

Summary: Collaborative Research with Students in the Humanities: From classroom to *French Review* and *The Country Wife*
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Scott Carpenter, Professor of French and his students

Allison Spies, Mei Chin, and Hannah Callaway

Ruth Weiner, Professor of Theater Arts and her students

Laura Owen and David Macauley

Two different groups presented their experiences with collaborative work and research in the classroom and how it was involved in larger projects. The first group, a 19th century French literature course led by Scott Carpenter, had worked together to research and write, in French, an article on two short stories that has since been accepted for publication in *French Review*. The second group had combined a theatrical production of *The Country Wife*, directed by Ruth Weiner, in conjunction with an academic course, taught by Tim Raylor, where they read, researched and discussed aspects of the play and the production.

Writing a scholarly article in the French literature course was an experiment Prof. Carpenter had not tried before, one that students described as chaotic, intense and, ultimately very rewarding. An incredible amount of work went into the project, with students in small teams writing extensively; only a small proportion of the prose was actually used in the final article. Ultimately, Prof. Carpenter wove the various components together into the article that was submitted for review and, eventually, accepted for publication. Students remarked that they felt they really had to be on top of the material in order to meet the demands of writing an article together and that they learned a great deal from the experience, while at the same time bonding with other students in the class in what one student described as “academic boot camp.” They felt they learned more about academia and how it works, and that this course and project helped them bridge the gap between academic learning and actual contributions to academic research. Scott Carpenter remarked that the collaborative process, uncommon in the humanities, in many ways produced a better article than what he alone would have written.

In contrast to Scott Carpenter’s new experiment, Ruth Weiner had directed a play in conjunction with an academic course on two previous occasions, although all very different plays. One thing she felt all three experiences had in common was producing a sense of ownership and confidence in the students while they put on challenging productions. The students echoed that sentiment by describing how learning about the historical context of the play helped them develop their characters and frame the production. They both felt that negotiating the gap between academic knowledge and theatrical practicalities led them to greater insight into both. Ultimately, their efforts were rewarded in the final productions of the play, when the audience joined in, as they had hoped, and the play was well received. Taking a course for academic credit alongside preparing the play gave students the time to learn about their characters and the period.

One sentiment echoed by both groups was, we did it, but there are many ways it could have been a disaster. Both these courses were risks for the students and professors, and beyond the scope of most typical courses. They demanded incredible amounts of intensity and energy from every individual involved, but, in reflection, the participants seemed to feel that it was an exciting, challenging and worthwhile learning experience that gave them new insights they would not have gained in a more conventional setting.