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March 25, 2016

Teaching Self-Reflection

Date: Friday, March 25th, 2016 from 10-10:50am

Course: AIS 160A – Many Nations of North America

Room: Cesar Chavez 306

Students in Attendance: 22 students (of 26 regular)

Today, I began class promptly at 10am, even though a few students filtered in a few minutes late. I have noticed that the later we get in the semester, the more students I have that for some reason are late to class. However, since it does not seem to be the same group of students, I have only mentioned (via email) for students to try to be prompt to class.

My first goal of today's session was to pass back the "pop quiz" sheets from Wednesday's lecture. Students watched a movie and were told to take notes during the film, which they then turned in as a pop quiz grade. In this course, we typically do not give any forms of quizzes back, but because these were actually notes we had to make sure the students received them. For this quiz, I only put check marks on the top of the page to verify that I had received it, so the quickest way to get these items back was to have students pass them around the room. In hindsight, I should have alphabetized them so that students could find their notes quicker, but this slipped my mind during the grading process.

While students were passing the notes back, I was able to provide immediate feedback on the essay outlines that were due at 9am (an hour before our class). I made feedback that I felt was broad, and showed issues that lots of students had including, but not limited to: not using Wikipedia as a source, making sure to include a book/journal source and not just online sources, to pay attention to "contemporary" issues after 1970, etc. While students will be receiving direct feedback from me this weekend, I had already done an initial scan of everything that was turned in so that I could guide them immediately with some of these wide scale issues. Also, I mentioned that the following Friday would be the Exam 2 Review, so that students could make sure to come to class this day.

Once all the notes were passed out, I had students break into groups to discuss the film. I liked that students were able to try and make actual circles or squares with the chairs in the room. There were still a few students that did not move much, but at least they made the effort. I noticed that, as usual, there were a few students that were not participating much in the discussion. However, these are the students that did not come to the lecture to watch the in-class film. I intentionally allowed them to be put into random groups, because as an educator I do not want them to go into the upcoming Exam 2 without having ever heard anything about the film. They will likely not have received all of the details of the film in their group, but I want them to have some knowledge, and that knowledge can come from what those in the group discussed.

I then asked students to tell me what they had mentioned in their groups as important notes. I was pleasantly surprised, because the students were able to touch upon a lot of key points from the film. For me, I think this means they actually were engaged with the film that was chosen by the teaching team, and paid a bit more attention to it than they regularly do. After students brought up their points, I went through some of my notes from the film and tried to clarify things about the film that they will encounter on the exam.

As an activity, I think this group work went over very well. I was happy with the amount of discussion that took place. It seems that the more group work I do, the more engaged the students are and the more willing they are to talk in groups. Unlike my regular groups of 2-3, I also told them to create groups of 4-5, and this may have helped a bit, because they have a few extra group members to rely upon.

The second activity connected students to a mapping activity. In class, Dr. Colombi had discussed his work with a Google Mapping project in Indigenous Russia, and during that lecture on Monday I was watching student reactions to the material. It seemed like the professor skipped over the “why” of the project—why is it important for the Indigenous communities of Russia to create maps—and the “how” of the project—how does this look or appear? He did show one or two maps, but really did not discuss them in depth. I saw that students seemed to become disengaged with the material (they began texting, browsing the internet, a few actually got up and left) and so I wanted to address this. Rather than just re-discuss what mapping was, I wanted to have students get a hands-on experience.

First, I printed out a map of my farm out in southwest Tucson and then spent a quick 10 minutes at home creating my own Indigenous themed map. I showed students the real Google map of this location to show them what we think of when we currently think of Google maps. I then showed them my own map, which was very different. I explained to them that my map has things on it that are known only to me, or people I grew up with. Though a little different, this is similar to the Indigenous maps being created—they provide special insight and information to areas. I wanted to show my own example so that students had an idea of how I was connecting this activity to the course information. It also seemed fair to have done the assignment/activity that I was going to assign them, so that I could gauge how much time to give it.

I brought in some paper and had students, still in groups, to give them a continued sense of community (we’re all doing this assignment together, not alone in our own chair) began drawing and creating their own Indigenous map. I think allowing a good 7-10 minutes was needed, and it really let students think about what was important for their map. I then had one volunteer to show his map, which was fun and interactive for the class. I then randomly selected two other students to share when no one stepped up to do so—which is typical in this section of my course. They are very shy about showing, discussing, etc., because they seem to be in other fields (sciences, math, economics, etc.) where there are either right/wrong answers and they do not want to be “Wrong” in front of their peers. I am trying to train them to be more relaxed and not to fear being “wrong” in my class, but that is taking far more time than I thought it would.

Overall, I think today's class provided a very learner centered environment, and hopefully allowed them to feel a sense of community. I think the hands-on activity will be something that will actually help them remember some of the reasons why/how Indigenous mapping takes place, which will be good to know for the upcoming exam. If I had improvements, I think one would be to bring crayons/colored pencils for the students to make their maps with—I overlooked this, and left my colorful utensils at home. I think it would have been nice to bring them for students to use. But apart from this, I was very pleased with what I accomplished today.