CIP Essentials Pilot Grant Final Report Summary

Title: First-Year Seminars Using Personal Journeys to Teach Geography

Faculty Involved: Sarah Blick; Siobhan Fennessy; Harry Itagaki; Patricia Richards; Greg Spaid; Stephen Volz

Summary: The group met three times in the past 8 months over lunch on 28 January, 1 May and 21 August, with each meeting running about 1.5 hours. We also worked individually and in small groups over that period, working out sample syllabi for possible courses, putting together potential reading lists and other materials, and also framing out how we may be able to initiate and sustain these types of courses over the long-term. The conversation in August was informed by the faculty retreat on 14 August, where courses of this type were discussed. We have come up with four different models of how these courses could be taught: as seminars taught by individual faculty; as seminars co-taught by two faculty; and as two parallel seminars taught by two faculty where we could meet together as a larger group in some cases, or as integrated "half courses" where we could swap courses at mid-semester between faculty. In addition, we discussed several models of initiating these types of courses, including applying for FAC funds, replacing a course in a departmental curriculum, and the possibility that these types of courses may be part of a new curriculum that may be evolving at Kenyon. Sustaining these courses will require sacrifice either at the departmental level, resulting in fewer of the "regular" courses being taught, or an initiative at the college level, where funds for innovative courses might be found and sustained over the long term.

A Vision for these Courses

The Course Ideals:

As the CIP pilot grant came out of the Geography group at the "Essentials" retreat, we think that any of these types of courses have to have at its core a physical journey in a specific time and place. We also came to an agreement that at the core, these types of courses have to engage with the idea of a clash or a meeting of cultures so that they emphasize differences in place, differences in peoples.

The Course Approaches:

We agreed that these types of courses have to also be unified in their approaches. The points of emphases include:

- Being a First-Year Seminar, these courses should emphasize writing, oral expression, and have aspects of critical reading;

- The students should begin to get an understanding the geography of the different locales;
- They should experience putting geographic information into historical, cultural and scientific contexts;
- The students should gain a better understanding of how travel and our understanding of geography have changed;
- They should come away from the course with a better understanding of cultural biases, including their own;
- The students also should begin to understand the persona, economic, strategic, religious, scientific and cultural reasons for a journey;
- The courses should use real physical maps instead of/in addition to virtual maps.

Many of us felt that our students don't typically use physical maps, so without a GPS, their understanding of physical geography is suspect. One idea is for students to make their own maps so they understand the process. For example, each student could document a journey that they took during Thanksgiving Break or Spring Break, using drawings, hand-drawn maps and journals to chronicle their journey.

To ground the course more concretely, these courses could also have the following attributes:

- If possible, the courses should apply to the students' own lives in a direct way;
- To this end, we could start each course with a bike ride around Knox County and some readings from Wendell Berry or David Kline on the idea of "place" in human societies;
- We could, as a class, take a journey, in which the process of a journey through physical space is emphasized.
- Last but not least, some of the study and organizational skills taught by Ted Mason in his "Doing the Work" seminar could be incorporated into this course to ease the transition of the first-year students to college life.

Possible Themes and Topics *(sample outlines/syllabi in Appendices)***:**

We discussed a number of refinements to the idea of a course based on personal journeys. Specifically, there could be multiple different parallel courses that look at journeys at different times in human history. One could be on travel during the Middle Ages/Renaissance, (perhaps focusing on the topic of pilgrimages) where different texts from different cultures (*e.g.* Ibn Battuta, Marco Polo) could be compared (Sarah Blick and Patricia Richards could teach this course).

Stephen Volz and Harry Itagaki could teach a course on 19th century journeys that would look at both Europeans going to other places (*e.g.* Livingstone, Darwin) and Africans (and South Americans) going to Europe. Alternatively, there could be a course on the travels of Darwin (and Wallace and Humboldt) that has a more scientific focus (Siobhan Fennessy and Harry Itagaki).

In parallel, there could be a third type of course based in the 19th and 20th centuries looking at personal journeys based on photographs rather than text (*e.g.* Edward Curtis, Robert Frank) (Greg Spaid). This type of course could contrast the differences in media (text *vs.* photograph) and how that changes one's viewpoint.

We also discussed the concept of a forcible journey (*e.g.* The Middle Passage, or the deportation of peoples – Native Americans, Jews to death camps, Russians to the gulag) as a topic and compare that to the a voluntary journey (*e.g.* the Grand Tour of Europe in the Victorian Age).

Ideas on How to Organize These Courses:

We conceive of them as being taught as First-Year Seminars with specific general education goals (appreciation of geography; critical reading and reasoning; writing skills; public presentation skills; interdisciplinary thinking; understanding the "other"). If possible, we'd like for the courses to be team-taught with faculty from different departments of divisions to emphasize the interdisciplinarity and the different perspectives different faculty members would bring, so as to be able to look at different cultures and approaches on equal terms. One possible way to organize the class may be to do what history does with HIST 100, where multiple sections may meet once a week for a lecture (perhaps by a guest professor) and the individual sections meet for discussions during the other time periods. These related courses could have both common reading between sections and section-specific reading.

Linkages to Other Parts of the College:

One idea that would generalize the teaching of Geography at Kenyon is if we could link these courses to Off-Campus Study, where the students going abroad were more conscious of the concept of a journey before they went.

Models for Sustaining This Type of Course:

This was the stickiest part of our discussions over the past 8 months. Finding the resources to make these courses happen and to sustain them over time is the biggest obstacle we saw. The entire task would be easier if the college were to adopt a First-Year Seminar as a general education requirement, and although the idea of First-Year Seminars was on the agenda at the last Faculty Retreat, there did not appear to be much enthusiasm for it. Indeed, Greg Spaid's experience with it at a different institution was that it devolved into a chore and became mostly taught by adjunct faculty. There was also general agreement that none of us wanted to teach these courses over and over, and there was general reluctance to institutionalize these specific courses. In contrast, we wanted a situation where both the faculty and the students were eager to teach and take these courses, not a situation where they were required. Hence, one way that this could by kept fresh is if different faculty with different viewpoints and ideas rotated in and out of these types of courses.

At the core, the ability to sustain these types of courses would depend on the ability of interested faculty to be exempt from teaching a course that is normally on the books. It may be that departments often have enough leeway in their courses such that courses of this type could be initiated if there was the will. This is clearly easier in larger departments as compared to small ones, but it also depends on the individual departments as some, such as History, seem to have more leeway compared to Biology.

Another model for team-teaching a course of this type is to double-list the course so that the course is seen as belonging to both departments so that the departments view it as an addition to each department's curriculum rather than as a loss of the faculty member's time that needs to be replaced somehow. Of course, this would require both departments to broaden their conception of what "counts" as falling within their discipline. From the perspective of the student, the double-listing clearly shows the interdisciplinary nature of the course.

Other ideas included the use of the new ¼ unit short course format, either in a January/May term (if approved by the faculty, though that didn't seem likely based on the response at the retreat), or in the course of a regular semester, possibly with two faculty from different disciplines co-teaching the course, perhaps by "swapping" sections mid-semester, so that they each teach two ¼ unit courses back to back. The disadvantage of this is that the interaction and interdisciplinarity that comes from team-teaching is lost.

One idea that was also discussed is if the college had a pool of open teaching slots that rotated among interested faculty, giving them leeway to teach innovative courses.

These teaching slots would be awarded competitively, and would result in the replacement of a normally-taught course for a semester so that departments would be more willing to sponsor these types of innovation.

Conclusions:

The members of the group were uniformly enthusiastic about the possibility of this type of course. Several of us will likely apply for a FTG in February with an eye for trying to get at least one course of this type off the ground. In the meantime, we will take part in the on-going discussions about the General Education Requirements with an eye to supporting these types of courses.

Appendices:

Sample outlines/syllabi of courses discussed:

Tentative Outline of Syllabus for Journeys: Darwin's Voyage on the HMS Beagle

Readings:
Darwin, Charles. (2001) The Voyage of the Beagle. Modern Library Classics

Movies:
Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World

The Schedule:
Week 1 - Introduction to Victorian England
Week 2 - The Aims of the Expedition
Week 3 - The Atlantic Islands: the Canaries and the Cape Verdes;
Week 4 - South America: Brazil
Week 5 - South America: Brazil and Uruguay
Week 6 - South America: Argentina
Week 7 - South America: The Falklands
Week 8 - South America: Tierra del Fuego
Week 9 - Galapagos
Week 10 - Galapagos
Week 11 - Tahiti and New Zealand
Week 12 - Australia
Week 13 - Keeling Islands and Mauritius
Week 14 - The results of the expedition; wrapping up

Possible goals of the course:
Making of maps
Understanding the geography of the different locales
Putting geographic information in a historical and biological context
Better understanding of how travel and our understanding of geography has chanced
Writing skills
Understanding the cultural biases Darwin brought to the voyage
The economic, strategic, scientific and cultural reasons for the voyage.

Tentative Outline of Syllabus for Victorian Journeys: Darwin, Livingstone and Travelers to and from Europe

Readings:

Darwin, Charles. (2001) The Voyage of the Beagle. Modern Library Classics.

Wallace, Alfred Russel (2008) The Malay Archipelago. Periplus Classics.

Livingstone, David (2001) Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa, Vol. 1. Narrative Press.

Khaladi, Omar, *ed.* (2006) An Indian Passage to Europe: The Travels of Fath Nawaz. Oxford Univ. Press.

Cobbing, Andrew (1998) The Japanese Discovery of Victorian Britain: Early Travel Encounters in the Far West. Taylor and Francis.

Course Schedule:

Week 1 - Introduction to 19th Century in Europe, Africa, Asia
Week 2 - The Aims of the Travelers
Week 3 - Darwin: The Atlantic Islands: the Canaries and the Cape Verdes; South America
Week 4 - Darwin: South America (cont'd)
Week 5 - Darwin: The Galapagos
Week 6 - Darwin: The Voyage Home
Week 7 - Wallace: The Malay Peninsula
Week 8 - Wallace: The Malay Peninsula (cont'd)
Week 9 - Livingstone: Southern Africa
Week 10 - Livingstone: Southern Africa (cont'd)
Week 11 - Voyagers to Europe
Week 12 - Voyagers to Europe (cont'd)
Week 13 - Voyagers to Europe (cont'd)
Week 14 - Voyagers to Europe (cont'd); Wrapping up

Possible goals of the course:
Making of maps
Understanding the geography of the different locales
Putting geographic information in a historical, cultural, religious, economic, scientific context
Better understanding of how travel and our understanding of geography have changed

Writing skills
Understanding the cultural biases travelers brought to their voyages
The economic, strategic, scientific and cultural reasons for the voyages
Writing of personal journals of a journey
Acculturating first-year students into college level work (“Doing the Work”)

(HI, 8/13)

Suggestions for a "Journey" course **Stephen Volz**

course idea #1

An interdisciplinary course on journeys by knowledge-gathering explorers from industrializing societies to other regions of the world during the nineteenth century and the role that those journeys played in the development of how people have come to understand the natural world and humanity's place in it. The course would be team-taught by one faculty member from History and one from Biology (e.g. Volz and Itagaki), studying a number of journeys that illustrate various themes in the history of science during the nineteenth century.

There are many different journeys to choose from, but among the most prominent are those of Charles Darwin and David Livingstone. Each unit that focuses on a particular journey would include study of that traveler's own accounts as well as some scholarly analysis of the journey's significance. Each journey that is studied could represent a different theme, subject of study or perspective, providing a contrast/comparison with the other journeys and revealing the extent to which the journeys were products of their time, were major individual accomplishments, facilitated imperialism, continue to influence thinking today, contributed to scientific knowledge of the natural world, etc.

Some sample books that situate journeys in the broader context of the nineteenth century and the history of science include:

Lawrence Dritsas, *Zambezi: David Livingstone and Expeditionary Science in Africa* (2010)

Aaron Sachs, *The Humboldt Current: Nineteenth-Century Exploration and the Roots of American Environmentalism* (2006)

More general studies of that broader phenomenon include books such as:

Peter Raby, *Bright Paradise: Victorian Scientific Travellers* (1997)

Stephen Bown, *Sightseers and Scholars: Scientific Travellers in the Golden Age of Natural History* (2002)

course idea #2

An interdisciplinary course on journeys by various people that is broader in its disciplinary scope than course #1 but narrower in its geographic, chronological or other scope. For example, the course could focus on a particular region, examining not just how/why a scientist took a trip to

that place but also an artist, writer, diplomat, missionary, pilgrim, merchant and/or soldier. The chronological scope could also be expanded to include study of how views and experiences have changed over time, contrasting, for example, depictions of visits to central Africa by Livingstone in the 1860s, Conrad in the late 1890s and Theroux in the 1990s. Another way to organize the course might be around the theme of personal discovery and growth, viewing travel primarily as a timeless individual endeavor rather than a social/cultural/political event and choosing case studies that illustrate various aspects of how/why individuals embark on journeys.