CTFD Professional Development in Teaching Grant Proposal

Application for PMYR funds to redo my course

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████████████ - **3 credits**

Professor █████████████

Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures

Goals:

- To redesign the content of my ████████████ course entitled ██████████████ ████████ (3 credits).
- To develop new materials and exercises in order to facilitate student learning and interaction both online and in class.

Project: I have been teaching ████████████, a Gen Ed course on dystopian film and fiction, for some years. The course usually enrolls about 25 or 30 students, of all levels but mostly juniors and seniors. The course combines lectures and discussions with weekly readings and films -- the latter streamed directly to the students so they can see them on their own time. The course is a demanding one, multidisciplinary and multigenre in nature, and involves reading of fiction, scholarly essays, and film and book reviews, as well as the screening of one film a week, plus exams and papers.

When I began teaching this course, most students had never come across the word "dystopia." These days, however, with the increasing popularity of this genre in recent film and young adult fiction, students are well acquainted with the term. However, they know little about the history of the genre and are not used to exploring the serious philosophical and political questions raised by the best of these books and films. The superficial familiarity that they do have in fact creates problems in going beyond the obvious "adventure" aspects of this genre, in which an alternative/future world is postulated only to have the plot devolve into quite conventional heroic antics, with the serious initial problems abandoned or unrealistically resolved.

One result of students' current familiarity with popular versions of the genre is that as soon as a discussion goes beyond the level of the self-evident ("machines have taken over") or the personal ("what I like"), students find it difficult to focus on underlying issues and articulate their thoughts. In practice, this means that if one wants to go beyond banalities, just a few students (the same few) end up doing most of the speaking in class, and it is very hard to get others involved. Perhaps this is related, as well, to the difficulty many students seem to have getting the readings done. If I assign two or three short texts – say adding up to 50 pages a week – many students seem to read just one, possibly two, almost never all three items. In addition, over the years I have had to decrease the number of complete novels that I use, again in response to students' evident reluctance to take on and complete longer readings. The films are a more

congenial form for these students, but insufficient in terms of substantive learning unless accompanied by reading.

I am requesting PMYR-related funds in order to redesign the course, in terms of both the content and the form. With new materials and assignments, I hope to highlight issues relating to our time and its problems and to find ways to get the students more involved. With more creative online assignments (in which the Center for Teaching can no doubt help me), students may well be stimulated to prepare better for class discussions, and thus to elevate the level of learning and interaction that takes place throughout the semester online and in class.

Schedule: My plans are to work on this project starting in the late spring of 2016 and continue throughout the fall semester of 2016. I expect to try out the new version of the course in the spring of 2017.

Requirements: For the above purposes I will need a research assistant with appropriate computer skills to help me gather and scan new materials, and then, based on these, to aid me in preparing interactive assignments (I have basic computer skills but am not talented in this area). I envision a series of online assignments relating to each week's work. I will replace weekly in-class quizzes (which in the past were designed mostly to induce the students to keep up with the work – with very inconsistent success) with online assignments involving both individual and small-group work. Given that their at-home preparation for the class will be more directed and precise, involving questions and discussions often in small online groups, my expectation is that these activities will translate into more engaged and participatory classroom interactions too. If possible, I would like to have the same assistant work with me on the course for a couple of hours a week in the spring of 2017, as I teach the new version.

An important component of the course will be to redesign its content in such a way as to address key problems in today's world, especially as these relate to politics, religion, technology, and the environment. For this purpose I am also requesting funds for the purchase of books and films to allow me to reconceptualize the course and present new material to the students.

Evaluation of Impact: I will be accompanying and commenting on students' online activities, and taking notes on their in-class participation, and will communicate with students online regularly about their performance. Each month I will administer a questionnaire to the students regarding their progress in the course and their reaction to the different activities required. These should allow me to gauge how successful the new design, activities, and materials are compared to the last few times I offered the course.

Budget:

Student research assistant/programmer: $1500

Films and books: $1500

Total request: $3,000.