

End-of-Course Reflections

Course: FWS 1104.101 – *One Foot in Front of the Other: A Walking History of Walking*

Semester: Fall, 2018

Institution: Cornell University

Overall Impressions / Takeaways

- The walking sections of the course worked well, and encouraged discussion. Anecdotally, walking days saw more engagement; almost everyone took part in discussions – perhaps because walking made it more of a conversation?
- Walking classes had some organizational surprises that I didn't anticipate:
 - Full-group discussions tended to happen in very small spaces because of the problems of being heard in the gym
 - Pacing was different; walking classes can cover less material than traditional ones
 - 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
- I had wanted to walk outside more, but there were some logistical issues:
 - It was necessary to start the semester on the track in order to better control discussions and acclimate students to the process, and by the time I was comfortable trust the class in less controlled environments the weather had turned cold and wet
 - Planning outdoor classes ahead of time was made difficult by variable weather
 - What will students do with their packs/belongings/food if we're walking outside?
 - This is compounded if you can't plan because of the weather
- Asking students to fill out surveys after every class was informative, but because it was online I averaged about only 3/4 of students bothering, even when I allowed sufficient time.

Things That Went Well

- I was able to successfully connect course materials and discussion to student's lives, making real differences in how they saw the world
- The walking journals were useful, and the final essay assignment asking students to assess their journals through course readings was very successful
- Congressman John Lewis's *March* was a high point in the semester
- Solnit's book was a good primary course text
- De Certeau's essays were hard for students to grasp, but wound up really informing how they thought about materials for the rest of the term.
- In the main, the course assignments succeeded in connecting readings and discussions to the students' external lives.

Things That Need Improvement

- More small-group work in traditional classes, perhaps with less reporting back, would be good. There was a notable difference between

- The 3rd essay wasn't as successful as I'd like; students struggled to understand the prompt and the writing was correspondingly uninspired. It did not connect the course materials to students' lived experiences, which was the point.
- I'd like to try to find a way to speed up walking discussions; I tried walking jigsaws but that didn't work especially well.
- I don't need to ask students to buy the joy of walking book. I can make copies of the couple essays I want to keep on the syllabus.

Problems

- No real problems this semester.

Thoughts on Specific Lessons

- The gallery walk activity using big post-its during walking classes was a good way to work through confusing texts like De Certeau.
- Multiple students noted that they really enjoyed the class where I asked them, in groups, to draft a campus map. This activity needed more time, though
- Treating Dickens's essay by breaking students into groups with assigned sections of the text and asking them to account for all the people Dickens talks worked surprisingly well. It encouraged them to really think about their section. Having the specific purpose was valuable.