

Learning & Teaching Update

Unleashing Student Creativity in Biblical Studies

In a 2003 paper in *Teaching Theology and Religion*, Theresa O'Donovan explores some creative practices in a Biblical Studies undergraduate unit called "Women and Holy Writ". She was keen for her students to respond creatively to the unit.



She set a final examination and three assignments, one designed "to evoke creative initiatives and imaginative responses to women's issues". Her [scaffolding](#) for the assignment was:

Having analyzed and reflected upon any character, program or theme presented in "Women and Holy Writ," provide your own creative expression of it in relationship to your own personal experience or to the issues confronting women today.

You may choose as a form of expression just about anything which strikes your imagination (poetry, diaries, short stories, paintings, photographs, film, dance, music, needlework . . .), but your work must clearly reflect analysis, integration, and creativity.



Picture: The Dinner Party
(click on both these links)

Include as part of your assignment a one to two page explication of it, including, as appropriate, your assignment's relationship to the course material, your reasons for choosing this particular subject and form of expression, the meaning of any symbols you have incorporated, etc.

You are encouraged, if at all possible, to prepare this assignment for presentation to the class. . . . The shared experience of each others' creativity generally proves to be the high-point of the course .

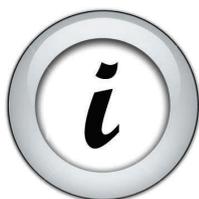
The responses were very encouraging: Biblical women spoke through monologues or diary entries; they appeared in poetry and art. Students heard Delilah's side of the story, Mary Magdalene took her rightful place, and the anonymous concubine so cruelly dismembered in the biblical text was given a name and artistically returned to wholeness.

Inspired by Judy Chicago's "The Dinner Party" one group hosted a dinner party.

The guests included six women of biblical influence represented through a personalized place mat artfully displayed on a set dinner table. The group explained why each figure had been invited and her culinary contribution to the feast.

O'Donovan goes on to discuss the hermeneutical implications of these activities, the risks involved for student and instructor, issues of assessment, and the merits of adopting such creative processes. For the complete article see *Teaching Theology and Religion*, ISSN 1368-4868, 2003, vol. 6 no. 3, pp 159-163.

This unit delves into gender, power relations, and the status of religious texts. Students feel strongly about it. A traditional essay format does not ordinarily invite extended personal reflection on one's own experience, but personal experience can and should enter into the artistically creative process. This assignment asks the student to leave temporarily the safe ground of distanced rationality and approach the material differently.



June [Student Feedback on Units and Teaching](#) to be administered by Insync. Closes 18 June

Jul 7-9 [ANZATS 2010](#) Conference Melb The Future of God-Eschatology and the global challenges of future

September 6 Submit moderation packages for October 6 Discipline Moderation — Christian Practice

Sep 10 Friday 10-4 Booth College: Professional Devel Day – Learning & Teaching : all faculty welcome.

Oct 1-3 [Biennial Conference](#) in Philosophy, Religion & Culture CIS Creation, Nature & Built Environment

Marking Tips

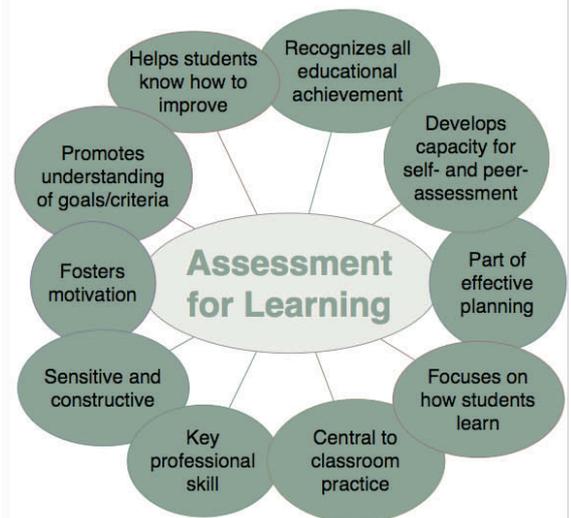
I always provide the rubric in advance, which has been constructed to respond to the nature, focus and criteria of the specific assignment task. First, I mark using this rubric (i.e. at a micro level). Then I try to step back and decide whether the total mark seems appropriate (i.e. at a macro level). In most cases it does, but sometimes there could be something unexpected about a student's work which is deserving of a slightly higher or slightly lower grade, something which is beyond the scope of the rubric. In these cases I alter the sub-scores to produce a more appropriate overall final score. [From [Jan Fermelis](#), Senior Lecturer (Deakin University)]

Less can be more. Sometimes we try to give exhaustive comments of all that is wrong with an essay. It may be better to identify four or five items that if corrected would allow the student to submit a better piece of work next time.

Be positive. Although it is always easier to point out mistakes and tell students where they went wrong, it is also valuable to encourage good performance. A few encouraging and rewarding comments can also make students more receptive to other comments. This may require some inventiveness but the hard work you have put into marking will have more effect. Finally, simply saying "good", rather than stating specifically what is good about it, can end up suggesting the wrong message. Think about preceding a comment with a phrase like "This is very interesting however.." or "I can see what you were thinking here but..."

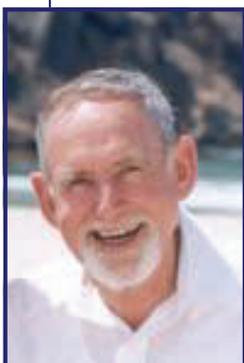
Clarity of comments. Make your comments clear and unambiguous. You may know that a wiggly line down the side of some text signifies agreement with the content but a dislike of the wording but the student is probably unaware of this. More extensive comments take longer to write but a few readily understandable remarks have more impact than many comments that need more interpretation. Some comments may be better placed as a group at the end of the report – identified in the text with a number.

Wrapping up. In addition to specific comments you add to the work itself it is also helpful to finish off with a general assessment of the essay. This is a good opportunity to be supportive of future work. Please also relate your comments to the student's assessment of their work on the cover sheet. [For full text and further comments go to [University of Birmingham](#)]



Contributions Welcome . . .

Share your teaching tips and curriculum ideas. This month we looked at Biblical Studies. Any contributors for another sub-discipline?



At the Professional Development Day on 10 September we will address assessment issues. An external expert will lead us in the design and construction of sound questions and other assessment topics. The report of the 2009 Biblical Studies Moderation Panel alerted us to the importance of addressing these issues.