

Ross' Rave: Mary, Mary, quite contrary

Ross LaBaugh, California State University, Fresno

"You see, Younger Bear had become a contrary,.....the most dangerous of all Cheyenne warriors..... He says "goodbye" for "hello", "yes" for "no",.....walks through bushes instead of on trails,.....and washes with dirt and dries with water." Little Big Man

Yesterday I taught 5 Business Communications classes. Junior and Seniors. Required, upper division writing classes for the College of Business. By the end of the night my lips were swollen and rubbery. I sounded like Elmer Fudd and was probably making as much sense.

The students' prompt was to write a five page, S.W.O.T. analysis (strength, weakness, opportunity, threat) on a publicly traded, U.S. company. Their instructor randomly handed out slips of paper, each with the name of a company, and fled the scene.

I did the usual library Lindy Hop. Swinging through databases, singing the academic jive. They sat, dutifully slouching at the computer screens, until I said, "Ok, I'm going to give you control of the computers and let you do some searching. I'll walk around and help."

They reanimated and the room filled with the syncopated sounds of twenty keyboard castanets.

The first student I helped had been assigned Disney.

"The big, evil mouse," I said with a grin, "This will be an easy one to do."

She looked at me like I was crazy!

"Disney is a huge multinational company. They have been criticized for their practice of paying laborers from developing nations pennies an

hour to produce goods which sell in the U.S. at tremendously inflated prices."

"I can't find anything," she said flatly.

"You mistyped 'Disney'," I said.

"I heard on the news last week that Michael Eisner, the CEO of Disney, got paid \$8,250,000 last year in salary and bonuses. If she worked 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, it would take a young girl working in one of his Haitian factories over 22,000 years to earn that!"

"I still can't find anything," she insisted.

"You need an 'e' before the 'y'," I said. "The computer is very unforgiving."

"Can I do a different one? I can't find anything on Disney."

"Keep trying. I'm sure you'll find something." I moved on.

Next to her was a student looking up Monsanto.

"Oh, Monsanto! They're huge, too!"

"I heard of them," she said. "Don't they sell t-shirts?"

"Sort of. They make the seeds, that grow the cotton, that's spun into thread, that's woven into cloth, that is sewn into t-shirts."

[I was harmonizing with Burl Ives.]

"I found an article which says that Monsanto gave \$250,000 to earthquake victims in India. That's a strength, right?" She seemed excited about this.

“It seems like a lot of money and a good cause,” I said, “but you need to keep your perspective before you decide if Monsanto’s contribution is a strength. A quarter of a million dollars is about .004% of their net sales last year. And, Monsanto has a huge stake in the cotton industry in India. You might want to ask yourself why they would do this.”

“But it’s like, y’ know, a strength, ‘cause we gotta find a strength and, like, a weakness, right? And what’s the other one?”

“Two others: opportunity, and threat.”

“Yeah that’s it. So I’m goin call this a strength and now I need a threat. Would that be like another earthquake?”

“What’s your major?” I asked her.

“Marketing,” she said.

“Ah.”

The third student had Halliburton. I had hit the trifecta!

“What do they do?” he asked.

I was stunned. How could anyone in a business class, in college, in the U.S. or on the planet not know the name Halliburton?

With a swift click I locked down all the computers. There was a collective moan and the distinct sound of someone in the back of the room banging a mouse on the desk.

“I have control of the computers,” I said. “You can stop playing Whack-A-Mole back there.”

“You all seem to be doing well, so far. Has anyone had difficulty finding his or her company?”

“I couldn’t find Disney,”

“e – y” I reminded her.

“Before we get started again, can I ask how many people here have ever heard of a company called Halliburton?”

One hand went up and it was from the guy who had it on his slip!

“No, seriously, how many people here have heard of Halliburton?” I pleaded.

“What do they make?” Mr. Whack-A-Mole asked.

How do I answer that? They MAKE billions of dollars off the backs of the poor and dispossessed. They MAKE a mockery of U.S. and international law. They MAKE rich people richer. They MAKE me sick!

Quietly and with restraint, I said, “Halliburton is a construction company.”

“Can you give us back the computers? I still have to find a threat.”

When I got back to my office I sat. Still and spent. Where had I gone wrong? For thirty years I’d been fighting the good fight. Read, study, pay attention, think, criticize, question, research, don’t assume, argue, doubt, think, challenge, probe, do! I confess. My politics are as subtle as a shiny red raincoat, but while I can be extremely opinionated on many issues, I know better than to use the classroom as a bully pulpit.

Besides, what chance would an aging, slightly flabby librarian at a second rate university have against the likes of Fox, Clear Channel and Disney?

Still, I feel professionally obligated and morally bound to use every opportunity and

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partnerships with faculty—all faculty—translates into stepping out beyond the library. We will serve on the teaching, learning, and assessment teams at our institutions. Our roles will blur to serve positions inside and outside the library. We will support teaching in the classroom with online tutorials and other 24/7 “just in time” instruction tools. We will be innovators on campus—using the course delivery software such as Blackboard to not only teach but to assess student learning. The train the teacher model is highly effective, but only when librarians become the “go-to” people on campus. We need to be the leaders and cut the edge in teaching and learning. In this environment, information literacy will be an institutional goal like writing, critical thinking, communication, and civic engagement. All students will have to demonstrate competency, and what librarians strive to achieve in information fluency and lifelong learning for students will be a mutual goal for all.

Step-by-step Teaching

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As a way to tie this all together, we posted a PowerPoint slide that asked for personal reflection. We asked them to think about which teaching methods did they choose most? Were they active learning, cooperative learning, discovery, lecture, problem-based, reflective, or student centered? And then in light of that, which teaching methods did they best respond to? To help with that, we asked them to recall the best teacher they had or the best learning experience they had. We wanted people to think about individual learning styles and individual teaching styles.

The workshop was a definite success. The attendees came away with many ideas of how to modify their personal teaching styles to incorporate different tasks and activities to achieve their learning outcomes.

—Look for part 3 of this series articles from George Washington University in volume 32(4).

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every means I have to shake up the flock. That's why I took this gig.

If I may cite from the Good Book, (ACRL's Information Literacy Competency Standards) (Standard 5: Verse 3)

The information literate student determines whether the new knowledge has an impact on the individual's value system and takes steps to reconcile the difference.

The next morning, hoping to start the day with a sunnier attitude, I opened my email messages. Some were offering to lower my mortgage, others to raise my you-know-what! Scattered among them were a half dozen questions

from students. Mostly, they read like this:

“im very sorry to bother you but i would like to see if can help me find some information about immigration, why are they immigrating and since when. I would appreciate your help.”

One by one I responded gracefully to them all. Just before I left my office for another rounds of classes, another email arrived.

“Hi... I was in that class yesterday. I'm the guy doing Wackenhut. I saw this article that said that they got this huge contract to guard nuclear power plants, but this other thing i read said that the goverment says that they don't do a good job. So what's up with that? That would be a “threat” right?”

“You bet,” I replied. :)