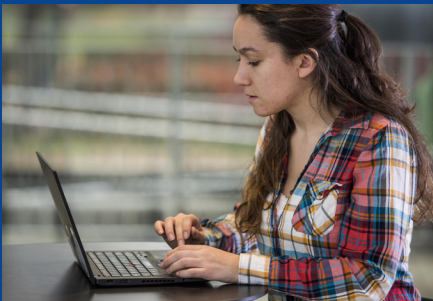


Faculty AHA! Moments



Spring 2020



Seton Hall University

Compiled by the Center for Faculty Development with Assistance from
the Office of the Provost

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Faculty AHA! MOMENTS FROM SPRING 2020 TEACHING

The sudden turn to virtual teaching in the middle of the spring 2020 semester—while it was sudden and even a bit scary—also had some unexpectedly positive results. When asked to reflect on the affirming things that took place—an idea first conceived in the Great Minds Forward Committee—Seton Hall University faculty responded with their usual enthusiasm and aplomb.

The anecdotes contained in this document, from faculty across the university—full and part-time, teaching everything from university Core classes to graduate classes—are filled with realizations, inspirations, and discoveries. Most of those who responded said they would carry the new strategy/approach/method into their teaching moving forward, whether face-to-face or online. They reveal new approaches to existing materials and tools, adaptations in the face of dramatic course change, and an intense desire to continue to engage with students in ways large and small.

The anecdotes have been grouped into the following categories:

- Assessment Strategies
- Pre- and Post-Class Activities
- Approaches to Group Work
- Strategies for Encouraging Discussion
- Enhancing Student Engagement
- Adapting Tools/Materials/Approaches

The contributors have all agreed to provide additional information upon request. Many of the contributors will also be presenting at two Center for Faculty Development events—June 8, 9am-10am, and June 15, 3pm-4pm—where they will elaborate on what they have written about and answer questions. These recorded events will be posted on the CFD website.

Mary Balkun
Director of Faculty Development

ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

Paige Fisher, Psychology

I gave several “in-class” exams after we moved to virtual. For each of these, I asked the students to start in Teams to go over any procedures and answer any last minute questions. I then told students I would stay in the Team via audio in case anyone had questions and that I would keep my eye on the chat as well. I asked the students to keep their chat open as well, in case I needed to communicate with them during the exam. This seemed to work well, as students did use both the chat and the audio when they had questions. If we continue with virtual in future, I would certainly continue doing this.

Roseanne Mirabella, Political Science and Public Affairs

Dr. King Mott and I were teaching the fourth Honors colloquium this semester and I was also teaching an online class in our graduate program. We had organized the Honors class as a discussion seminar and our transition to the remote classroom was terrific. The students were engaged and grateful for the opportunity to have conversations in the virtual environment. In contrast, I noticed early in the transition to remote

teaching that the students in my graduate class were far more stressed out and anxious than the undergraduates. I quickly came to realize that the balancing act of work, school and remote teaching their young children was bringing some of them to the breaking point. As this was an eight-week course with lots of tight time frames for assignments, many soon became overwhelmed. Many of the students began to wonder if they would be able to complete the course, talking about either dropping it or taking an incomplete. As we drew nearer to the end of the semester, I decided to eliminate one of the assignments for the class as a way to reduce their stress and asked them to vote on which one they preferred: Case Study Critique or the Final Exam. When the vote was evenly split across both assignments, I decided to give students the option of choosing either one to complete. This worked out quite well. In fact, of the 13 students in the class, only two had to take an Incomplete as they just could not get their work done. A simple revision making all the difference to most of the students who were able to successfully complete the course.

Gabriella Romani, Languages, Literatures, and Cultures

As an added assignment (which came out of our discussions) to my CORE 3540: Meeting the Other, Engaging the World, I asked students towards the end of the semester to prepare a two-minute video in which they recorded their perspective on the notion of multiple perspectives. I will definitely introduce this assignment in future offerings of this course. Here is the description of the assignment.

“Elaborate on the idea of multiculturalism and diversity in the context of our course focus: Encountering the ‘Other.’ How do the writers we have read so far present the idea of diversity, multiple identity and multiple perspectives? Have any of these readings made you think differently about these issues? If so how? Be specific and make connections, as much as possible, with any of the readings we have done in class. Before recording think about it, jot down some ideas, elaborate a brief statement/thought and then record yourself. It can be done as a video or as audio file.”

Peter Savastano, Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work/Religion

My pedagogy is rooted in contemplative practices, two of which are loving kindness and compassion. Realizing how stressed, anxious, scared, depressed, distracted (in short traumatized) my students were for the second half of the semester, I knew that the traditional 100 multiple choice, fill in the blanks, true and false questions final exam I usually give was not going to work this time around. I also knew that many of my students were suffering from food insecurity, job loss, and possibly being back at home in situations that are abusive or, at the least, less than ideal. I also knew, because some of them told me, that students unexpectedly found themselves at home where their parents had lost jobs, or were working from home, where they had younger siblings my students were suddenly responsible for helping to educate because their parents were working remotely. Taking all of these things into consideration, and being encouraged by the administration to be as flexible and understanding as possible (this was communicated in many meetings, though usually implicitly rather than explicitly), I devised a final paper/final exam combo that took all of the above into consideration.

As a follow up, I began reading the final paper/exam combo assignment yesterday. I am so happy I came up with the assignment. All of my suspicions and concerns about our students was not an exaggeration on my part. The papers were so deep and so revealing of the reality of our student’s lives at present. I am even more surprised at how much they tell me they learned from the course and their ability to back it up with evidence. Perhaps they just figured out how to give me what I asked for so they would get a decent final grade, but I do think for the most part what they wrote is genuine and real (and heart breaking). That is all that actually matters when it comes to education: that we educate our students to be good, kind, caring but also critical thinking human beings, but without losing sight of their heart, which also plays a role in our thinking, as so many studies show.

PRE- AND POST- CLASS ACTIVITIES

Mary Balkun, English

When I met my classes face to face, I always arrived in class a few minutes early and stayed a few minutes afterwards to answer questions, create rapport, and so on. Soon after the move to teaching online—which I did synchronously with my classes—I read about a technique that I decided to try that would allow me to replicate that experience. I was already arriving in Teams five minutes before class started, just to be sure everything was ready to go. But now I told the students that I would also remain online for another five-ten minutes after the class period had officially ended in case anyone had a question or wanted to talk about something. This strategy worked remarkably well, and there were only one or two times when someone didn't take advantage of that additional post-class time, and it was more often two or three students who stuck around. If more than one student stayed to talk, I would ask if anyone wanted to wait and talk to me last, just in case it was something personal. Most of the time the issues were pretty simple—a question about a due date or an assignment—but there were other times when a student wanted to talk about a personal struggle or a problem they were having in another class. This was a really simple concept, but both my pre- and post-class availability seemed to help further the engagement with my students that had been developing before we went online.

Amani Khawatmi, Biology

My experience fully transitioning to remote learning in such a brief amount of time has been pretty overwhelming and stressful at first. However, this experience did teach me patience, strengthened my organizational/time management skills, and enhanced my relationship with my students. I made them feel like we were all one family—we were all in this together to ensure their overall academic success! I started out every class with a brief discussion with my students such as how they are doing, how are their other classes, how are they coping with online classes, and ending the class with review questions/jeopardy games before every exam as a review. It provided the students with guided interaction and the students were much more engaged.

Susan Nolan, Psychology

I met with my classes synchronously, although I recorded them for those who could not attend. I began and ended each online session with a check-in question to which they could respond for just a few minutes. Some were related to class. I have long regularly used an end-of-class question (often from the list in this article: <https://nobaproject.com/blog/2018-09-06-why-a-simple-pause-at-the-end-of-class-is-so-powerful>), and continued to do this sometimes. But after we went online, I expanded it to a beginning-of-class question as well, and I mixed up the course-related questions with non-course related questions. At various times I asked students to share coping techniques; recommendations for what to watch, read, or listen to; suggestions for a new hobby; or what small things they're grateful for right now). Even in my class of 120, this worked because everyone can just post in chat simultaneously. I found that some of the students who participated least in class both before and after we went online were often engaging with these questions. It also sometimes let me know to whom I should reach out. And, as an added benefit, I got some great Netflix recommendations!

Leah Rowbotham, Nursing

Teaching clinical in a 'virtual' setting was challenging and totally new for me and my students. They were amazing, in shock, frustrated, tenacious, thinking critically and creatively, and I am so proud of them. We

spent time in the beginning of each session making sure everyone was in a safe place emotionally, socially, educationally, as well as physically. We ended each day with support info, recommendations, and resources for one another. After several weeks I felt that more of the surrounding community should be aware of what was happening with some of my students and emailed NJTVNEWS. They immediately emailed and phoned me back and did a short segment on them. I have a video copy as I am the least tech “savvy” of all faculty in the College of Nursing.

Cathy Zizik, Communication

Challenging times indeed... however, a bright spot was how advising was actually made better due to online communication systems. March, pre COVID-19 advising brought on lines outside offices and student busily meeting in between classes. Each in-person advising appointment lasted between 10-20 minutes. Post Covid-19 advising opened up the advising hours to 5 days a week at any hour desired by the student through Microsoft Teams or a phone call. It seemed as if communicating from our own homes at a mutually desirable time (by day or night) opened up the conversations and added a sense of renewed communication. Advising meetings through Teams lasted between 15-45 minutes. We had the opportunity to discuss academic life in this new environment and students were able to open up much more amid this crisis. Often, I had follow-up meetings or brief texts. I believe I will continue with virtual advising appointments in the future. The technology served as a convenient gateway to build stronger advising relationships.

APPROACHES TO GROUP WORK

Jonathan Farina, English

As a student, I was never a fan of group work; but when we went remote last semester, I incorporated 20-minute small group conversations on Teams into every single class session of one course, and students loved it. Every class began, as it had before distancing, with a 10-minute open-ended “quiz”: students wrote a short essay in response to one of three or four open-ended questions that I posted on Teams (and e-mailed) fifteen or twenty minutes in advance of class. Students uploaded their responses to a folder for the quizzes on our class Teams page. Then they joined their group video conference calls, which I pre-scheduled all at once in the Teams calendar (you can select a custom or weekly recurring meeting). I divided the class of 25 into groups of 5 based on where they had sat before we left campus and created five corresponding “Channels” in Teams (only the individual group members and I had access to the appropriate Channel for each Team). Students discussed the 3-4 questions from the quiz amongst themselves, synchronously and with their cameras on, and I randomly dipped in and out of each of the five concurrent conversations to take note of the best ideas, answer short questions, and indeed just to make some personal contact. Then we all hung up and joined a General Teams call together as a class. I lectured for 10 minutes, shared some of the best individual ideas from the groups, and then fielded discussion and questions.

The students spoke more and more freely in their group Teams calls than they had in the classroom. The Channels allowed the groups to share paper drafts and address questions to each other over Chat with some greater degree of intimacy or privacy than the General course shell allows. Some of them even conducted some Teams calls without me, outside of class time, which thrilled me excessively. The format fostered lots of personal interaction and community building. The structure of these remote classes kept the students working really hard, as two of them noted with good-humored chagrin. I plan on integrating Teams calls into my face-to-face classes when normalcy resumes.

Ramona Guthrie, Occupational Therapy

The flipped experience I shared during our discussion is something I have done since I started teaching the course, which predates the transition to online learning. In any event, I intentionally allocate specific class sessions for student collaboration on team projects. This approach has been successful in several ways. First, having pre-scheduled time to work in teams during class eliminates the need for students with very busy schedules to integrate an additional obligation into their day. Second, students are able to expend their time and energy on something other than trying to coordinate a meeting with their equally busy classmates. Third, in-class work time allows me to avail myself to students for candid feedback. What was different in the online platform was that I created channels within TEAMS for each student group. These channels were their private spaces for collaboration. While they were working on projects synchronously, students could invite me to their channels where we could engage in real-time discussions for questions and feedback. Because the channels were private, I could consult with each group without disrupting other students. Groups could also use this space outside of class time to communicate and share resources in preparation for in-class teamwork. Additionally, the channels allowed the class to do both whole group and small group work in any given session.

STRATEGIES FOR ENCOURAGING DISCUSSION

Alisa Hindin, Education Studies

I was running my classes synchronously and using break-out sessions, which helped with participation. What I found was that when we were meeting as the whole class, very few students were participating in the discussions. What I did was the following:

I sent the students an editable Google Document via email. I set it up as a table with one column and multiple rows. I provided a prompt for them to think and write about. In this case, I was asking them to think about the literacy assessments they observed in their field placements. I had them select a row in the document and jot down their responses. I projected the document as they wrote and their responses showed in real time. After everyone finished writing, I had the students share what they wrote by going row by row. What I liked was that everyone shared and the class could listen and respond. This felt more like the sharing that we would have in an on-ground session.

Eric Johnston, Theology

I was interested to discover how students responded to different media. I had a student who was terrified to speak in class, but she was much more comfortable on video. I had other students who tended to dominate when we were in person, but were more restrained over video. I found some students liked asking questions or making small additions to the conversation in the comment box—and I found the comment box a surprisingly powerful low-tech addition to our video conferencing. Other students seemed to come out more in the discussion on Blackboard. I would summarize that a strength of online synchronous teaching is the possibility of this multi-pronged approach, to let different students shine through different media. I especially liked comments by colleagues about asking students to present in different forms, such as a prepared video or a PowerPoint presentation instead of a spontaneous conversation, and the value of online office hours, where student and professor can look together at a paper much more comfortably than in person, or look at each other face to face, in a time when people are feeling very distant.

By contrast, I heard from my students that they disliked courses that reduced everything to a single medium. I heard from my students that some professors exclusively used readings and notes, with no face-to-face

contact; my students complained about that reductive approach. Finally, I would add the caveat that, for all the strengths of this multi-pronged online discussion, I am more aware than ever of the importance of non-verbal cues in conversation. It is hard to have a discussion when you can't see a student having a thought, or pondering whether to speak; it is hard for students to know whether to speak when they can't read each other's non-verbal cues to know whether someone else is about to speak; it is hard to encourage a student to continue speaking when you can't lean in, or make eye contact, or look around at other students; it is very hard to talk to people when you can't tell what they're looking at. In sum, I find that the online experience has real benefits for allowing new media of communication--but it has even bigger drawbacks, by removing the "media" of in-person non-verbal communication.

Anthony D. Koutsoftas, Speech-Language Pathology

My Aha Moment has been to shut up a bit more when teaching and let the students do the talking... this has been a welcome consequence of having to truly flip my classroom as a result of remote-learning. While I have always embraced technology in the classroom, the sudden change to remote learning required a big change in my delivery of instruction. Having to record lectures so students can view them in an asynchronous manner helped me to really streamline the important aspects of the lectures, especially with a goal of no lecture being longer than 20 minutes. Pairing each lecture with an article or short assignment gave students a chance to listen and read about given topics. During scheduled class time, I was able to meet with small groups of students in Bb Collaborate Ultra in 30-minute intervals and listen to students apply instruction to real world case studies. I was very pleased with how this turned out; now my only question is how to maintain this approach when we resume in-person classes...I guess just remember to shut-up a bit more and listen to the students more.

ENHANCING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Dena Arguelles, English

What I have found to be especially helpful this semester is the connection through Google Hangouts and a shared Google Document. The comments are immediate and further discussion on edits are simultaneous. It's time consuming but powerful. Another item is creating a follow-up to assignments with short videos and PowerPoints or other visuals. This is another way to reach visual and auditory learners. These two items help students focus who might otherwise lose their way in traditional settings.

Peggy Brady-Amoon, Professional Psychology and Family Therapy

Human interaction, the connections we make with each other, is truly at the heart of teaching. That knowledge was brought home to me in deeper, more meaningful ways, as we shifted to and engaged in remote teaching and learning this past semester. Students appreciated (and some needed) opportunities I offered to engage in real time with each other, with me, and, in one class, alumni guest presenters. (The latter was particularly poignant as alumni school counselors shared their experiences and hopes for school counseling practice in the current context with students working towards school counselor certification).

One other point: Remote teaching and learning during a crisis is not the same as intentional online teaching and learning with students who choose online delivery. However, my training and experience with online delivery at SHU (12 years so far) was helpful as I adapted instruction and assignments to promote students' well-being, learning, and professional development this past semester. I plan to build on these experiences as we move forward and am happy to share and learn more with all interested.

Dongdong Chen, Languages, Literature, and Cultures

In my first virtual class of Introductory Chinese II on March 16, when asking students in the target language how they were doing, I taught them the Chinese counterpart of “Take care,” Xiǎoxīn, with xiǎo meaning “small” and xīn denoting “heart” literally. From that day on, as part of oral conversation, I started the class by asking how they and family members coped with shelter-in-place during the coronavirus pandemic, and ended the class with the phrase Xiǎoxīn, urging them to take extremely good care. The Aha! Moment came when the students uttered Xiǎoxīn after I said to them Zàijiàn “Goodbye” at the end of the last day class for the semester. Greatly touched, I realized that the one month and a half remote teaching, though challenging, had made me so close with students even though we were physically separated due to social distancing.

Alan Delozier, Library

I wanted to offer some observations on my class (Introduction to Archives for Museum Professionals). Shifting to an off-site, video model in many ways brought our class closer together due to the shared and uncertain experience, so the effort to encourage continued interaction and success was heightened as a result. Outside of virtual class sessions, weekly e-mails to class and a number of individual notes to each student to consult on assignment topics and offers of video talk appointments, questions answered promptly, and continued moral support were a constant. These measures were coupled with suggestions for accessing digitized resources and videos through the University Libraries and related sites in lieu of print materials in order to help with needed research materials to complete required assignments. I am presently working on additional ways to be ready for either in-person or video class sessions, depending on what the Fall semester holds and with the welfare of student learning potential utmost in mind.

Pam Foley, Professional Psychology And Family Therapy

I have found that students really like hearing my voice – even if I am not telling them much more than what is in my written lecture notes. When we went online, I added a lot of audio clips into my ppt slides, which allowed me to explain things without making the slide itself too busy. I also find that my students really like Echo360 videos, particularly when I am demonstrating a procedure for something they’ll have to use themselves, like SPSS. They can see exactly what is happening on my screen, and they can hear my voice as I’m doing it. The nice thing about posting a video rather than just doing a live demo is that they can pause and replay if they need to see something again while they’re trying to do their homework on their own.

Cristina Guarneri, English

My Aha Moment was bringing in several technologies and assignments, which helped bring my students together as a community. By using Blackboard Collaborate each week, the discussion board, and assignments that included writing prompts, students became even more engaged with the course material and with each other. Over the semester I had students complete writing prompts on the discussion board. I used case studies found in business writing. Students completed the case scenario on the discussion board and we continued the discussion in our virtual classroom. This allowed for greater class discussion on the case study, but it also allowed for increased student engagement with one another and with me. It was a great semester!

Bryan Meadows, Educational Studies

In the Core III class that I’m leading, one learning objective is for students to develop conceptual understandings of Catholic Social Teaching themes (e.g., life and dignity of the human person, option for the poor and vulnerable). With the switch to distance learning, I was concerned about how students could develop their understanding of the themes beyond the surface, referential level. Therefore, I developed an online space where students were instructed to post real-life observations of the various Catholic Social

Teaching themes and to provide brief commentaries (25-50w) to connect the observation to the theme. In the online space, students could post URL links, videos, images, audio, and simple text. As this was a public online space, students were able to view one another's postings and leave comments/reactions. In their reaction postings, students tended to agree with their peer's posting and/or provide an additional connection to the original observation. In some exciting cases, students noted in their reply that the connection their peer made was a new one for them. This exhibits valuable reflective thought, which can lead students into deeper conceptual understandings of the Catholic Social Teaching theme. As a follow-up assignment, students reviewed the many online postings and wrote a discussion of what the themes meant to them. (To reduce the workload, students selected 2-3 to write about rather than all 7). In these closing reflections, students were able to convey deeper understandings of the Catholic Social Teaching themes (some more than others, of course). The deeper level of understanding they demonstrated, I believe, was due to the exposure to and engagement with multiple and varied examples of the themes in conjunction with their peers using digital online spaces. [By the way, although I used padlet for this particular assignment. An alternative tool could be the BLOG function in Blackboard. I believe it would work in the same way. Less aesthetically pleasing but the functionality would be identical.]

Elizabeth Redwine, English

This semester, the most bizarre one of my career, taught me some strategies that I will continue to use whatever the future holds for teaching, online and in person. My Aha! Moment has to do with the upheaval we all went through this semester. That experience reminded me of the importance of clarity, reminders, and reaching out to students in a variety of ways. For every Teams class, I did a quick video to share, emailed a write-up of the most important points, and posted that same write up on the Blackboard site. These extra steps only took me about twenty more minutes and helped me reach many more students. This approach also cut down on the emails from students asking for clarification. I plan to do this in my online classes in the future and use these approaches in my traditional, in-person classes as well.

ADAPTING TOOLS/MATERIALS/APPROACHES

Martin Edwards, Diplomacy

One of my biggest challenges was realizing that I was not covering all the material in depth as in previous semesters, and that this was okay. I relied on news articles to jumpstart our conversations into the course material. Over the weeks, I realized this was an important way to demonstrate that our class work had real value in helping students make connections to what was going on in the world, and that if it meant that our coverage of the readings was more shallow, that was fine. The benefits of getting them engaged, and keeping them talking, as well as helping them to see the intrinsic value in their learning, far outweighed the costs.

Greg Iannarella, English

Here are some of the strategies I used this semester in my move to online:

- Organizing blackboard into “weekly modules.” This is definitely something I’ll be carrying back into in-person instruction. Students love the focused tabs, which help me stay organized and on task as well. Once I switched over to this, it was a major Ah-Ha moment. I wish I had been doing it all along.
- Another thing is utilizing emoji reactions to make all of my digital mass communications interactive. During my weekly “to-do” messages, I ask students to respond with a specific emoji to confirm that they’ve read the post. This works as a confirmation signature so they can’t tell me later on that they didn’t read the message.

- Another thing is making screen share “tour videos.” For these, I share my screen and quickly record how to navigate the modules in Blackboard, how to post specific assignments, and just generally where things are. I do these weekly. This one, I think, is particularly powerful in the current climate. Students go to Seton Hall because they want to study with the faculty and this gives a sense of “over-the-shoulder” learning. I’ve gotten a lot of positive feedback from students who say they wish all of their professors did this. It really takes no time at all.

Ines Murzau, Religion And Catholic Studies

If there is one thing students would have never imagined from taking my Italy study abroad course on-line this semester it was to become Imaginative Learners. In their imaginative journals I noticed them using abundantly the “why” question. In the places, art work, churches, Greek and Roman temples, their imagination brought them through Sicily, Catania, Mount Etna, Agrigento, Amalfi, Naples, Pompei and Rome. Students felt immersed in history, internationally engaged, and do I dare say creatively adapted to the Italian culture! My Spring 2020 Italy course turned out to be a creative and imaginary exercise and I am proud to say that my students graduated from the creativity test! As for interpersonal connections and interactions, we maintained them throughout the semester. For me as an instructor, I might continue to use the imaginary journal writing and reflection in my other courses. I find it beneficial for students to practice cognitive flexibility – the mind’s ability to imagine and be creative.

Bryan Pilkington, Interprofessional Health Sciences and Health Administration, School of Medicine, and College of Nursing

As the bioethicist at the IHS campus, I end up doing a lot of guest lectures in addition to my regular teaching. I was curious how this might work, given that so much teaching is now online. Much of it has remained the same – joining a Zoom call or a Teams meeting, sharing some slides, and teaching a class. However, one innovation in teaching—which I’ve really enjoyed!—has been a move to interview-style conversations in Prof. Kathy Nagle’s SLP Ethics course. Prof. Nagle and I chat for 5 or 10 minutes and record a Q&A session about ethics. She draws the questions from the students in her course. This has allowed for a greater amount of flexibility in the subject matter and makes for more nimble ethics content delivery. We lose out on the benefits of real conversations in the course, but it has been fun to chat with Kathy—and it is great to help students think through the questions that they are facing and being able to follow up—albeit in a mediated way—with the students.

Kirsten Schultz, History

I have one “Aha moment” to share about an open-access online resource I used in an introductory history course, History of Latin America II: The Prelinger Archive at archive.org, a collection of films related to cultural and social history. The collection includes short documentary films on U.S.-Latin American relations and the World War II era “Good Neighbor Policy.” In the classroom, I usually show still photos from these documentaries and talk about some of their scripts in relation to other sources on the policy. For the remote class, I asked students to explore the archive themselves, choose one documentary of interest to them, and share comments on the how the film represented U.S. views of Latin America in a Blackboard Forum. Collectively, the students were able to explore many more films than I would have in one class and they were able to identify how the films tried to translate U.S. policy’s claims about shared values into several national contexts within the region of Latin America. The assignment also gave the students experience with using a digital archive. I plan to incorporate some version of this assignment into the course moving forward.

