

2012-2013 SOTL Grant Proposal

Using Modular Online Learning Platforms to (Re)introduce Student-centered Active Learning and Essential Academic Skill Development in History Survey and General Education Courses

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Department of History

An inherent weakness of the university educational system is that it places those least prepared for college in large lecture survey or general education sections least conducive to active learning or academic skill development. These courses in turn are entrusted to instructors who often lack the time, experience, or pedagogical insights to remediate its passive, static, learning climate; or address student skill deficiencies. As a result, large lecture survey and general education students face unjustifiably disproportionate dropout/retention rates vis-à-vis their peers in small honors or learning community sections.

The department of History services 450 students in history surveys and 1,545 students in Liberal Studies courses per semester.¹ This proposal seeks to develop a Department-wide online modular instruction platform that will (re)introduce active problem-based learning and scaffolded academic and discipline-specific skill development to these lecture-format courses. This platform, which will consist of six structured developmental units and twelve instructor-modifiable and/or interchangeable progressively analytical content modules, will 1) redress the passivity and inherent learning disadvantage of (large) lecture survey/LBST settings, 2) develop essential/higher learning skills and critical analysis in freshmen/sophomore introductory course formats, 3) promote student-centered, active and imaginary learning in content courses, 4) provide pedagogical tools and instructional rigor to faculty not necessarily schooled in history didactics. This non topic-specific Moodle-based platform can be used with any instructional format or and serve as a foundation for future hybrid and online delivery efficacy.

The proposal addresses the core objectives of the QEP plan and University student retention efforts. It makes access to quality education and student success more equitable by distributing high quality history didactics to faculty and students.

¹ Enrollment Fall 2012 semester.

**Budget Request for SOTL Grant
Year 2012-2013**

Joint Proposal? Yes X No

Title of Project Using Modular Online Learning Platforms to (Re)introduce Student-centered Active Learning and Essential Academic Skill Development in History Survey and General Education Courses

Duration of Project One year

Primary Investigator(s) Oscar Larsen

Email Address(es) oelansen@uncc.edu

UNC Charlotte SOTL Grants Previously Received (please names of project, PIs, and dates) _____

Allocate operating budget to Department of History

Account #	Award	Year One
		January to June
Faculty Stipend	Transferred directly from Academic Affairs to Grantee on May 15	\$ 3850
911250	Graduate Student Salaries	
911300	Special Pay (Faculty on UNCC payroll other than Grantee)	
915000	Student Temporary Wages	
915900	Non-student Temporary Wages	
920000	Honorarium (Individual(s) not with UNCC)	
921150	Participant Stipends	
925000	Travel - Domestic	
926000	Travel - Foreign	
928000	Communication and/or Printing	
930000	Supplies	
942000	Computing Equipment	
944000	Educational Equipment	\$75
951000	Other Current Services	
GRAND TOTAL		\$ 3925

Faculty Stipend –Summer I

Authorship of six online scaffolded developmental skill units, twelve progressive student-centered active learning content modules, and an online faculty implementation site, a faculty user manual; as well as the creation of Moodle project site, and an LBST 2102 online developmental course site.

Educational Equipment

Purchase of two essential monographs not available in the library:

Weimer, Maryellen. *Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012) isbn 978-0787956462

Whitton, Nicola and Alex Moseley. *Using Games to Enhance Learning and Teaching: A Beginner's Guide*. (New York: Routledge, 2012) isbn 978-0415897723



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November 6, 2012

SOTL Grants Committee
Center for Teaching & Learning
ctl@uncc.edu

Dear Committee Members:

I am writing in support of the SOTL proposal submitted by Dr. Oscar Larsen from our Department of History entitled "Using Modular Online Learning Platforms to (Re)introduce Student-centered Active Learning and Essential Academic Skill Development in History Survey and General Education Courses." Larsen plans to develop an online modular instruction platform consisting of six structured development units and twelve modifiable analytical content modules that are appropriate for a variety of History survey and general education courses. The modules are designed to promote active learning among students and to provide more rigorous pedagogical tools for faculty.

What is especially impressive about Dr. Larsen's proposed project is the breadth of courses in the History Department that will be potentially served by the modular platform. The potential "bang for the buck" factor seems high. Moreover, it seems that the concept and units proposed for essential academic skills are applicable beyond the History Department. The proposal provides plans for disseminating the results and I would be surprised if the other faculty at UNC Charlotte and beyond would not express interest if the modules prove to be effective. I encourage you to give this proposal your serious consideration.

Please let me know if you require further information.

Sincerely yours,

Nancy A. Gutierrez, Dean
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences



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Dr Rich Leeman, Chair
Faculty Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Committee
University of North Carolina Charlotte

Dear Dr. ~~Leeman,~~ *Rich.*

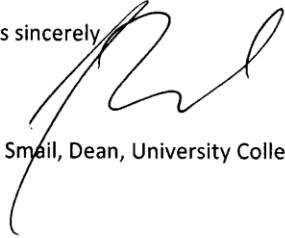
I write to endorse Oscar Larsen's SoTL grant proposal to develop modular on-line learning platforms for use in introductory courses in the History department.

In general terms my support for this proposal stems from my sense that the student-centered active-learning model that Oscar is proposing to develop is the right thing for our students. Although I am by no means an expert in pedagogical research, I am deeply immersed in efforts to understand the factors that influence student success. That work suggests to me that we need to be much more intentional about how we structure our students' educational experiences, particularly in the first year, both in terms of bringing students up to speed with the skills needed for success (the developmental modules in Oscar's proposal) and in terms of getting students involved in learning (the analytical modules in Oscar's proposal). Of course we have many faculty members teaching new students who, individually, excel at doing just this, and Oscar is one of them. The challenge, therefore, is twofold. We need to figure out ways to "share the wealth" so that these approaches become normalized in introductory classes, but we also need to ensure that there are commonalities between the experiences students get in different introductory classes. The modules Oscar is proposing seem to me to be one possible solution we should explore.

In specific terms my support for this proposal stems from its close alignment with a number of University initiatives. In terms of pedagogy, the work of the Top 40 Academy and of the Large Course Redesign initiative both have a similar emphasis on the use of active learning strategies, particularly in large enrollment courses. In addition, as Oscar notes, there are obvious parallels between the approach he wants to explore and the QEP curriculum that the University is in the process of developing since the modules he is proposing address the core student learning outcomes of the QEP. Finally, his efforts to integrate writing into large introductory courses align with approaches that the Communications Across the Curriculum program is

trying to foster. None of those programs, however, currently emphasizes the dissemination of this kind of work through the scholarship on teaching and learning, so it seems to me that this project fits the SoTL criteria while clearly being very complementary to other initiatives.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'John Smail', written over the text 'Yours sincerely'.

John Smail, Dean, University College

It is no secret that freshmen and sophomores are most vulnerable at failing or dropping out of college. In 2009, 22.5% of entering freshmen at UNC Charlotte did will not make it to their sophomore year; 35.1% not to their junior year.² Still in the formative stages of their mental, academic, and social development, these students either quickly need to attain the necessary skill sets for college and take responsibility for their learning; or risk being left behind. The University has made freshmen retention and active learning a prime priority of its 2011-2016 Institutional Plan and SACS-mandated Quality Enhancement Program.

However, those most vulnerable to failure, initially find themselves in class environments least conducive to formative learning and academic maturation. Scholarship has well established that large-lecture survey and general education courses, albeit a fiscal or logistical necessity and practice in modern academia, create passive, anonymous, learning climates that are content-driven at best.³ In turn, these courses are often taught by faculty, adjuncts, and graduate students who lack the time, experience, and sometimes pedagogical insights to remediate its passive and static learning climate; or address specific student skill deficiencies. Whereas innovative use of technology through a-synchronous (aka online) learning networks and course management systems has somewhat alleviated the passivity and anonymity of large lecture learning in the finite disciplines, the humanities have yet to satisfactorily (re) introduce active, student-centered learning in freshmen and sophomore large lecture survey and general education courses.⁴

²The University of North Carolina. *Retention, Graduation and Persistence Rates of First-Time Full-Time Freshmen at UNC Charlotte*. Last modified November 1, 2012. <http://www.northcarolina.edu/ira/ir/analytics/retgrper.htm>.

³Cheatham, Marcus. "Study of Undergraduate Retention at Michigan State University" *Institute for Public Policy and Social Research. Michigan State University(1994)*; Edmonson, B. and F. J. Mulder. "Size of Class as a Factor in University Instruction" *Journal of Educational Research IX, 1 (1924): 1-12*; Watts, Michael and William E. Becker. "A Little More Than Chalk and Talk: Results from a Third National Survey of Teaching Methods in Undergraduate Economics Courses." *Journal of Economic Education* 39, 3 (2008) 273-286; Richard R. Hake. "Interactive-engagement versus traditional methods: A six-thousand-student survey of mechanics test data for introductory physics courses." *American Journal of Physics*, 66 (1998):64-74; Joel Geske. "Overcoming the Drawbacks of the Large Lecture Class." *College Teaching*, 40,4 (Fall, 1992), 151-154.

⁴Lizzio, Alf, Keithia Wilson, and Roland Simons. "University Students' Perceptions of the Learning Environment and Academic Outcomes: implications for theory and practice." *Studies in Higher Education*, 27, 1 (2002): 27-52; Barak, Miri, Alberta Lipson, and Steven Lerman. "Wireless Laptops as Means for Promoting Active Learning In Large Lecture Halls." *Journal of*

This lack of active learning models and/or academic and discipline-specific skill development in freshman/sophomore large lecture survey and general education courses has serious consequences beyond elevated D/W/F grades and negative effects on retention rates. Whereas History develops undergraduates' critical analytical and contextual thinking and expression skills, these attributes transfer poorly in general education and history survey settings with little to no experiential or collaborative engagement. Furthermore, student learning emulates faculty teaching. Passive, lectured-based face-to-face or online instruction thus leads to surface (content) rather than deep (analytical) cognition; in turn directly affecting qualitative learning outcomes and student skills.⁵ In other words, students not only learn less but *less well*, eroding the value and impact of their college education for their future studies or professional endeavors. This does a disservice to the UNC Charlotte student body, and creates unjustifiable learning inequities vis-à-vis those privileged to attend small student-centered honors or learning community sections.

Instructor efficacy, motivation, and satisfaction suffer from passive, large lecture environments as well. A European study of twenty-two universities in eight countries convincingly showed that student ownership, focus, and quality of learning, as well as instructor teaching skills and satisfaction significantly improved when placed within active learning settings with pedagogical training and support.⁶ As American academia does not hold an as integrative view of its research and teaching mission as its European counterparts,⁷ it falls to the discipline-specific didactical experts trained in these methods to develop student-centered active learning models that are readily accessible to

Research on Technology in Education 38, 3 (Spring 2006):245-263; Karen Swan; "Virtual interaction: Design factors affecting student satisfaction and perceived learning in asynchronous online courses." *Distance Education*.22, 2 (2001); 301-336.

⁵ Lizzio, 27 and 43.

⁶ Gibbs, Graham and Martin Coffey. "The impact of training of university teachers on their teaching skills, their approach to teaching and the approach to learning of their students" *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 5, 1 (2004): 87-100.

⁷ Counterparts in European nations mandate teacher training for university-level instructors, and fund and merit effective student-focused learning. Gibbs, 88; Habermas, Jürgen and John R. Blazek. "The Idea of the University: Learning Processes." *New German Critique* 41 (Spring-Summer 1987): 3-22.

undergraduates and faculty alike; and can be easily integrated within the current institutional and instructional parameters across a wide variety of History survey and Liberal Studies courses.⁸

This proposal seeks to develop a Department-wide online modular instruction platform that will (re)introduce active problem-based learning and scaffolded academic and disciplinary-specific skill development to History survey and Liberal Studies lecture-format courses. Scholarship shows that active, student-centered, problem-oriented learning renders both the highest learning efficacy and student/instructor satisfaction.⁹ Using experience gleaned from the investigators' effectual freshmen large lecture retention and (hybrid) skill development efforts, visual-experiential freshmen learning models, and collaborative research efforts in problem-based progressive learning,¹⁰ this Moodle-based platform will consist of six structured developmental units and twelve instructor-modifiable, progressively analytical, experiential content modules relevant to the Department's United States, European surveys and LBST 1102, 2101, and 2102 course offerings. Depending on the level of customization, this versatile modular instruction platform can be used in auxiliary, hybrid, or stand-alone delivery format; and serve as a foundation for future hybrid large lecture or online delivery efficacy.

The development units, which can be directly plugged in to any of the survey or general education history courses, provide interactive, problem-based tutorials and exercises on essential academic skills. These range from note taking, essay writing, and visual learning; to source interpretation, problem analysis, and critical argumentation – as well as engaging in imaginative,

⁸ The investigator is a European-trained senior teaching-track faculty member/administrator who maintains both a historical and a didactical research agenda.

⁹ Barak, 246-247; O'Neill, Geraldine and Tim McMahon. "Student-Centred Learning: What Does It Mean For Students and Lecturers?" in O'Neill, G., Moore, S., and McMullin, B. (Eds). *Emerging Issues in the Practice of University Learning and Teaching*. (Dublin: AISHE, 2005); Prince Michael. "Does Active Learning Work? A Review of the Research" *Journal of Engineering Education*, 93, 3 (2004): 223-231

¹⁰ I consult with American and European universities on visual, experiential learning in large lecture settings, as well as collaborate on the European Union Euroclio History Didactics initiative. At UNC Charlotte I pioneered freshmen-only LBST courses with structured transitional skill development, as well as an experiential-based history freshman learning community seminar and an honors college freshmen-only seminar.

collaborative writing, and preventing plagiarism. Instructors may choose how and where to place these units within their course and whether to require simple completion or assign specific course credit values to each unit.

The twelve analytical, experiential content modules are broad-theme rather than content-specific in nature, and access material from or through the eyes contemporaneous student peers.¹¹ This approach allows for the widest cross-course implementation while assuring student affinity and relevance – themes to be decided collectively by the survey and Liberal Studies instructors. These modules are sequential in nature, progressing from simple interpretation and place-based reporting; to complex source analysis and scenario-focused collective problem solving; to evaluative, collaborative writing via Google Docs. As each two modules address one stage of progression, faculty can select anywhere from six to twelve modules per course (at least one of each stage), varying both the presence and intensiveness of this Moodle component in their course. In turn each module scenario can be modified to fit the specific course content (the method is fixed to assure the modules offer student centered, progressive skill development/practice). For example, the module that introduces evaluative, argumentative historical writing uses a modified letter format (students write a letter based on a student-selected visual source that must circumvent the prying eye or censorship of a third party). Whereas one instructor may use postcards from the Great War, i.e. letters from the front covertly expressing the reality of war, another may use photographs or narratives of despair and have students select a (fictitious or historical) person or group and create lyrics or rhyme top express their emotion.

This Department-wide online modular instruction/support platform for history survey and general education courses therefore will:

- Redress the passivity and inherent learning disadvantage of (large) lecture survey and LBST settings by offering student-centered active, experiential, collaborative learning exercises.

¹¹ See my Euroclio *Mastering the Unmasterable* module, Yale Teacher Initiative/Charlotte Teacher Institute inaugural seminar on *Children in War and Conflict*, and my current LBST 2102 course of the same title.

- Lessen student transitional difficulties, retention challenges, and increased W/D/F rates by integrating essential and higher learning skills development in freshmen/sophomore survey and general education course formats.
- Address specific instructional weaknesses in the History Department's undergraduate curriculum by promoting student-centered, active, imaginary learning in survey and liberal studies content courses.
- Introduce computer-enhanced learning across the History Department's undergraduate curriculum by providing a readily adoptable and easily modifiable Moodle platform for all history courses.
- Contribute to the University's Communications across the Curriculum initiative by developing collaborative writing in course formats not yet included in the Department's CaC efforts.
- Explore complementary approaches to the University Quality Enhancement Plan by introducing reflective student-centered and/or driven research and writing in freshmen and sophomore course offerings.
- Improve content delivery, instructional rigor, and teaching efficacy and satisfaction by providing pedagogical tools to faculty not necessarily schooled in history didactics.

The investigator respectfully requests a stipend for work during the first summer session of 2013 and reimbursement for two books to bring this project to fruition (see budget narrative). The proposal will be implemented within one year along the following timeline.

- March/April 2013: Meeting with three focus groups (survey faculty, LBST faculty, LBST Children in War and Conflict students) to identify the main themes and fine tune skill modules. Careful crafting of a department-wide plan tailored to instructor need with little to no customization effort from faculty, will ensure buy in at the formative stage.

- Summer I 2013: Authorship of six developmental modules, twelve content models, and online faculty guide; creation of Moodle project site, and LBST 2102 online developmental course site.
- Summer II 2013: Piloting of the developmental and content models in online LBST course format.
- Fall 2013: implementation of developmental skill units in all history survey and LBST courses via Moodle and the Department website. Piloting of full platform in History LBST QEP course. Fine tuning of the content modules and training meetings with the faculty teaching surveys and LBST courses for spring 2014. Both the review and training will take place during regularly scheduled department meetings, minimizing again faculty effort,
- Spring 2014: implementation of full platform via Moodle in all History survey and LBST courses. Individual consultancy with each instructor to help modify the analytical modules. Faculty may start with developmental units and incidental analytical modules; expanding to full implementation in the subsequent semesters.

This project will be evaluated through an extensive online survey distributed to students in the LBST 2102 pilot section (Summer II 2013), and history survey and LBST operational sections (Spring 2014); as well as faculty survey and feedback sessions. The investigator intends to disseminate and share his findings with UNC Charlotte and the larger academic community via the annual Large Lecture and Communication across the Curriculum Summer Institutes, discussions around the QEP; nationally via TeamUP; and internationally at Euroclio and VGN conferences. The investigator will author an article on these practices for European and American history didactics journals, as well as lead workshops for interested faculty and departments. Finally, if funded, this proposal will form the bases for further investigation of History Large Lecture Course Redesign at UNC Charlotte.

If this proposal would be funded, it would affect the teaching of six courses, thirty course sections, twenty-three instructors, 450 history survey students, and 1,545 history LBST students per semester.¹²

¹² Fall 2012 figures.