

Statement of Teaching and Service
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I. Teaching

At the center of my teaching, as at the center of my research, is the belief that the liberal arts are interdisciplinary by nature. By studying how writers and scientists collaborate in reimagining the world, I demonstrate the power of imaginative literature to reflect upon and even change its society. In examining the formal protocols and historical contexts of literary works, my students learn to expand their understanding of what “literature” designates, whether analyzing the metrical forms of lyric poetry, or investigating the rich literary influences of scientific, political, and religious writings. In both large lecture-format courses and smaller seminars, I emphasize the intellectual and imaginative engagements that drive the act of writing and provide access to the continued relevance of nineteenth century works of fiction, poetry, and prose for modern society and its technologies. I believe this is one reason why my courses have consistently received high marks in student evaluations. My experience teaching at both public and private universities has been a tremendous asset in learning how to negotiate classrooms comprised by students with diverse backgrounds and writing skills and varying levels of K-12 preparation. For these reasons, my pedagogy focuses on using digital technology to foster a collaborative and engaging environment; places emphasis upon historical specificity and the value of drawing connections between previous historical periods and our own; and underlines the value of drawing interdisciplinary connections between various natural scientific, environmental, and technological modes of inquiry and the objects of our critical study.

In spring 2015 I taught my first graduate seminar at USC, a survey of “Science and Literature,” which has become an important subfield of literary studies. In exploring the history of science and literature as a subfield of literary studies, we evaluated the disciplinary and institutional logic that conjoins science and the humanities within the liberal arts curriculum. It is my firm belief, both through my own work and through my participation in a range of interdisciplinary workgroups, that cross-disciplinary research works best when we are grounded firmly in one discipline but can take up another with a fresh eye. To that end, the course emphasized collaboration between pairs of students with distinct interests, and I actively recruited seminar members from a range of related fields, including history, art history, and comparative literature. In addition, I arranged for outside visitors and a visit to the collections at the Huntington Library in order to broaden the basis for our conversation. This fall, I will teach a new graduate seminar, titled “Theory at the End of the World,” that will consider the widespread turn toward planetarity and environmental humanism that has characterized scholarship in the last several years. Amy J. Elias and Christian Moraru, in their recent account of the new “planetary turn” in ecocritical and postcolonial writing, argue that “planetarity” is fast becoming the fundamental condition of aesthetic production, because, “for the first time in human history, one single commonality involves all those living on the planet: environmental deterioration as the result of the human consumption of natural resources.” In confronting the implications of climate change at the dawn of the Anthropocene, a range of writers have called for new ways to think collectively and interactively about our place in the world, which means grappling with the complex integration of that world as a dynamic system we share with the other species, things, and forces. To articulate this collective, these writers build (sometimes unreflectively) on ecology’s organicist



formulations, a way of theorizing the "ecosystem" which is derived from Romantic organicism. Drawing on my own published work on Darwin as an ecologist, and a forthcoming special issue on "Open Ecologies" which I am editing for the journal *Victorian Literature and Culture*, our seminar will explore the longer history of thinking about biological and social collectivity, in light of current work by writers like Donna Haraway, Andreas Malm, and Jason Moore, in order to ask: what other forms of collectivity are available today? And which forms of *anticollective*, *unintegrating*, and *inorganic* organization were excluded by organic thinking?

I often use multimedia and web technologies in my teaching, both in and outside the classroom; while not a panacea, technologies such as course blogs, visualizations, and podcasts help me engage my students and channel their imagination. In my popular seminar on Victorian Radicalism, for instance, I combine online Facebook readings with video responses. This digital environment helps students test the innovations of nineteenth-century literature by connecting them to contemporary works. In comparing genres and works my students gain a sharper sense of how literary form operates. In my undergraduate Arts & Letters course on "Shocking Knowledge," a class for which I received a General Education Teaching Award in 2013, we explore both Gothic and Science fiction as a response to Enlightenment theories of knowledge and uncertainty. As we read works by Ann Radcliffe, Philip K. Dick and Ursula K. LeGuin, among others, we test the importance of uncertainty in registering the relation between the past and future, exploring, as an example, how an eighteenth-century Gothic novel like Anne Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) helped shaped the generic, psychological, and sexual protocols explored in films like Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979). By addressing a range of genres and time periods, such courses invite students to connect the objects of their personal investment with the wider Anglophone world.

At USC, I have consistently found that the tools of digital humanism, from web blogs to multimedia projects, aid students in this process of discovery, by both tapping into their broad immersion in modern media culture, and by confronting students with new challenges and perspectives. Integral multimedia video projects encourage students to explore how the intellectual models of the curriculum can help to answer basic questions. This helps to leverage the uneven technical literacy of the students and to encourage collaborations across media outside of the classroom. I've been leading workshops for the students that walk them through the basic elements of visual and aural composition, how to think about material for editing in the process of shooting, and how to produce and publish the video using Vimeo and YouTube. At the same time, it has been crucial to make room for students to draw upon their own skills and backgrounds, and the resulting diversity and engagement of their work has made the projects a successful and extraordinarily popular component of the program. Moreover, I have found that digital tools provide consistent opportunities for students to collaborate and engage each other. By their very nature, the multimedia tools, in combination with social media and web publishing, draw upon broad range of skills, and this serves to maximize the opportunities for students to contribute to group work.

My focus on collaborative work first emerged in my experience teaching writing seminars, which proved the value of active learning. Composition flourishes best when reading and thinking are practiced in a collaborative environment, where students can bounce ideas and interpretations off of each other – an environment which carries over into the digital community of blogs and discussion boards. It is a perspective also rooted in my scientific experience as an undergraduate researcher, and later, as an analyst, experiences in which ninety percent of what I learned was absorbed working alongside graduate students and other researchers. This perspective grounded previous work in helping to design the new Integrated Studies curriculum for Ben Franklin Scholars at the University of Pennsylvania. We asked students to

synthesize knowledge from across the humanities, social and natural sciences, and encouraged students to think creatively and spontaneously about the interdisciplinary foundation of study in the liberal arts. Through a mixture of multimedia projects and focused writing assignments, we provided students a range of intellectual tools as they puzzled out “how it all fits together.” The best learning is goal-oriented, whether that goal is simply to explain our visceral reading experience, or to clarify the complex nature of what we have come to understand. My teaching works to bring experience and explanation together: to stimulate student reactions (the need to *say* something), and to give structure, precision, and depth to what is said.

II. Service

In my first six years at USC, I have served on half a dozen administrative committees in the department and have served on numerous dissertation and exam committees. I have directed two undergraduate honors theses, have mentored dozens of students, and have recently agreed to chair my first dissertation committee. I have also been extensively involved in various professional organizations outside of USC, and have helped to organize an annual meeting of North Atlantic Victorian Studies (in Fall, 2013) and VCologies (Fall 2017). I was also recently asked to help organize and host the 2021 meeting of Interdisciplinary Nineteenth-Century Studies. I am also coordinating my department's nineteenth-century reading group, which will host its first visiting speaker on May 4, and for the last several years have been a co-organizer of the Race and Empire faculty working group, along with colleagues in Comparative Literature (CSLC) and the Department of French and Italian. I have also been extensively involved with the Joint Education Project, both through having my undergraduate Engl 262 and 425 classes participate in its co-teaching and mentoring program, and through my direct involvement lecturing to and mentoring senior English students at Foshay Learning Center in South Central Los Angeles through USC's Neighborhood Academic Initiative (NAI). The success of the English curriculum at NAI, recently featured in both the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times*, helped me to secure new funding to expand a collaboration with the Dickens Universe summer conference at UC-Santa Cruz, so that we can bring former NAI students who are now undergraduate students at USC, along with current NAI seniors and graduate students. I am, frankly, excited about the possibilities of this opportunity to further develop this collaborative program of advanced literary study and mentoring that extends across high school, undergraduate, and graduate education. Finally, and in collaboration with colleagues across USC's Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, I am working to establish a graduate certificate in digital textual analysis to complement the successful certificate in Digital Media and Culture offered by the School of Cinematic Arts.