be Text: Harnessing Cell Phones in the Classroom

Nate Scharff, Business Administration

19.7 InstaPedagogy: Critical Thinking, Digital Communication and Instructing Through Instagram

Rachel Hastings, Communication Studies

Submissions

Submissions are always welcome. There is rolling on-line publication and print distribution during FLEX week.

Please submit work to M/S 9 or dstephenson@miracosta.edu



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Academy

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www.miracosta.edu/StudentServices/WritingCenter

A Collection of Gifts

Issue 19, Fall 2019

Validating culture and building community are important ingredients, especially in our cohort programs—Umoja, Puente, Mana. But the techniques they use are open for all of us to use. Read how **Don Love** uses the African Griot as a call to examine family history and oral traditions. Would something similar work for you?

Cell phones off! Or possibly on, in the classroom. Read how **Nate Scharff** uses a single app to develop multiple kinds of interaction in his business classes. It takes a bit of out-of-the-box thinking to imagine myriad uses, but the engagement that ensues may be well worth the effort.

Perhaps you worry that social media distracts students from coursework, but it can also be leveraged to teach them how to create, rather than merely consume, content, according to **Rachel Hastings**. Her use of Instagram not only engages students, but her assignment challenges them to think critically about audience and purpose. She suggests that a similar assignment could be used with most any course content.

I hope you find something in this issue which sparks a new idea or two. Going into fall semester refreshed is not only the result of summer vacation and relaxation, but also a feeling of excitement for our disciplines. Fresh activities with students can renew our enthusiasm. 🎁

A Collection of gifts



Issue 19, Fall 2019

Great Ideas For Teaching

19.2 An Opening Ritual

Susan Herrmann, English

I am a big believer in opening rituals for classes. When students can rely on certain activities to occur every time we meet, activities that reliably and meaningfully carry the students from the world outside the classroom to the world we've created inside, then the transition to a productive class meeting becomes smooth and natural.

My opening ritual in English 100 begins with an activity that can be adapted for other disciplines and subject matters. We begin with the reading of a poem, but a short reading of another kind can work, as well. For a few semesters, I used a book called *The Intellectual Devotional*, which had entries for each day of the year on cultural literacy topics. Page-a-day-type desk calendars on a relevant subject may lend themselves easily to this activity, too. The resource should have a wide variety of choices within it. I like using the anthology *Good Poems*, edited by Garrison Keillor; I've also successfully used the shorter *Poetry 180*, edited by Billy Collins.

Each student is required to take a turn during the semester of choosing a poem from the book, preparing to read it aloud effectively, and then reading it to the class at the beginning of the next class meeting. (One side benefit is that the student usually reads many poems in the book—sometimes, all of them--before choosing; I doubt that would happen if I assigned them to read twenty or thirty poems!) The student also prepares to answer two simple questions: What do you

think is “happening” in the poem? And “Why did you choose this particular poem?” Once the poem has been read and the questions answered, then the other students can make comments or ask questions; the student who read at the previous class meeting launches this part with the first comment or question. Once the discussion ends, we give the reader some applause, I place a post-it with the reader's name on the poem's page, and the book passes to the next volunteer. I prepare the post-it for next time and stick it to my roster, which makes a nice reminder of who is responsible for the book and the poem for our next meeting.

Why do this? After all, English 100 isn't a poetry class or even a literature class; it's composition and reading. Billy Collins made it his project as U.S. Poet Laureate to “introduce clear, contemporary poems in the nation's high schools” by assembling accessible poems intended to be read at the end of the general announcements each day of the school year. He aimed to make poetry a part of everyday life for the students. These are some of my purposes, as well. I want to open my students' ears to intentional, effective language use, and to save them from the intimidation of digging for proverbial “deep, hidden meaning.” I want to transition the students from whatever has filled their day thus far to a space where we have the communal experience of listening, reflecting, connecting to, and perhaps puzzling over a piece of writing that a classmate has chosen as worthy of sharing. In my classes, the ritual continues to a short daily writing. Sometimes the poem carries over into the writing topic, but usually it doesn't.

Again and again, students come to appreciate the poetry and all that it raises. The combination of brevity and accessibility of the material, of

A Collection of **gifts**



Issue 19, Fall 2019

Great Ideas For Teaching

choice within the parameters of the book, and of a low-stakes, structured presentation makes this practice an effective transition to meaningful class time and community.

The Billy Collins' quote is from the introduction to *180 More: Extraordinary Poems for Every Day*. 📖

A Collection of gifts



Issue 19, Fall 2019

Great Ideas For Teaching

19.3 Solidifying Concepts and Developing Soft Skills Through Community Outreach

Dominique Ingato, Biotechnology

In my experience, students are often intimidated by laboratory-based science courses. While there is an excitement about experimentation, the fear of making a mistake or running out of time tends to take over.

While trying to deal with this issue, I thought back to a 2011 article in the New York Times describing the trajectory of science students. According to the article, middle and high school students have an excitement for science which “quickly fades as students brush up against the reality of [college science courses].” Some of the suggested remedies for this growing problem include incorporating more hands-on projects and providing non-graded opportunities to practice.

Community outreach is a great way to provide students with a hands-on activity that will allow them to practice their science skills in a less stressful environment. I pitched the idea of community outreach to my junior-level students in an advanced biotechnology lab-based course and only heard from a few interested students at first. After discussing ideas with those students, we made a plan for our community outreach event: host a science workshop for middle school girls during the 2018 Girls Tech Conference at MCC.

By the time we had made this plan, more and more students in my course had begun to express

interest in helping out, and, on the day of the event, more than half of the class showed up to volunteer.

Not only did these student volunteers have a chance to solidify their knowledge of science concepts by explaining them to middle school students, but they were also able to practice soft skills that are often lacking in science graduates. A recent Forbes article ranked teamwork, critical thinking, and public speaking as crucial skills for landing a job in any field. The student volunteers were able to practice these skills as they worked together to teach the middle school girls and solve experimental issues that arose.



Many of my students ended up applying for jobs and internships later on during the semester and nearly all of them chose to describe the skills they developed during their community outreach experience in their applications.

In summary, community outreach is an enjoyable way to help students solidify classroom concepts and work on their soft skills. To be most successful, the outreach activity should allow students a chance to do hands-on work in a relatively low-pressure, non-graded environment. 🎁

A Collection of gifts



Issue 19, Fall 2019

Great Ideas For Teaching

19.4 Engaging Students on the First Day

Christina Johnson, Chemistry

Before students walk into the classroom on the first day, they may have already formed an opinion about the course. Chemistry is one of those courses that everyone has heard something about, and often that something can be reduced to one word: HARD. Chemistry can be a tough subject, but it is even tougher if students don't believe there is anything of interest for them to learn. The typical mindset of the non-major science student is that chemistry is a foreign language, impossible to understand and with nothing to offer them. The only reason they are taking the class is because it is required. If they continue to have this mindset, the class will end up being just what they expect, but if I can help them see that the material has merit and is important in their lives, then the result can be much different.

In my class, on the first day, even before we go over the syllabus, everyone introduces themselves, including their name, major and the one thing they have heard or that most worries them about the course. By doing this first, the students begin to develop a sense of community; they see that they are not the only ones thinking the same thing. Next, I pass out index cards and the students write one question they have wondered about that they think may be answered through science/chemistry. Questions include "What are GMOs?" "Why don't oil and water mix?" "How does aspirin work?" and

"Are all chemicals bad for you?" I collect the cards, put them in a bag, and ask a student to pick one. I read the question out loud and give the students the opportunity to answer or come up with what they have heard about the subject. Then I fill in the gaps. After I answer the question, I try to link the question and answer to a topic from our textbook and write the subject and chapter down on the board. Sometimes there are questions that I can't fully answer, and when that happens we do some research together, using the textbook and smartphones to find the answer. After 5-10 questions, the board is usually full and the students are beginning to realize that chemistry does have something to offer them and might even be interesting! We usually don't get through all of the questions in one class period, but I bring the bag with me to every lecture and try to answer another question at least once a week.

This exercise doesn't necessarily change their opinion that the course will be hard, but now they also think it will be interesting and add value to their lives, thus opening the door to learning the subject and, as a side benefit, making for a much more enjoyable semester.



A Collection of gifts



Issue 19, Fall 2019

Great Ideas For Teaching

19.5 Becoming an African Griot: Building CommUnity through Family Oral History

Don Love, Umoja Counselor

I was introduced to this activity at an Umoja Conference years ago and have used it as part of my COUN 105 Transfer Success class ever since. In Umoja, community is absolutely fundamental to the learning experience, for the students, the faculty, and the staff. By tapping the intellectual and social capital represented by our students, we build community and greatly enhance the meaning of our classrooms/offices. Beyond helping keep our students in school, building community causes students to be accountable to each other's learning. Communal intelligence implies that we teach a willingness to see your own suffering and that of your sisters and brothers and take responsibility for it. Community transcends our courses and services and reaches into the "I am, because you are."

West African griots are the historians and storytellers within a tribe or community. They are genealogists, historians, spokespeople, ambassadors, musicians, teachers, warriors, interpreters, praise-singers, masters of ceremonies, advisors, and more.

African stories told by griots have been used since ancient times as a way of teaching and remembering the past. Many stories have been told about African peoples, including

those about the glory and splendor of heroes and kings. Listening to stories makes learning pleasant and interesting and the warm, informal atmosphere in which the tales are told binds people together.

An African story is neither read nor recorded in Africa. Instead, it is recited on the spot at the time of the telling of the story. Storytellers work on the feelings and imaginations of their audience. The most renowned storytellers invent words, compose songs, and imitate animals, people and sounds in their stories. Storytellers mime and dance, they sing songs, they act the various roles with a dramatic use of tone and inflections.

This assignment is given in order to connect students to their past as a way to look forward to their future. There is much to be gained from the stories passed down in families through the generations. To complete this assignment, students will interview family members and research information about their families. They are given categories of questions to ask such as: highest education level reached, careers pursued, travels ... Students take notes during the interviews and write a story about their families. As a final presentation, students are asked to select a story or incident that they learned about their families and present it in griot form.

Details:

- 1) Students interview at least one older relative or friend who is familiar with their family history. (Try to interview the person who can remember back the farthest.)

A Collection of Gifts

Issue 19, Fall 2019

- 2) During the interview, they will gather information for their story, taking notes including dates, full names and places of events, and details. If there are photos, documents or artifacts that they are able to use for their presentations, all the better.
- 3) Next, they will create a story from the information gathered and present it to the class. Students are encouraged to use props, music, costumes and artifacts as needed.
- 4) A minimum 2 page written reflection about the experience, lessons learned, and historical knowledge gathered is due as part of this project.

Over the years, students have discovered wonderful stories about their family histories that they did not know, stories which help to serve as motivation when challenges occur in their lives. These become their “Why.”

Student presentations are impactful as they are encouraged to be creative when telling their stories. In the past, I’ve had students sing, perform spoken word poetry, or dance. One student prepared a dish in class that he used to make with his grandmother. Upon finishing the story (within 3 minutes), he handed out samples of his dish, prepared the night before, to the class, bringing everyone into his family. It was well rehearsed and powerful as he described the interaction.

The sharing of stories has been great for building commUnity and something that helps to strengthen relationships within the class. ❧

A Collection of gifts



Issue 19, Fall 2019

Great Ideas For Teaching

19.6 Let There Be Text: Harnessing Cell Phones in the Classroom

Nate Scharff, Business Administration

Do you remember a time before smartphones? If you walked onto a college campus prior to 2010, you may have seen cell phones, but probably not many smartphones (those phones with internet access, apps,



etc.). Fast forward nine years to 2019 and our phones (which are all smartphones now) have arguably become the most essential accessory in our daily life. Students use their phones to dictate assignments, access

Canvas, manage their calendars, communicate with friends, conduct research and... goof around on social media. When it comes to the digital landscape, for our students, the main tool is their phone and, like it or not, that phone usage seeps into our classrooms. And the debate continues: Should cellphones be in the classroom, or are they a distraction to learning?

I believe the question is not whether or not cell phones SHOULD be in the classroom, but rather HOW they should be used in the classroom. I use a social media app in my classroom that harnesses student's use of cell phones to help them engage with the course and each other. It's called WeChat, and it's the #1 social media tool used by college students in China. WeChat boasts over 1.058 billion

monthly active users, making it the fifth largest SNS globally, beating Instagram at 1 billion active users and dwarfing Twitter at 335 million active users. Imagine an app that combines the functions of Facebook, WhatsApp, Amazon and Uber into one highly sophisticated mobile operating system, and you have WeChat.

With WeChat, an instructor can quickly set up a private chat for each class that, unlike Twitter, is closed to outside access and limited just to students in that class. WeChat also syncs easily with classroom computers, enabling the instructor to type class chat messages using the classroom keyboard and computer to all student's phones instantly and attach any content they like to that message. This can include pictures of board notes, handouts, video links, pictures, websites, etc. Imagine no more handouts in your classroom. Imagine sending a picture of your finest board notes and diagrams to your students' phones after your amazing lecture. Imagine feeling like the Wizard of Oz, your voice cackling and booming as you effortlessly distribute a cornucopia of digital content to your students' phones. Imagine your answer always being yes when students ask, "Can you send me what you just covered in class?"

WeChat also provides a backchannel whereby students can communicate with each other, inside and outside of the classroom, on the platform they use most - their phone. With a few stern warnings about monitoring WeChat for cheating and following student code of conduct guidelines, I have experienced no problems with students abusing WeChat in my classes. Students answer each other's tech support and assignment questions and are

A Collection of gifts



Issue 19, Fall 2019

Great Ideas For Teaching

encouraged to do so with extra credit points. This cuts down on the quantity of FAQ's the instructor has to respond to.

The classroom WeChat can also be pulled up on the projector screen in class and used for polling and peer grading exercises. In my Business Communications class, I display a student work sample, and students chat feedback on errors and corrections for quick and collaborative feedback on class writing. Here the magic can really happen as students begin teaching each other, using the mobile channel they are comfortable with.

But wait, there's more! I also use WeChat for peer feedback on student presentations. As students complete their individual presentations, the rest of the class chats feedback to that student in real time. After their presentation, the students can scroll through their feedback and quickly determine where they did well, and where they can improve, directly from the audience feedback.

WeChat can also solve the riddle of only being able to project one thing at a time in the classroom. Do you show videos in your class and distribute separate handouts for students to answer questions? With WeChat you can distribute these questions directly to students' phones, where they can view the questions while the video runs on the projector screen. No need for handouts.

Have a hard time getting students to participate with difficult or contentious topics? With WeChat you can ask students to respond with an "agree or disagree" or "yes or no" response to an opening question, for example,

"Do you agree or disagree that the border wall is a bad idea?" With the class WeChat displayed on the projector screen and responses displaying live, I can quickly scan the student responses and select a student who I think would be good for starting a discussion on that topic because, for example, they have the minority opinion on a topic. WeChat allows you to curate your participation respondents in a way that fosters better discussions.

WeChat can also serve as a fun icebreaker. When I launch WeChat in the second week of the semester, I let students take a few minutes to be silly with emoticons and pictures (within code of conduct guidelines). These digital introductions allow introverts to express themselves.

Of course, technology can fail and workarounds are required. This semester I found Android students blocked from WeChat access, and their phones wouldn't load the app. Occasionally, students don't have a smartphone, or their wifi isn't working. It's important to make app use optional and not required. Paper submissions are always a reliable workaround. I have set up a text group for students having access issues, and that has solved them.

Bottom line: Whether it's in the class getting work done or outside of class getting support, students love being able to pull out their phones and connect with their classmates. Making an effort to engage with them in their native platform is appreciated. There are many mobile tools - try one out. Your students will be more engaged with the class and each other. 📱

A Collection of gifts



Issue 19, Fall 2019

Great Ideas For Teaching

19.7 InstaPedagogy: Critical Thinking, Digital Communication and Instructing Through Instagram

Rachel Hastings, Communication Studies

In the Age of Information where the Digital Revolution is in full rage, I have found that teaching oral communication skills using social media and digital tools can be a great way to internalize concepts, as well as prepare students for a world where being fluent in technology-based tools will be central to their professional success. My favorite assignments meet students where they already are in the digital world—Instagram. I ask students to create memes, vlogs and daily stories that will be posted, promoted and analyzed for audience effectiveness.

To help keep things centralized (and control the content), I create one Instagram account for the class to share at the beginning of the semester. The password is shared with all the students. Throughout the semester, various assignments teach students how to use the digital tools on Instagram to create content, post it to various parts of Instagram, engage with audiences, manage content, analyze feedback and reflect upon how to improve the effectiveness of their message. In this way, these assignments ask students to do more than think about how they represent themselves online.

Instead, they call upon students to reposition themselves as content creators rather than content consumers within these social spaces.

I typically like to break the digital ice early in the semester with an introduction meme & vlog. These work great for both online and face-to-face classes. Instructors can put their own spin on the meme content, all throughout the semester. I'll share a digital icebreaker that's worked well with students and teaches the essentials of how to use the Instagram tools.

The GIFT: Selfie Album Cover Meme & Vlog

The purpose of this assignment is to develop skills in content creation.

1) Create your own meme

I introduce this part of the assignment as a lesson in creating visual aides. There are many meme-making apps and websites dedicated to creating stunning visuals. I love Canva.com as a presentation-making website and app. The large quantity of templates, plus amazing selection of free stock photos really assist students in creating quality visuals. Also, they already have the specific aspect ratios for every single digital presentation you can think of. From logos and daily stories on Facebook to resumes and invitations, there is so much to choose from.

For the Selfie Album Cover assignment, have students upload a selfie picture as the background.

A Collection of gifts



Issue 19, Fall 2019

Great Ideas For Teaching

Add the following text to the Selfie:

- An Album Title
- 3 song titles representing you. (Song titles can be real or imagined, but should have some significance to your identity).
- First name only.

2) Record A 60 sec video

Video is the most effective and engaging type of content on social media. And for a Communication professor, it is absolutely crucial in helping students to overcome camera anxiety and stage fright. That's why the first video speech is a simple explanation of each part of their Selfie Album Cover. Additionally, students are challenged to respect the time limitations of Instagram as a speaking platform and aim for a 60 second presentation.

3) Post To Instagram as a Carousel Post

Once students have created both their Selfie Album Cover Meme and Vlog, they upload both items into a Carousel post on Instagram. A Carousel has multiple items uploaded onto a single post. For this assignment, students were asked to use the photo as the top item and the video as the second item. This allows followers to see the album cover and then slide to the left for the video explanation. Encouraging this type of interaction between the content and followers not only increases engagement but is also key for understanding how effective one's message is.

This was a really fun icebreaker because students went all-out with their album covers. When posted, the meme basically functioned as a promo ad for student videos. This inspired students to choose fun, adventurous, and thoughtful images of themselves. They also really thought about their song titles, choosing to tap into trending songs of the time and to create their own. The videos were inspiring as well. Each student was encouraged to have fun and keep it diary-style. Students shot videos in parked cars, at the park, in the bathroom at work—they really tapped into their own lived realities and brought that with them to the video. And most importantly—it introduced students to Instagram as a digital tool for content creation. Students were able to creatively learn how to use the platform and how to represent themselves to others.

Concluding Thoughts

What I love about Instagram is that it's a platform built upon niche communities. From a pedagogical standpoint, an instructor could use Instagram as a creative space to explore visual, verbal and vocal representation. I chose an introductory topic: the self. But I could just as easily have selected a literary topic, like poetry, or a cultural perspective like Latina photographers, and created digital assignments specifically for those niche audiences.

While I know social media is often shied away from in the classroom for a number of reasons, platforms like Instagram can become transformative spaces that challenge students to take into consideration not only what they say, but also how they say it—in different contexts. It can encourage students to think critically

A Collection of **gifts**



Issue 19, Fall 2019

Great Ideas For Teaching

about what their message will look like and how it will be received by their target audiences.

This is a valuable skill as we are constantly consuming information asking us to make social choices and digital decisions everyday. 📱