

Marc as College Professor: Year Two

Marc Edward DiPaolo (June 13, 2008)



What do college professors do with their time? Here's what I did, during my early years in a full-time, tenure track job.



Self-Evaluation:

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I. Introduction

During my second year at this college, my teaching and faculty governance responsibilities increased as I took on additional courses and became the chair of the Faculty Development and Research Committee. I helped form a community outreach program geared towards providing extracurricular activities and learning opportunities to the young people of the south side of the city. I also contributed to the local Literary Festival.

II. Teaching Effectiveness

Courses Taught Spring 2006:

Com 101 - Composition and Research (two sections)

Com 122 - Mass Media

Com 132 - Journalism Workshop

Com 332 - Multimedia Design and Editing

Com 432 - Newspaper Production

Eng 321 - Ethics and Tragedy

Courses Taught Fall 2006:

Coll 110 - First Year Seminar

Com 131 - Writing for the Media

Com 132 - Journalism Workshop

Com 332 - Multimedia Design and Editing

Com 362 - New Media

Com 432 - Newspaper Production

Coll 390 - Foreign Films

Winterim 2007:

Com 290: Special Topics: Comic Books and Super Heroes

I've really enjoyed teaching most of my courses this past year. In particular, the honors course on Foreign Films was a joy to teach. Although my comprehensive exams and my dissertation dealt with film, this was only the second time I had the opportunity to teach a film course. My first outing, Italian Films at Wagner College, was successful to the extent that I feel that I taught the class well and led excellent discussions, but I felt frustrated that the students, as a whole, loathed the material. This time out, the classroom discussions were quite good and the students were highly responsive to even the most challenging films. For example, they actually liked *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, which is one of the oddest films ever made, and had interesting comments to make



about it. I was genuinely sad when the course ended and several students expressed the same sentiments to me.

Having taught the journalism classes once last year, my sections of Writing for the Media and Newspaper Production were far better this time out. I'm not a veteran yet, but I felt that my lectures had improved, the syllabi had evolved in a positive direction, and my confidence has grown. While I felt that I had made my classes a little too easy last year, I may well have made them too difficult this time out, as several of the students chafed at the amount of reading I assigned. For example, I put six books on the reading list of Writing for the Media this time, in comparison to last year's one textbook. Consequently, I anticipate some resistance to the workload on my student Feedback Forms and on ratemyprofessor.com. Still, I feel that the class is improving and that the third time out teaching Writing for the Media will be the charm.

Meanwhile, the Ethics and Tragedy course that I helmed was easy for me to teach because we did a lot of in-class "close reading of text" exercises that ensured the students understood the esoteric language of the plays and the more obscure historical references. I am particularly good at teaching by doing in-class text-crawls, but I am not sure how often such an approach is justified in a Communication course.

While the Fall 2006 semester was largely successful, I should acknowledge that the Spring semester of 2006 saw my least successful course at this college thus far. Inspired by Toby Fulwiler's pedagogical philosophy (discussed in my last self-evaluation), I designed my Composition and Research classes as primarily in-class writing workshops and provided computers for students who did not like to write in longhand. The students were supposed to read the selections from *The Conscious Reader* at home and come to class ready to write their reactions in three thoughtful paragraphs on the classroom computers. The theory was that the best way to learn to write was to read a lot (at home) and to write a lot (in class). It didn't work. Unfortunately, the most of the students refused to buy the book (claiming financial difficulties) and used the computers to surf the web rather than write the papers. Discipline was a major problem – a lot of talking in class and iPod listening and Facebook/MySpace tinkering. After several weeks passed and the situation did not improve, I issued a new syllabus and taught the class in a more traditional mode. The new direction worked and the class was salvaged. I am not sure whether Fulwiler's methods are fundamentally flawed or if I tried them with the wrong group of students. Either way, I don't imagine I will attempt to use them again any time soon.

With that particular class past me, I do feel that the teaching of writing remains a real challenge. It is especially difficult when the students do not appear to have had a tradition of writing instruction in their K-12 years, and in a culture that encourages them to look up "the right answer" on Wikipedia, thereby avoiding thinking about a given issue or crafting a response to an essay question from whole cloth. Plagiarism in general has become a large problem, to the point where it is actually a frightening prospect assigning an essay or a paper to students. I have tried asking students to redo their papers on the first plagiarism offense of the semester (they often seem genuinely ignorant of what plagiarism is, just as they do not understand that downloading music/movies constitutes theft and copyright infringement) and then failing outright anyone who repeats the offense. These measures appear to be too lenient, so I am considering using the Turn It In internet services.

Perhaps the best solution to a given problem is to grade students with a rubric that demands a certain number of quoted passages and a given amount of commentary on the quotes. I have used this measure to teach journalism and have, as a result, secured much better researched articles for the school paper. While articles handed in last year tended to be editorials thinly disguised as articles without any quotes from staff, faculty, or administrators whatsoever, students are now compelled to conduct interviews before writing their articles, largely because of this rubric I have created.



So, I'm still working all this out. I'll get back to you next year with how it all goes...

III. Advising and Service to Students

I think it is safe to say that the fruits of my labor as a professor, and student organization advisor, are at their most visible whenever the school newspaper is posted online or delivered in hard copy throughout the campus. This year's staff is the first one that I picked. I was not able to choose highly seasoned reporters because I taught exclusively freshmen and seniors last year, so I have a staff of mainly sophomores. I had chosen them on the basis of their writing skills and their knowledge of campus events. Since they are good students, they are overextended – they are almost all work-study types on CAB, SGA, and members of Sigma Tau Delta or the Philosophy Club. Consequently, the articles have been better written, but it has taken longer for the paper to come out since they have to squeeze their work on it in between various work shifts. My goal for next semester will be to maintain quality while speeding up the publishing cycle.

During my tenure, the paper has taken a strong stand against racism on campus and rampant vandalism. Vandalism in particular seems omnipresent. The dormitories are regularly vandalized, the letters of the school logo were recently stolen from the Upland Center, and over a dozen cars parked on campus had genitals and homophobic slurs scrawled over them shortly before Thanksgiving. My staff and I have worked to cover these events. We have also featured a new column, Alvernia: A Black Perspective, by an adult student (she's 30), and the SGA president has supervised the creation of a broader Multicultural section. Certain articles and columns have inspired debate and controversy on campus – especially the first Black Perspective column – but the general perception is that the paper has adopted a certain edge, and a willingness to cover “bad news” that it has not had previously. The reaction from the faculty has been strongly positive on this score. I am pleased to hear it, even though I am not out to be edgy for the sake of being edgy. Since I have sensed increased interest from the students, who say they are more likely to read the paper these days, and support from the faculty, I would like to maintain this general sense of “readership” good will by holding the students to higher standards of journalistic integrity and accuracy. In a recent letter to the editor, an alumnus scolded The Alvernian for sensationalism and said, “Yes, report the news – but report it responsibly.” That has been my goal and it will continue to be my goal.

IV. Scholarly Research and Creative Work

A) Scholarship and Teaching

Interestingly, while some might worry that scholarship and service to the profession distract faculty from their students at a teaching-centered college, I have found this year that my scholarly work has helped improve my lessons and my grasp of the field. In fact, the work I have done as a book reviewer for CHOICE Magazine has helped my New Media course in particular. I have been kept up-to-date with all of the most recent Cyber Culture scholarship, and have reviewed books by luminaries in the field such as Ellen Seiter. I have been able to incorporate much of what I have learned into my lectures. Even my failed attempt at getting a “Super Hero” anthology book published last year has led to my writing an academic book on comic books as commentaries on “the war on terror” AND I have used my research for this book as the basis for a Winterim course on super heroes and comic books. So intellectual work, no matter how seemingly elitist, does indeed find its way back to the students after all!

B) Conferences

I gave a presentation on “Batman as Terrorist, Technocrat, and Feudal Lord in the Comic Books and Film Adaptations” at March's North Eastern MLA conference in Philadelphia. With luck, the speech will be published by McFarland and Company in a book called Heroes and Home Fronts, edited by Lisa DeTora. I also attended a conference on grant-writing sponsored by the National Endowment for



the Humanities held at Muhlenberg College and discovered that I was eligible to apply for exactly 0 grants. Oh, well...

C) Editing The Conscious Reader

A brief edition of The Conscious Reader is slated for publication January 5, 2007. I was working on it throughout the Fall 2006 semester.

D) Other Publishing Endeavors

My goal for this semester was simple. Publish. Publish. Publish. So I submitted an array of proposals in response to a variety of Calls for Papers (or CFPs) out of the Penn State Listserv. The proposals were all for chapters in themed anthologies edited by professors at other colleges and universities. A number of my proposals were accepted, putting me in the position of having to write my essays in a great hurry during the course of the semester. Fortunately, I completed all of the essays in question and submitted them all on time. As a result, there is a good chance that my name will appear in the table of contents of no less than four books next semester in addition to on the cover of The Conscious Reader:

“‘ITALIANS’ KNOW NOTHING OF LOVE: THE MARX BROTHERS AS GUARDIAN ANGELS OF YOUNG LOVERS IN JEOPARDY.” 100 Years of the Marx Brothers. Edited by Joe Mills. Cambridge Scholars Press.

“VAMPIRES” and “SERGIO LEONE” entries in The Encyclopedia of Religion and Film. Edited by Eric Mazur. London: Greenwood Press.

“BATMAN AS TERRORIST, TECHNOCRAT, AND FEUDAL LORD IN THE COMIC BOOKS AND FILM ADAPTATIONS.” Heroes and Home Fronts. Edited by Lisa DeTora. McFarland and Company.

“WONDER WOMAN AS WORLD WAR II VETERAN, CAMP FEMINIST ICON, AND SEX SYMBOL.” The Amazing Transforming Superhero. Edited by Terrence Wandtke. McFarland and Company.

I am also working on getting my dissertation published as a book. Peter Lang has expressed an interest and has sent the manuscript off to a reviewer. Fingers crossed.

E) Areas of Academic Interest

As a generalist with interdisciplinary interests and a foot in both the English and Communications fields, my scholarly interests are highly diverse and often evoke a certain amount of surprise. (For example, my dissertation is about Jane Austen and I am now writing about Batman. Many people find this juxtaposition odd, if not outright funny.) Because my writing interests are diverse, I predict that there will be a certain amount of pressure placed upon me to find an easily graspable “summation” – or “high-concept phrase” – to attach to my body of work, demonstrating continuity from one essay/book to another. I dislike defining myself, and I do not want such pressure to stifle my generalist leanings or force me to prematurely pigeonhole myself. However, I understand that it is critical that I find a certain theme that unites my work. Although I may change my scholarly leanings in the future, I have determined that the following two themes have recurred in my work thus far:

1) I have an interest in the process of enculturation, both from the perspective of new immigrants



and those who are descendants of immigrants who arrived at Ellis Island. This interest informs my scholarship on the portrayal of Roman Catholics (particularly Italian and Hispanic) in film, and my writings on super hero comic books, which were created by Jewish immigrants. In the future, I will likely write about Italian role models (how I prefer Columbo and Rocky to the gangsters in *The Sopranos*) in film and on television. I have already written about the view that director Sergio Leone presents of Catholicism and the Mexican-American experience in his films, and I hope to see that article published in *The Encyclopedia of Religion in Film*.

2) Adaptation theory, which concerns storytelling technique and how changes in content and narrative form influence both the central themes of a given story and potential reader response. My dissertation covers novel-to-film adaptation, and focuses on Jane Austen. My Batman paper covers comics-to-film adaptation. In the future, I hope to write about fairy tale adaptations, plays-to-operas (such as Verdi's *Il Trovatore* as an adaptation), and the King Arthur legend as an inspiration for the television series *Babylon 5*. While these specific essays may never be written or published, my interest in adaptation will likely remain constant.

V. Service to the College

A) Faculty Development & Research: I was elected as a member-at-large to the D&R Committee at the end of the Spring 2006 semester. Two-thirds of the way into the Fall semester, the chair of the committee was compelled to resign for family reasons. Since I was the only remaining member who could be the chair (two other members were chairs of other committees and the third member had exceeded his term limits as chair of D&R), I became the chair. I'm still learning the ropes. I'll have more to say on this score next January. Also, I am now on the Executive Committee.

B) The Literary Festival: I offered a lecture called "The Politics of Horror Films." At once academic and fun, it played to a full house, including community members who read a preview piece on the talk in the local newspaper.

C) Organized a classical music concert in conjunction with the music department. The concert featured clarinetist Stacey Miller, an Eastman alumnus, a doctoral candidate at Stony Brook, and my fiancé.

D) 2008 Association of Franciscan Colleges and Universities Conference: I have volunteered to help organize it.

F) Donated several books to the school library. Most were useful, scholarly, and welcome. However, my collection of James Bond books was returned to me.

G) The Writers' Series. I am writing my autobiography (in installments) and reading it (in installments) during Dr. Bierowski's monthly forum at the library on Friday afternoons at 1. This material has all, eventually, found its way into my blog, *The Adventures of Italian-American Man*. If not for the Writers' Series, there would be no blog.

VI. Service to the Profession

A) Reviewer for CHOICE magazine.



B) Manuscript reviewer for SOKOLIK AND KRASNY. SOUND IDEAS. McGraw-Hill Higher Education. Proposed 1st edition of Freshman Writing anthology.

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