

1. Project Title

“Reinventing Galleons: Researching Global Connections”

Anne Gerritsen, History

2. Keywords

global history; material culture; early modern history

3. Summary

The main aim of this project is to make the students enrolled on a second-year History module, entitled “Galleons and Caravans”, active participants in the research of global connections in the early modern world. Each year, between 25 and 40 students enrol on the module. Beginning in the autumn of 2006, this module has had one seminar group working first with Anne Gerritsen and from 2007 with Giorigo Riello on the Reinvention project. Each seminar begins with a discussion of visual materials selected by the students, and these are subsequently posted online, as are the student presentations that support the student-led seminars. A ‘presentation’ to the department of this website-in-progress was held in the third term of the first year. The students have also organised several field trips to relevant museums and exhibitions in London.

4. Activities

who?

The main people involved are the module leaders: Anne Gerritsen primarily, but also Maxine Berg and Luca Mola, as the module is team-taught. From the second year, the team was reinforced by a new appointment in Global History, Dr Giorgio Riello.

The students of one seminar group were all involved in the project. They were second year students taking modules in History and various related disciplines, but all enrolled in Galleons and caravans. Out of these twelve seminar students, two students were selected to act as research assistants. Their tasks included liaising with their fellow students, co-ordinating the individual student gatherings of research materials and making them available (online, on data projectors) for discussion in seminars, and the maintenance and updating of the ‘student research’ pages.

where?

The context for this module was the History department, although the various disciplines used in seminar discussions and readings draw also on literature, economics, art, art history, material culture, anthropology, science and technology and politics.

The actual physical meeting spaces of the seminars were mostly in the History Department. This caused considerable problems. I had been interested in using the Reinvention space for teaching, but there were no slots available in a suitable time. Also, History seminars are 1 1/2 hours in length, which means scheduling causes conflicts. So we opted for the History seminar rooms. However, the main problem there is that these are not centrally timetabled rooms, and not equipped with projectors and computer sockets. I had to borrow a laptop with data projector from AV, to be collected from their offices, and, as AV services do not come out to locally timetabled rooms, I had to struggle independently with equipment that did not work well. It was most unfortunate that the technical difficulties threw a shadow over most of the early seminars. Although Warwick encourages the integration of new technologies in the teaching, the teaching rooms many of us use in the Humanities building do not match this standard.

We finally opted, on the initiative of the students, for meetings in the Learning Grid. This worked well, so long as the students remembered to reserve a room, although it was also

made clear to us that we were misinterpreting the guidelines for the use of the Learning Grid by using it for formal teaching.

why?

As outlined in my original application, the motivations for the 'reinvention' of Galleons stem from my sense that students in the History department are taught by tutors who are active researchers, but that few of the students become active participants in this research process. History modules have in recent years become more resource-based, allowing students to learn by actively engaging with a wide range of primary sources. We seek to offer students access not just to traditional documents, but also to material culture, visual materials, or literary sources. The process of preparing for resource-based learning, however, is part of this research process, and this is where the students can help. The students themselves have decided which they consider the most suitable resources for the transmission of the ideas they gained through research. This way the students could be involved in the 'knowledge creation process' (Freire, 1996:20). Staff and students are working on the 'reinvention of Galleons' by working together on the creation of knowledge, thereby not only integrating teaching and research, but also encouraging 'deep learning' in the students (Hattie and Marsh, 1996:533-4).

what?

The project has now run for 1.5 years. During the first year, the students worked towards the development of an online exhibition of materials. Each of the nine seminars were designed around the selection of illustrative items (images mostly, but also material objects and documents) that engage with what the students determine to be the most pertinent research question for that specific subtopic. This required group-based research, seminar discussions, and discussions of the best presentation of the materials. Throughout the year, the website has been designed and developed by the students. The end result was presented in an online exhibition of materials, presented formally by the students to the entire History Department and all its students during an open morning in one of the seminar rooms.

At the end of the first year, one of the students appointed as student research assistant worked with me on a presentation of the project at the 'The Student as Producer' conference at Warwick in September 2007.

with what result?

During the last weeks of the term in summer 2007, the students have been able to show their work to their fellow students, to the staff of the History Department, and to other interested parties within the University. From the comments, it was clear that the students felt proud in their work. Their comments in the module evaluation forms also backs this up:

- 'Student-led seminars make them more enjoyable and easier participation as it feels less intimidating to participate'
- 'Discussion in seminars has helped to get to grips with the course and its aims. Always interesting and thought-provoking. Student-led and well focussed—less intimidating.'
- Seminars helped understand the course material and brought excitement into the material. Helped me grasp the material.'
- The seminars being led by different people—variety. Different perspectives, relaxed and open atmosphere easy to contribute. Lots of images!'
- 'Brief presentation of images provokes discussion and personal involvement in the seminar.'

Overall, these techniques have benefited my teaching across the four modules I have taught during the past year. It has been especially pleasing to see that elements of what

I have tried to do are now also visible in other modules: my colleagues teaching Galleons and Caravans have started to use student-led seminars; the colleagues in Comparative American Studies are working on the creation of a Visual Archive of the Americas; colleagues working in Modern British History have worked on a student-led exhibition of materials; several colleagues have applied for Reinvention Centre funding to increase the undergraduate research element in their modules. This, combined with the numerous e-learning initiatives that have now become embedded in our undergraduate curriculum, has made the History Department feel like a place of ongoing innovation and development in teaching and learning, and it has been exciting to be part of this.

5. Contact details

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6. Supplementary information

The general History website, of which this module forms a part can be found here:

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/>

The module website, maintained and developed by students involved with the project, can be found here:

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/undergraduate/modules/hi163/>

The student presentations and other 2006–7 activities can be found here:

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/undergraduate/modules/hi163/seminars/>

The current student projects can be found here:

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/undergraduate/modules/hi163/studentresearch/>