

TEACHING PORTFOLIO

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Statement of Teaching Philosophy and Methods

In the summer of 2002, having just purchased a one-way ticket to the Czech Republic, I had little desire to pursue graduate studies beyond the M.A. in English that I had recently completed at Colorado State University. My first venture into teaching at the university level had left me with mixed feelings. I enjoyed teaching, but I found that my students were less than enthusiastic about William Shakespeare and Virginia Woolf. Though not yet “digital natives,” the students in my introductory classes regarded literature as an artifact—something outdated but charming, like a crinoline or a 1953 Studebaker—and they failed to see how creative or expository writing skills would benefit them in a career in pharmaceuticals or civil engineering. Armed with such notions as “critical thinking” and “active reading,” I realized that these concepts remain abstractions unless tethered to real-world concerns, but I was unable or unwilling to put my own humanistic assumptions to the test.

While my decision to move to Europe was motivated, in part, by a desire to explore other avenues of teaching, it also afforded me a new and unique perspective on the sociopolitical agency of arts and letters. Over the course of the five years I spent as an English as a Second Language instructor and senior teacher at a private language school in Prague, an often neglected center of the modernist avant-garde, I came to appreciate the crucial role of art-as-action in the history of a country with one of the highest literacy rates on the continent—a quality best exemplified by the late Václav Havel, then President of the Czech Republic. A dissident playwright turned politician, Havel maintained that “[the] attempt to devote oneself to literature alone is a most deceptive thing, and [...] often, paradoxically, it is literature that suffers for it.” Havel’s career demonstrates that even the codes of absurdist drama are not so absurd when they function as a basis for non-violent protest. While our own everyday struggles may not encompass anything as grand as the Velvet Revolution, the philosophy of uniting the life of letters with the “literariness” of life has implications for both scholarship and pedagogy. Indeed, while working in Prague, I began to see that the communicative approach to second-language acquisition could be adapted to what we might call “literature acquisition.” The current emphasis in ESL theory on *realia*—relevance and authenticity—has led me to reconsider the pragmatics of the humanities, not only in my scholarly investigations into “literary agents,” but also in my pedagogical emphasis on the agencies of literature in the modern world.

Regardless of whether I am teaching composition or literature, I encourage students to take to heart George Orwell’s dictum: “If you cannot write well, you cannot think well, and if you cannot think well, others will do your thinking for you.” As Orwell implies, literacy is a function of power and vice versa. Being an effective writer and thinker allows us to participate in the conversation that surrounds us, but it also provides us with a means of checking and interceding in local, national, and international affairs. At Tufts University, my approach to teaching expository writing focused on implementing the university’s commitment to active citizenship by asking students to apply creative nonfiction techniques to social and political problems. One assignment, for example, combined *National Geographic* photojournalism with a selection of travel and biographical essays, such as M. Scott Momaday’s “The Way to Rainy Mountain” and excerpts from Rebecca West’s *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, to explore the verbal and visual cues that constitute the “semiotics of place.” Adapting these skills to their own project, students drafted a dynamic proposal for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), advocating for the inclusion of their chosen location in the list of protected World Heritage Sites. Through peer-workshops and revisions, students learn that

the choices they make in writing, however subtle, affect their ability to communicate across cultural divides.

Of course, the best writers are the best readers. Like my research interests, which examine the ways in which the humanities both inform and intervene in ostensibly nonliterary discourses—topics, for example, like “law and literature”—my approach to teaching literature foregrounds the relationship between word and world, text and context. In my “Other Worlds” class, we began each semester by considering the role of mythology in modern society. Students are often resistant to the notion that what Joseph Campbell calls “the literature of the spirit” continues to exert an influence on their world. However, by drawing upon a diverse range of modern mythologies—such as James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Franz Kafka’s parables, and Gabriel García Márquez’s “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings”—students were able to gauge the politics of mythological and fantastic modes and their potential to shed light on contemporary concerns. For instance, in pairing García Márquez’s short story with his 1982 Nobel Lecture, we located the force of magical realism in its ability to offer alternative or “counterfactual” histories of modernity. Turning to the multimedia mythologies that inform their own generation, the students then theorized how fictional texts negotiate and critique the shifting borders of nationalism and globalism in the twenty-first century.

While I believe in having a flexible and ever-evolving teaching philosophy, my work in the introductory English program at Tufts, for which I was twice honored to be named Outstanding Teacher and Teacher Mentor, has persuaded me that the most effective classes are student-centered, combining mini-lectures with student presentations. In addition, having taught at institutions both big and small, I have grown to understand the value of diversifying student interaction through small and large-group discussions, online forums in which students read and respond to their classmates’ ideas, and collaborative activities aimed at encouraging a sense of intellectual community. Despite economic, cultural, and linguistic barriers, students begin to see that literature, at least, does not have to be another foreign language.

Teaching Competencies

I am prepared to teach courses in the following areas:

Courses in Academic Writing

Introductory, Intermediate, and Advanced levels of Expository Composition

Courses in Literature

19th, 20th, and 21st-Century British Literature and Culture

The Great War and Modern Literature

Transatlantic Modernism

Cold War Literature

Literary Theory

Survey of Literature in Western Civilization

Survey of English Literature

Law and Literature

Courses in Interdisciplinary Modernist Studies

The Culture of Intrigue: Modernism and the National Security State

Medical Modernism: The Clinical Gaze in Literature, Art, and Science

A Modern Bestiary: The Animal in Literature and Philosophy

Courses in English as a Second Language

Academic Writing for International Students

Communication Strategies for International Students

Teaching Experience

Alvernia University, Reading, PA

Fall 2014 to present

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Communication, and CIS

In addition to *First-Year Seminar* and *Composition and Research*, currently teaching two sections of *Contemporary Fiction and Drama*, a survey of plays, novels, and short stories from world literature of the last thirty years; readings include selections from Laura Esquivel, Salman Rushdie, Wole Soyinka, Marina Carr, Haruki Murakami, and Marjane Satrapi.

Lesley University, Cambridge, MA

Spring 2014

Adjunct Lecturer, Department of English

Taught one section of *English Literature II*, a survey of major British writers from the late 18th century to the present day; readings include representative works of Neoclassicism, Romanticism, Victorianism, Modernism, and Postmodernism.

Bentley University, Waltham, MA

Fall 2013

Adjunct Assistant Professor, Department of English and Media Studies

Taught one section of *Critical Thinking and Writing* with an emphasis on cultural studies; readings included works by W. H. Auden, E. E. Cummings, Langston Hughes, Barbara Ehrenreich, and Neil Postman.

Tufts University, Medford, MA

Fall 2008 to Spring 2012

Graduate Student Lecturer, Department of English

Taught four sections of *Expository Writing* and four sections of *Other Worlds*; assumed sole responsibility for creating lessons on argumentation using a number of literary and philosophical texts, including selections from Plato, Apuleius, Franz Kafka, Virginia Woolf, and Zora Neale Hurston, as well as films and contemporary journalistic essays.

Teaching Assistant, Department of English

Assisted in the instruction of *Horror Stories* (Professor Joseph Litvak), a study of 19th and 20th-century horror novels and films; co-taught a class on Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan*; graded student essays and final exams.

English as a Second Language Instructor, Academic Resource Center

Piloted a graduate-level course called *Communication Strategies for International Graduate Students*; designed and taught lessons focused on ESL, American culture, and practical pedagogy; prepared international students in a variety of disciplines to work as teachers, teaching assistants, and laboratory assistants.

Caledonian School, Prague, Czech Republic

Fall 2002 to Spring 2007

Senior Teacher for Observations

Responsible for observing and evaluating teachers at various levels of experience; provided constructive oral and written feedback; investigated student complaints and issues of teacher professionalism as needed; held regular office hours for ESL resource consultations.

English as a Second Language Instructor

Taught ESL to international students at all levels, both in-school and in-company; responsible for creating lessons on grammar, phonology, vocabulary, and syntax based on a communicative approach; assessed individual student progress; prepared students for the Cambridge English Exams (PET, FCE, CAE, CPE, BEC) and the TOEIC exam.

Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO

Fall 2000 to Spring 2002

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of English

Designed and taught five sections of *College Composition*, a course on expository writing and cultural studies; developed lessons based on a variety of literary and creative nonfiction texts, including selections from Katherine Mansfield, E. B. White, and Roland Barthes, in addition to music, film, and television.

Teaching Assistant, Department of History

Assisted in the instruction of *Britain in the 20th Century* (Professor Henry G. Weisser); responsible for participating in class discussions, tutoring students, and grading exams on both historical and literary texts, including novels by D. H. Lawrence and Kingsley Amis.

Efforts to Improve My Teaching

First-Year Writing Training Program

Fall 2008

Tufts University, Medford, MA

Completed a semester of biweekly workshops on various pedagogical topics, from creating assignments to evaluating student essays.

Teaching English as a Foreign Language Training Program

Fall 2002

Caledonian School, Prague, Czech Republic

Completed a comprehensive certification course based on the Cambridge CELTA program; developed pedagogical skills through observations, practice teaching sessions, and self-assessment; attended workshops on TEFL theory, communicative-based learning, and Cambridge Exam preparation.

Professional Internship in English (PIE)

Fall 2000 to Spring 2002

Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO

Participated in a two-year professional development program for graduate teaching assistants under the supervision of Dr. Stephen P. Reid, author of *The Prentice Hall Guide for College Writers*; completed twelve credit hours of coursework, including a semester of practice teaching and discussion of pedagogical strategies and techniques; attended regular workshops on contemporary theories of rhetoric and composition.

Sample Syllabi and Course Proposals

1. *Identity Crisis: A Survey of 20th-Century British Literature*

If, in the nineteenth century, “the sun never set on the British Empire,” the twentieth century witnessed an era of setting suns and new dawns of national consciousness. The intervention of two world wars, the rise of the welfare state, and the growth of immigration ensured that the social and aesthetic “composition” of British culture would radically transform in a relatively short space of time. Taking into consideration a wide range of novels, short stories, poems, and plays, this course examines the way twentieth-century British literature engages in a continual renegotiation of cultural identity in response to change. As we trace the “art of mutability” from modernist disenchantment to postmodern pluralism, we will focus on the manner in which British culture reads and critically restages its own (literary) history as it attempts to articulate a new conception of Britishness.

Students will complete two papers and a final exam. In addition, students will also receive an additional grade based on attendance and class participation.

Grading

Paper 1	25%
Paper 2	25%
Final Exam	30%
Participation	20%

13-Week Syllabus

Week 1, Introduction

Virginia Woolf, “Modern Fiction” and “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown”

Week 2, Trying to Connect

E. M. Forster, *Howards End*

Week 3, Identity Theft

Ford Madox Ford, *The Good Soldier*

Week 4, Forging a Conscience

James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

Week 5, Among the Ruins

W. B. Yeats, “The Second Coming,” “Sailing to Byzantium,” and “Byzantium”

T. S. Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” and *The Waste Land*

Week 6, Restaging the Past

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* and *Between the Acts*

Week 7, The End in the Beginning

Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*

Week 8, Poetry after Potsdam

Edwin Muir, "The Absent" and "One Foot in Eden"

Dylan Thomas, "Fern Hill" and "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night"

Edith Sitwell, "Three Poems of the Atomic Age"

Philip Larkin, "Church Going" and "Dockery and Son"

Ted Hughes, "Theology" and "Crow's First Lesson"

Denise Riley, "Dark Looks" and "Oleanna"

Week 9, Against Romanticism

Kingsley Amis, *Lucky Jim*

Week 10, The Hamlet Complex

Iris Murdoch, *The Black Prince*

Week 11, Undiscovered Countries

Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and *Arcadia*

Week 12, Voyaging In

Salman Rushdie, *East, West*

Week 13, Cosmopolitanism(s)

Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*

2. *The Culture of Intrigue: Modernism and the National Security State*

In *The Spy Story*, John Cawelti and Bruce Rosenberg characterize the modern era as the “Age of Clandestinity,” suggesting that the figure of the spy has, in effect, become the archetypal modern subject. In addition to living in an increasingly cosmopolitan world dominated by high-tech gadgets and sophisticated technologies of surveillance, we constantly find ourselves negotiating multiple identities, traversing the border between public and private spheres, and attempting to reconcile individuality with bureaucratic collectivity. Within this context, the spy story becomes more than a mere “entertainment.” While some narratives of espionage and intrigue reinforce nationalist ideologies and offer illusory fantasies of agency, others work to critique the very concepts of secrecy and security. Taking into consideration a variety of novels, memoirs, poems, and films, “The Culture of Intrigue” examines the way spying intervenes in culture and vice versa. More specifically, this course focuses on the manner in which the arts and humanities have simultaneously witnessed and participated in the machinations of the secret state from the early twentieth century to the present day. From the British secret service’s recruitment of writers in the First World War to the CIA’s manipulation of arts and letters during the Cold War *Kulturkampf*, “intelligence” has conspired with imagination, troubling the divide between fact and fiction, history and fantasy. By investigating these intersections of aesthetics and politics, we may better understand the modernist parallels and postmodern implications of twenty-first-century security issues, from the War on Terror to the emergence of WikiLeaks.

Assignments

Students will complete four assignments over the course of the semester: an in-class presentation on a primary text and three essays. In addition, students will also receive a participation grade based on attendance and the completion of five informal responses to readings and viewings (posted the day before class on our class website; students may choose to scatter these five responses as they see fit).

Class presentation:

On the first day of class, students will sign up to give presentations on the primary texts (one or two students per week). Presentations will take approximately fifteen minutes. Essentially, students will offer their “take” on the given text—for example, they may wish to historically contextualize the work based on additional research or offer a critical argument/interpretation—and then lead a whole-class discussion based on their prepared questions.

Papers 1 and 2:

The first two papers will be critical analyses (5-7 pages) based on one of several essay prompts that I will provide two weeks before the due date. For example, students will have the option in Paper 1 of addressing an additional film adaptation of one of our readings—such as Hitchcock’s film version of Buchan’s *The Thirty-Nine Steps* or Maugham’s *Ashenden*. Comparing and contrasting the book and film, students will construct an argument about the politics of adaptation itself. What significance should we attach to the filmmaker’s alterations? How do the technical properties of cinema (music, sound, lighting, etc.) both reinforce and undermine the novel’s themes?

Paper 3:

The final paper will be a research assignment (7-10 pages) in which students will argue that one of the texts from our class speaks to—or sheds light on—a current issue (WikiLeaks, the War on Terror, Globalism, etc.). The research component will focus on the contemporary issue or context. For example, how might Virginia Woolf’s conception of the secret “society of outsiders” help us to better understand an organization like Anonymous?

Grading

Class Presentation	10%
Paper 1	20%
Paper 2	25%
Paper 3	30%
Participation	15%

13-Week Syllabus

Week 1, Introduction: The Secret State

Week 2, The Heroic Tradition

Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans”
John Buchan, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*

Week 3, The Ironic Tradition

Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*
Sabotage (dir. Alfred Hitchcock)

Week 4, Spyographies

Winston Churchill, “My Spy Story” from *Thoughts and Adventures*
W. Somerset Maugham, *Ashenden; or, The British Agent*

Week 5, Les Femmes Fatales

Mata Hari (dir. George Fitzmaurice)
Virginia Woolf, “A Society,” “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” and excerpts from *Three Guineas*

Week 6, Spy Poetry

Christopher Isherwood, excerpts from *Lions and Shadows*
W. H. Auden, “Missing,” “The Secret Agent,” “The Questioner Who Sits So Sly,” “Half Way,”
“His Excellency,” and excerpts from *The Orators*
Cambridge Spies (dir. Tim Fywell; episodes 1 and 2 required; episodes 3 and 4 optional)

Week 7, A Case for the Traitor

Elizabeth Bowen, *The Heat of the Day*
Rebecca West, excerpts from *The Meaning of Treason*

Week 8, On Her Majesty’s Secret Service

Ian Fleming, *From Russia with Love*

Skip Willman, “The Kennedys, Fleming, and Cuba: Bond’s Foreign Policy” from *Ian Fleming and the Cultural Politics of 007*
From Russia with Love (dir. Terence Young)

Week 9, The Cold

John le Carré, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*
The Third Man (dir. Carol Reed)

Week 10, The Campus

Graham Greene, *The Quiet American*
The Good Shepherd (dir. Robert de Niro)

Week 11, Postcolonial Agencies

Salman Rushdie, “Chekov and Zulu” from *East, West*
Jamyang Norbu, *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*

Week 12, Delusions of Intrigue

Chuck Barris, “Prologue” from *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind: An Unauthorized Autobiography*
Michael Kackman, “The Agent and the Nation” from *Citizen Spy: Television, Espionage, and Cold War Culture*
Confessions of a Dangerous Mind (dir. George Clooney)

Week 13, Whistleblowers

Hans Ulrich Obrist and Julian Assange, “In Conversation with Julian Assange”
Excerpts from “Espionage Act and the Legal and Constitutional Issues Raised by WikiLeaks,”
Hearing before the House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary
Burn After Reading (dir. Joel Coen and Ethan Coen)

Excerpts from Student Course Evaluations

The following comments are taken from student course evaluations in the First-Year Writing program at Tufts University. Please note that complete sets of course evaluations are available upon request.

Organization and Syllabus

“I loved this course and it was my favorite that I have taken this semester. Mark Kaufman was a great instructor w/ clear and organized presentation of material.”

“Good course, really liked the subject and readings.”

“I really liked using both texts and movies.”

“All the assignments were fair and useful.”

Leading Discussions

“Good at encouraging class discussions. Has interesting ideas.”

“He is enthusiastic and always encourages the class to stay engaged in the material.”

“No pressure, excellent interaction, great feedback.”

Feedback on Written Assignments

“His comments on my papers were the most helpful that I have ever gotten.”

“Thank you for the extensive comments on the papers. They were insightful [and] they challenged me to become more critical of my own writing.”

“He made great comments on my papers and he is always available outside of class.”

Accessibility

“I thought that Professor Kaufman did an excellent job making himself available outside of class time for students who could not make it to office hours. I thought that my writing improved a lot because of his help.”

“I appreciate your prompt responses to my numerous emails!”

Miscellaneous

“[...] I really enjoyed this course and learned more than I have in previous English classes. Mark was a great teacher.”

“I truly looked forward to each class meeting.”

“I would take another English class with him.”

“[The] professor is a great teacher and I’ll be back next semester.”

“The class has given me thoughts of possibly majoring in the subject.”

“Mark is a great professor!”