

Guidelines for Special Problems Courses That Are Literature Reviews

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Preparing the Syllabus

Before the semester starts, the student designs a syllabus (i.e. reading list) that spells out each week's readings. It should include full citations for each week's readings, and indicate the flow of topics.

- The syllabus should include about 40 readings. A "reading" is defined as a scholarly article or book chapter. The number 40 is based on my approach to literature-oriented graduate courses, where I usually assign about three readings a week, but none in the final week.
- The syllabus should be organized into a series of topics that relate to the thesis research. For example, student Heather Roth conducted her thesis on educational tools for teaching Native American students at the college level. Her client was a startup that wanted to develop a website offering such tools to professors. Heather organized her lit review into the following topics:
 - Ethics and the History of Indigenous Education in the US
 - Native Students and Higher Education
 - Decolonizing Education through Cultural Responsiveness
 - Online Resources and Educators
 - Native Students and Online Learning
 - Creating Websites Based on User Experience
 - Generating a Community of Practice for Educators of Native Students
- The student prepares the syllabus with feedback from me. We collaboratively discuss topics for the syllabus, and I can often suggest possible readings. But the student is responsible for doing the background research to identify the relevant readings in the field.
- The syllabus should be completed before the course begins.
- The syllabus may go through minor modifications during the semester, for instance if the student discovers an exciting new book that was not on the original syllabus. But it should not go through major revisions once the semester starts. This means that it should be well designed to begin with – the student should have conducted sufficient background research to identify the key readings in the field *before* the syllabus was put together.

The Flow of the Course

1. Each week during the special problems course, the student writes an annotated bibliography entry for each of the items they read for that week. The student emails me the entries once a week on a day that we agree upon.
2. Once every two weeks during the special problems course, I meet with the student to talk about the readings. It is best if we can come up with a regular time and day to meet. At the meeting, the student shares their ideas about the readings, reflects on relationships between readings, and so forth.
 - For on-campus students, I prefer face-to-face meetings
 - For online students, we can have phone/Skype calls

3. At the end of the semester, the student writes an essay (5-10 pages; more is OK) that critically reflects on the texts they have read for the course, and identifies themes and patterns across the readings. They should also relate the readings to their thesis. The essay should cite all or nearly all of the readings. This essay can form the basis for the literature review chapter of the student's thesis.
4. The final deliverable is a very long report that brings together, in this order:
 - The essay
 - All of the literature reviews written over the course of the class, sorted alphabetically by author's last name. Format the entries according to the Chicago Manual of Style, Author-Date System.

This report will be a useful reference source when the student writes their thesis.

How to Write an Annotated Bibliography Entry

Each entry of the annotated bibliography should start with full citation information for that reading, formatted according to the Chicago Manual of Style, Author-Date System. Use single spacing for the citation.

The citation is followed by a review of the reading, double-spaced. The review can range from a paragraph to two pages. It should provide two kinds of information:

- A summary of the reading
- How the reading relates to the student's thesis research

Below is a sample entry from Heather Roth's annotated bibliography.

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Brayboy, Brian McKinley Jones. 2014. "Culture, Place, and Power: Engaging the Histories and Possibilities of American Indian Education." *History of Education Quarterly* 54(3):395-402.

In his opening statement for a special issue of *History of Education Quarterly*, Brayboy discusses the tensions surrounding the education of Native students in the United States and how indigenous ideas of education conflict with those of the Western variety. In particular Brayboy introduces two thoughts, "education is both simple and complex" and "learning is ubiquitous." The first thought considers how "education in its many forms is imbued with power." The fight for this power includes the creation and dissemination of knowledge. It also reveals the beginnings of this "battle" which are rooted in differing ideologies of what education is and how it should occur. Brayboy shares the following statement about education by the Inupiat scholar, Leona Okakok, "educating a child means equipping him or her with the capability to succeed in the world he or she will live in." Brayboy points out that education is not just

preparation to be a successful adult, but also a vehicle to instill values in children who will one day function as autonomous members of society. Unfortunately the values as upheld by White America have “manifested themselves in brutal ways” through its education of Native students. Indigenous ways of knowing and what makes a tribal member a successful part of society were all lost to these students who were forced to move away from their homes, learn English, and forget their own traditions. Brayboy also points out that a misunderstanding about how individuals “engage and are engaged by society” has led to “a narrowing of education” for all students.

Brayboy’s second point, that “learning is ubiquitous,” asserts that the act of learning is not confined to a classroom or traditional Western conceptualizations of what learning is. For instance, Native students may see elders, children, or their peers as teachers. “Learning for many Indigenous peoples is directly tied to the day-to-day engagement of their lives.” He further elaborates that the Western idea of wisdom greatly differs from that of the Apache who believe wisdom is the ability to keep a clear head, be resilient, and maintain “steadiness” so as not to allow anger to overwhelm you. These qualities to a successful education, of what is wisdom, are all aimed at survival. Such pedagogical paradigms differ greatly from what we experience in Western schools.

In my research it has been pointed out that what I am doing can have differing meanings depending on the perspectives of various groups. More interestingly, the value I derive from my work, and what my client derives from my work, may be very different from that of my participants and others whom my work will affect. The value of my work, much like education for Native students, can be contested and the subject of various tensions. My work is also situated within a very Western paradigm because of my own situatedness. I have learned from a Western perspective and I am conducting my research from a mostly Western lens. This awareness is a first step to actively defying colonialist tendencies and ensuring that I engage in research in a way that is both respectful and valued by the communities with which I will engage.

One solution to these issues is how I frame my findings and recommendations. In the process of identifying major themes I can focus on what the community of educators of Native students needs to survive. What will make them most successful through a web-based platform? What values should be instilled in this community for their students to thrive? My study is bridging an exploratory investigation into user experiences of what currently exists and how those experiences can be enhanced and catered to through a particular website. Therefore these overarching questions can help guide my analysis process once major themes become available.