



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

Published by the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) • College of Education • The University of Texas at Austin

JOURNEYS OUT OF THE CLASSROOM

After many years of teaching "the traditional way" and listening to students complain about how boring their classes were and how they hated school, I decided that it was time for a change for me as well as for them. I decided *not* to teach any more, but rather to take my humanities students on an endless journey to faraway places to learn about other cultures.

"I just knew I was going to hate this class because I hate art, literature, and architecture. Here it is the end of the semester, and I love going to art museums because I know what to look for."

"My teacher cares that I might have an art preference different from hers, and she lets me talk about it."
"I no longer see buildings in the city. They have a style, and I can relate to it."

"My teacher is not Hispanic, but her love for their culture is contagious!"

My love for humanities began in 1982, when I was an adjunct faculty member at Santa Fe Community College (FL). I had two teenagers, one preteen, and no hospitalization for any of us. I had heard that by taking just one class, I could get student-rate hospitalization for all of us. When I was an undergraduate, my university offered no humanities classes. Since I had already earned my M.A., there were few courses to take at the community college level. However, I found a 2000 level humanities class and three days per week sat front and center, totally fascinated by my professor's slides and her commentaries on her trips to different parts of the world. What a great way to earn a living—traveling and talking about firsthand experiences in class!

I had just returned from work on a summer grant in Mexico and had lots of pictures and wonderful stories to tell. So I began to share my slides and experiences, and relive these wonderful adventures.

I know I give students information that they will NEVER find in a textbook—e.g., surgery and medical practices in the ancient cultures, musicians playing in the open air public restrooms of Ephesus to drown out the noise, delousing wigs of the French courtiers, the overwhelming appearance of the Turkish mosques inside and out, the less-than-sanitary kitchen conditions in some Egyptian restaurants, the emotion of climbing the 159 steps to enter the King's Chamber at the top of the Great Pyramid, getting seasick on land riding a camel to the pyramid, the utter awe of walking from one building to the next on the Athenian Acropolis, walking the *Via Dolorosa* and reliving Christ's passion and death, and seeing six-year-old Mozart's childish handwriting.

I admit to being a hopeless romantic, but that quality enhances my lectures. When I have the garments, I dress the part. If not, I bring in all sorts of realia to make the lectures come alive. One day I shocked everyone, appearing in work clothes, with water bottle, sun hat, and glasses in hand. I was reliving my two weeks of restoring a medieval village at St. Victor la Coste, near Avignon, France.

Since I wanted to be an Egyptologist by the age of ten, I have strong feelings for this culture. Hieroglyphics have always fascinated me, so I show my students a video about them, use original transparencies to show how to read either right to left or left to right. After having found a website that allows me to type a message in English and print it in hieroglyphics, I can provide students with an alphabet of sorts and have them decipher it. They get a better idea of why it took Jean François Champollion 24 years to decode the Rosetta Stone. Many students are so enthusiastic that they send hand-drawn messages back to me to decode. They create their own cartouche in hieroglyphics.

Other activities that students find fascinating are learning to "read" Greek urns, recognize English words derived from Greek in the Greek alphabet, see never-seen-before writings of the Dead Sea Scrolls, see how to build a Gothic cathedral, feel the excitement of Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture—especially "Falling Water," and learn how to use many of the gadgets used by their grandparents.



There are no major paper and pencil tests, no long research papers. Since this is a state-mandated 3000-word course, I use a variety of ways to engage students in writing and speaking activities. Even the most timid students become more relaxed after making oral reports before the class four times each semester.

Who says that humanities courses have to be dull? This can be the most exciting and rewarding class that a college student might ever take. If you cannot travel, then get travel magazines at library book sales and create your own "slides" to show. Do some research and provide interesting trivia not found in the textbook. Read commentaries by other travelers to the areas that

you will feature in your classes. Take your students on an endless journey through time and space.

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Suanne D. Roueche, Editor

October 12, 2001, Vol. XXIII, No. 22

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Innovation Abstracts (ISSN 0199-106X) is published weekly following the fall and spring terms of the academic calendar, except Thanksgiving week, by the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD), Department of Educational Administration, College of Education, SZB 348, Austin, Texas 78712-1293, (512) 471-7545. Periodicals Postage Paid at Austin, Texas. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Innovation Abstracts*, The University of Texas at Austin, SZB 348, Austin, TX 78712-1293. Email: sroueche@mail.utexas.edu