Introduction for Faculty Colleagues

This is one of six assignments based on readings and resulting in short papers. It happens during the first month of COR 110. This particular assignment has a sibling, a paper due near end of the course, which shares the same initial quote by Dr. Merrill Gates, with a different set of readings that will bring attention to the statements Dr. Gates makes about what a civilized person should be. Here we focus on how he encourages us to see ‘uncivilized’ others.

COR 110 asks faculty to prepare students for global citizenship. A global citizen is one who will encounter people unlike those the citizen has met before. One question, then, is how to prepare students for those encounters. How to help them develop the skills they will need to establish relationships of trust with people they may not have encountered before.

As students prepare and write this paper, I invite them to consider the images they already have of the ‘other,’ in Dr. Merrill’s day often called the ‘savage.’ Associated readings help students challenge the idea that indigenous people are simple, needy, without dreams for themselves and for their children, and uneducated. The primary goal is to help students envision encountering subsistence people, or newly urbanized subsistence people, with curiosity and without condescension. I am asking a lot of students in this short paper and its sibling, but I believe it can contribute to our COR goal of global citizenship and appreciation of diversity.

Versions of this assignment have been offered twice before, without rubrics and by asking students to imagine themselves giving advice to a colleague who would study abroad in a Mayan community. A rubric is now attached. Its measurement level is purposely low. Rubrics for the other short papers will be visually similar and at low measurement levels, but may employ different concrete criteria. Making the context more local is an attempt to make the assignment usable for more than one semester, as this way I can work with common readings like Fall 2014’s The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind.

I use this assignment to learn about my students, and of course, to help them learn about me. In addition to diversity and the admittedly amorphous idea of ‘global
citizenship,’ the areas we explore include our visions and stances on political correctness and the power of words. I am yet sure how, but this assignment and the students’ papers have helped open a broader space in class for explorations of other, politically difficult themes that, without prior preparation, might have affected my authority as a professor in their eyes.

The Assignment I Distribute to Students

COR 110 – The Global Experience

Consider the following passage from *The Story of Corn* by Betty Fussell:

We have, to begin with, the absolute need of awakening in the savage Indian broader desires and ampler wants. To bring him out of savagery into citizenship we must make the Indian more intelligently selfish before we can make him unselfishly intelligent. We need to awaken in him wants. In his dull savagery he must be touched by the wings of the divine angel of discontent. . . . Discontent with the Teepee and the starving rations of the Indian camp in winter is needed to get the Indian out of the blanket and into trousers,--and trousers with pockets in them, and with a pocket that aches to be filled with dollars (p. 154, italics in original).

These ideas were offered to an audience by Dr. Merrill Edwards Gates, President of Amherst College, in 1896. Before you write, make an initial judgment: Is his statement old and outdated, or does he promote values describe what is still relevant today? Use this judgment as your guide in selecting one of the following paths to follow in writing your paper.

I am asking you to write to a student who will be working with indigenous immigrants for their service-learning contributions this spring. She or he has confided in you, saying she has never worked with the poor and she is nervous about it. She has also read Dr. Gates’ passage but not the other materials we’ve read and discussed in class.

If you believe Dr. Gates’ statement is still helpful today, use what he suggests about indigenous people to provide advice to your colleague. Let her know the kinds of things he or she should notice in the indigenous immigrant community, the kinds of things she or he should be ready to talk about, and the kinds of lessons he or she might learn from the experience.

If you believe Dr. Gates’ statement is not helpful today, share examples of the different assumptions would you as your colleague to consider making about the indigenous immigrants, and how she or he could use those assumptions to guide
him or her in what to look for and what to talk about during the service-learning experience with this community.

For this paper, focus on how Dr. Gates’ ideas about the subsistence people would or would not help your colleagues relate to the indigenous community. Later this semester we will use this same passage to explore the way Dr. Gates asks us to see ourselves.

I will use the following criteria to evaluate your response:

- Conformity with format requirements for papers presented to Dr. Nienhaus, as posted in Moodle.
- Integration of ideas from your reading of The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind, the judgments you offered in paper 1, my feedback to you for that paper, our discussions of on urban and rural communities, and your understanding of the claims Dr. Gates makes about subsistence people in the passage above.
- The quality of the advice you can give to the 2015 students. Will your advice help them establish relationships of trust with the people they meet in the local community?

The Grading Rubric

Writer:

Assignment : Paper 3: Dr. Gates’ Advice Reading notes attached?_____

_____Conforms with format

_____Integrates ideas from common reading, Moodle, class discussion, and feedback

_____Provides helpful advice to the 2015 student

_____Overall

Comments: