

End-of-Course Reflections

Course: FWS 1101.102 – *Orbis Terrarum: The Medieval Earth was a Globe*

Semester: Spring, 2018

Institution: Cornell University

Overall Impressions / Takeaways

- This class felt less engaged in the materials than previous groups have; I would say that, as a group, they seemed more like the stereotypical 2nd semester FWS students than I have generally had before
 - There were some very interested and engaged students, but also a higher-than-normal number of absences, generally less wide-spread class participation, and more points in the semester where it became clear that lessons or discussions had not made an impression
- This class, like most, enjoyed the maps
- I had a difficult time fitting in everything that I wanted; I am unsatisfied with some of the balance of instruction this semester
 - Partly because we missed several days for weather-related cancelations, the syllabus got somewhat thrown off and we never quite caught up
 - I did not spend as much time as I would have preferred on some of elements of writing
- I used data from this class for a TAR study on “to be” use, which has proved useful – both for better understanding my student’s use of the verb, and for thinking about new ways to approach the topic in the future

Things That Went Well

- I continued to require Zotero, which worked well. Having students use it for citation management means that class discussion can center on the reasons for citation, rather than on specific elements of a given style
- In general, the class made noticeable improvements in their use of evidence to support their claims
- Using Russel’s text to close the semester was a useful way of bringing all of the elements of the semester to a fine point.
- I continue to find the 4th essay structure (review a classmate’s 3rd essay) to be a fruitful one.

Things That Need Improvement

- To work in the Russel reading I compressed Mandeville, and that did not work well. It was clear that most students were not able to read the text closely.
- There is an opportunity with Russel’s book to talk explicitly about the creation of historical narratives, but I couldn’t quite get the class to that point. They got there with maps, but they needed more scaffolding throughout the semester to come to the same type of conclusions about history writing.
- Too many of the final research essays were simple reiterations of classwork. I needed to spend more time with this class on teaching how to find a good research question, and how to follow up on it.

Problems

- I had a student who was badly disinterested, and with whom I never managed to connect. I'm not sure what I should have done differently, but they did not get as much out of the class as they might have.

Thoughts on Specific Lessons

- The lesson on the Piri Reis map went somewhat awry, as the class took seriously Charles Hapgood's argument about the map showing secret knowledge of Antarctica. In previous classes this has been a useful moment when they can see that their own background has prepared them to understand when some else's argument has gone off the rails. Here, though, they largely took Hapgood's claims at face value.
- Michael Camille's article was as unpopular as always, but it is very useful as a space for really digging into secondary source arguments and showing how to think critically about their claims. The class got a lot out of the discussion, even if they disliked the reading itself.