



## 8 December 2004 Mellon Fellows Salon NOTES

Dear Mellon Library Partners,

You may or may not be aware that last year, the Mellon Steering Committee organized a series of monthly lunches for the Fellows as a way of supporting connections within the first cohort and providing a venue where fellows could exchange information about their courses and discuss both successful strategies and challenges in introducing library research into their undergraduate courses.

This year, we have set upon a different approach, namely that of semiannual "Salons" for the Fellows, held late in the day at the Morrison Library, and focussing on topics identified as "of interest" to the Fellows. Last Wednesday, sixteen Mellon Fellows met in the Morrison along with Principal Investigators Tom Leonard and Christina Maslach, members of the Steering Committee, and Institute facilitators. The Salon was planned and facilitated by Mellon Fellows Andy Furco (Education) and Michelle Douskey (Chemistry).

We thought you might like to hear what was discussed during this inaugural event whose focus was on peer-to-peer exchange. You will be gratified to know that many of you were singled out praised for your contributions to the work of you Fellow partners. Bravo!

The topic of this first Salon was RESEARCH ASSIGNMENTS.

ISSUES identified by the Fellows included:

- Setting limits on "overachievers;" helping students to achieve the right balance between research and other coursework
- Determining what is the right amount of background and guidance to give undergraduates undertaking library research; how much is too much? Does a "sink or swim" approach support or discourage independent student research?
  - Differences in approach between professors and GSIs with respect to providing guidance
- How to handle non-majors and majors in the same class; within the same research assignment
- Do students understand what the research process is all about? Do they understand why we are asking them to do it? Do they recognize the relevance and importance of independent research? Do we need to be more explicit about this when assigning research?
- Difficulties in predicting the level of research skills that students bring to the class
- Where in the curriculum is research best focussed? Lower Division? First course in the major? Capstone experience?
- How do you create a research assignment that everyone can tackle and/or be challenged by when the level of students in the course varies so significantly?
- Non-native speakers and information literacy competencies – do they have the language skills to tackle some of the higher order skills?

- Many students have poor time management skills and this speaks to the need to sequence the research project over a period of weeks, not tackle it as a single end of the semester product.
- Is there a difference between "the research project" (one meta-product) and "research based learning" (many smaller, discrete research components) Is there a place for both of these approaches?
- How do you build in collaboration in the research process?
- Striking the right balance between the course reader, readings and the research project

#### SHARING OF EXPERIENCES among the Fellows

- As a way of motivating students to explore research, one Fellow underscores for her students that research is "multi-vocal," that everyone has a say in constructing knowledge, including them. She emphasizes that the better the research completed by the students, the more powerful the expression of knowledge can be ("ten voices speaking as one")
- Another fellow challenges her students to "illuminate," i.e., to show the class something about the topic that perhaps no one else has seen before.
- One of the social science fellows invites his students to explore alternative research paradigms. If their most natural research approach is ethnographic or qualitative, they are encouraged to try a data or statistical research approach and vice versa. By providing flexibility in research approaches, he encourages them to maintain an open mind and to think differently.
- Another fellow described a research framework developed for her students:
  - ESTABLISH – Figure out what is known about the topic
  - INQUIRE – Identify what is not yet known about it
  - INVESTIGATE – Determine what sources you would rely on to find out more
  - ANALYZE – Try to identify themes to the research. What did the material you uncovered say? How did you make sense of it?
  - SYNTHESIZE – Pulling it all together in a logical way
  - SUBSTANTIATE – Prove your hypothesis by pointing to evidence

#### SUCCESS STORIES

- One fellow learned the importance of the topic of research being meaningful itself to the students themselves and the advisability of having students stake out their research claims, rather than assigning them research topics.
- In a lower division language class, one fellow had her students tape native speakers, and transcribe what they heard, rather than doing a more traditional textual analysis. This allowed students to uncover the differences between the spoken language and the written language and brought the study of language alive for them.
- Another fellow has organized her 1,200 students in such a way that they will be giving group poster sessions
- Another fellow is having his students publish their research on the web including the option of presenting "live" on the web via streaming video. The "Student STARS" have been enthusiastic about being able to publish their work to the web.

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