

Reinvention Centre Academic Fellowship Final Report

1. Project Title

New undergraduate module ‘Interdisciplinary and Creative Collaboration: The Faust Project’

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2. Keywords

Interdisciplinarity; multidisciplinary; collaboration; team-teaching; assessment

3. Summary

The aim of this project was to design and pilot an innovative new undergraduate module. The module was distinctive for three main reasons: 1) it was open to all second-year students from across the University, regardless of degree course; 2) it was team taught by an ‘ensemble’ of teachers from a range of departments; 3) it attempted to take seriously the notion of interdisciplinary learning and sought to establish how feasible – logistically and philosophically – such learning is at the University of Warwick, and, by extension, at similar institutions across the UK.

The Interim Report described the rationale for the creation of the module, its pedagogic foundations in open-space and collaborative learning, and the problems encountered in recruitment of staff and students in the months before the module was run for the first time. This final report reflects on some of the successes and shortcomings of the module’s pilot year (2009-10). It draws not only on student feedback and on my own experiences as the module leader, it is also heavily informed by external reports conducted by student researchers using the Faust Project as a test case for the present state and future direction of pedagogy in the University.

4. Activities

Syllabus:

The module recruited to its capacity of 15 students. As described in the Interim Report, these were drawn almost exclusively from the Arts and Humanities Faculty and preponderantly from joint honours English degrees (e.g. English and Theatre; English and Philosophy). Most of the students were conscious (a la Faust himself) of having taken a risk in selecting the module. We explored these and other feelings in the opening session in which we reflected on a set of questions that both related to the Faust myth and to our identities as students (and a staff member) in a modern university: why am I here? What is my specialist subject? How do I define my discipline? What is my most developed skill? These functioned as icebreakers, of course, but also initiated a strand of self-conscious reflection that would run throughout the module and would indeed form a significant component of assessment (see below). Students were then asked to write (anonymous) responses to the question: ‘How do you want to spend the next 24 years?’ (that being the amount of unfettered playtime granted to Dr Faustus before his terrible reckoning.) We took a break and when the group returned I had scattered these responses throughout the studio space – as if they were the *disjecta membra* discovered by the scholars in Faust’s study the morning after he has been dragged down to Hell. The following

'Theory-Building' exercise continued this theme: the group was split in three and each subgroup received an envelope of fragments (imagistic and textual) relating to the Faust myth. (The Theory-Building Kit can be downloaded from the website – see Resources). Each group then had to arrange their fragments into a spatial (and therefore meaningful, argumentative) relationship. Such a task not only modelled the collaborative spirit central to the module's aims, it also served as an induction to the lateral, associative and boundary-crossing thinking that would be required of all of us as we shuttled across centuries of thought and between different ways of seeing on a more or less weekly basis.

The remainder of the Autumn term followed the syllabus outlined below. The initial weeks offered a grounding in the core texts of the Faust myth (with the great help of a colleague from German); after Reading Week, the multidisciplinary journey began. It was noteworthy that two students dropped out in the first fortnight; one cited the method of working and group assessment as inimical to her own working patterns ('I always leave it till just before the deadline'), the other (a sociologist) said he felt intimidated by the predominantly literary-dramatic opening to the module. Although these two were quickly replaced by new students who had heard positive things about the module and were keen to switch into it, there was certainly a lesson here about disciplinary blindspots: as someone with a background in literature and drama, I had seen the opening weeks' contents as both inevitable and neutral when they were, perhaps, neither.

If Autumn term went more or less according to plan, Spring term was more improvisatory. Some colleagues were, for various and good reasons, unavailable to fill the slots I had assigned to them. I had also underestimated the amount of time the students would need to work on the group project. The projected sessions in Weeks 4, 5 and 7 were cancelled; Week 4 became an invaluable session with a theatrical practitioner on approaches to devising; from Week 5 onwards, all planned sessions (and many, many extracurricular hours) were devoted to the group project. There was widespread disappointment that the exploratory phase of the syllabus was over combined with a relief that work was finally about to start on the much anticipated group project.

PLANNED SYLLABUS 2009-10

Autumn Term 2009:

Week 1: Introduction and *The English Faust Book* [Paul Prescott, English]

Week 2: Christopher Marlowe, *Dr Faustus* [PP]

Week 3-4: Goethe, *Faust, Parts 1 and 2* [James Hodgkinson, German]

Week 5: Devising *Faust* [Annouchka Bailey, Theatre Studies]

Week 7: Faust, Magic and the Mind [Matthew Broome, Medical School]

Week 8: Faustian economics 1 [Grier Palmer, Business School]

Week 9: Faustian economics 2 [Grier Palmer, Business School]

Week 10: Faust and Society [Cath Lambert, Sociology]

Spring Term 2010:

Week 1: Faust on Film 1 (Murnau, *Faust* 1926) [Sean Allan, German]

Week 2: Faust on Film 2 (*Szabó, Mephisto* 1981) [SA]

Week 3: Faust in the Theatre [PP]

Week 4: Faust and Theology [Dr Paul Edmondson, Queens Foundation, Bham]

Week 5: Faust's Brain [Matthew Broome]

Weeks 7: Faust in the Dock: Faustian pacts in legal history [Paul Raffield, Law]

Week 8 – 10: Group Project Work [PP]

Summer Term 2010:

Weeks 1-2: Group Project Work and Public Presentation [PP]

Week 3: Deadline for Group Projects and Individual Portfolios (Faustbooks)

Assessment:

Essay (25%)

Not only was the content of the module uncharted territory, for most of the students the forms of assessment were equally novel. The first formal assessment was an essay, a conventional enough medium but the task was distinctive to the module:

Write an exploratory essay (2500-3000 words) that links any aspect of the Faust myth to another (non-literary) body of knowledge or cultural phenomenon. You are not expected in any way to 'master' this new body of knowledge/discipline; rather, you are essaying (= 'attempting') to suggest productive points of connection. You might use the article 'Faustian Economics' (Wendell Berry) as a template for a short essay that moves between disciplines and is addressed to an intelligent common reader. As the arguments and findings of your essay can only be provisional and as your research time is inevitably limited, you should provide an 'Afterword' (max 300 words) outlining how you would further this exploration if you had more time. What is missing from your argument? What knowledge do you need to substantiate or qualify your argument? Where might you go to get it? This Afterword is an important part of the essay; it demonstrates your ambition, your awareness of limitations, and your capacity to self-critique. Please give it due consideration.

Students rose to the challenge by putting the Faust myth into dialogue with a range of topics, including: representations of the 'Eternal Feminine' in Disney; the Chinese Cultural Revolution; the collapse of Enron; criminological attitudes to young male delinquency (based on this mature student's professional experience as a probation officer); the Contemporary Art market; New Labour; the history of nuclear physics. At its best, the challenge to write an interdisciplinary essay produced work of great originality and sophistication. Even at its worst (in terms of the grade awarded), a retrospective survey revealed that the Faust essay grades were closely comparable to those which the students were averaging in other modules. One could only conclude that the experimental nature of the assessment had not unduly damaged any student's overall profile. Nevertheless: there are some issues relating to this form of assessment that I was unable to resolve in this first year. Not least of these was the issue of whether I (or anyone else) was qualified to act as first marker for all of these essays. On the one hand, I *was* well positioned to mark these essays: I shared with students a consensual definition of what an essay (on any subject) should look like and do; I had also attended all the classes on the module and therefore knew what amount of exposure students had had to e.g. economic history. On the other hand, I could not hope to have all the knowledge required to make an *entirely* informed judgment on the very wide array of subjects students tackled in their essays. Ideally, a first marker would have been identified in an appropriate subject area, with the module convenor then second marking all essays and ensuring parity across the cohort. (If the essay had been worth, say, 50% of the module, then the first marker should also serve as a supervisor of sorts.) For a variety of reasons this proved unfeasible. Expert team marking on a module with a tighter interdisciplinary focus (e.g. 'Shakespeare and Law') is clearly more straightforward than it is on a multidisciplinary module; this is

something this module (and others like it) will have to address in detail in future iterations.

Group Project (25%)

The task here was collaboratively to devise a piece in response to the various types of knowledge and disciplinary perspectives encountered during the module. The group was advised that:

Possible projects might include: an adaptation (film, theatre, radio, for schools); an interactive lecture; an installation or experiential piece of theatre; an exhibition; designing an educational workshop – these are just the most obvious types of project: there really is no limit to the amount of ways in which we might interpret this brief. Whatever the medium, the main challenge is to juxtapose /synthesize in a creative and critical fashion the full range of the module's curriculum for an audience of your choosing.

I had expected that the group would be unable to agree on which of these options to choose and would consequently splinter into smaller groups, each with a distinct project. Interestingly, all fifteen students were united in wanting to undertake the project en masse. It was also agreed (with a remarkable lack of friction) that the event would be experiential and offer the audience something approximating both Faust's journey (in Goethe) and their own journey as students through the module. (In aspiration, this project bore a striking resemblance to the theatre company Punchdrunk's 2006 *Faust*, a production which none of the students had seen but which I had described to them with perhaps too much enthusiasm.) All of these primary decisions were taken in meetings that I had arranged but which generally began by my announcing that I would be silent and play no part in proceedings. The group quickly decided that it would be necessary to create some version of Heaven and Hell in this experience; the architecture of the CAPITAL Centre (where these sessions took place) with its open foyer leading into two performance spaces, suggested a third space of limbo. Thus it was that the group of fifteen devolved into three working groups, each with its own space to curate, each responsible for one leg of the audience's journey through the Faust myth.

The date for the performance was set on April 30th, 2010, on the opening night of a New Writing festival in the CAPITAL Centre. The date was auspicious and offered inbuilt drama: April 30th is Walpurgis Nacht, the Witches' Sabbath, an evening that plays an important part in Goethe's rendering of the myth. As with any human activity requiring the participation of more than one person, there were many bones of contention and periods of strain throughout the devising process. This kind of work is indeed designed to make conflict, debate and negotiation inevitable. One of the original aims of the module was to test whether interdisciplinary learning might well prepare students for the wide range of post-university working environments that require advanced interpersonal skills, collaborative aptitude, and the ability to think laterally and creatively. Such ensemble-based work has also been central to the CAPITAL Centre's pedagogical mission and has its origins in theatre practice and, by extension, drama education. As my colleague Jonothan Neelands has written:

Working together in the social and egalitarian conditions of ensemble based drama, young people have the opportunity to struggle with the demands of becoming a self-managing, self-governing, self-regulating social group who co-create artistically and socially (Neelands 2009, p. 182)

As the weeks passed, it was indeed the ways in which the Faust group learned – or rather taught itself – how to self-govern and self-regulate that made the greatest impression on me as a now more or less detached observer. I was repeatedly struck by the levels of maturity, cooperation and emotional intelligence displayed during this often gruelling process. These are qualities that are not inevitably harnessed or developed in the course of most undergraduate teaching. The high stakes clearly helped to forge a collective identity: in one of the focus groups conducted by Alex Mockridge, the students recognised this with comments such as:

'There will never be two years of Faust that will be the same, because it is so shaped by the people who are taking it.'

'If you're doing Faust, you can't afford to be too scared.'

'We are the Family of Faust.'

It is also the case that the spectre of public performance, like a morning hanging, concentrates the collective mind wonderfully. The resulting Walpurgis Nacht event was, by any standards, highly successful. The CAPITAL Centre was imaginatively and intellectually transformed. The audience began its journey in a museum-like foyer (a densely informative ante-chamber to the myth), before proceeding into a dark, claustrophobic studio space to witness a series of live events (short play, dance, song) each of which bore a sometimes obvious, sometimes tantalizingly oblique relation to episodes in the Faust legend. We emerged, blinking, out of this space into a strange limbo, a brightly lit corridor in which we were each calmly and bureaucratically informed of our fate – half the audience had been consigned to hell, the other half to heaven, consigned that is to either half of the event's final arena, a large white studio space partitioned down the middle to create a sort of apartheid of the afterlife. In hell, our heads were clamped with headphones that remotely received a range of unnerving noises, whilst our eyes could not avoid the film footage, an anthology of twentieth-century atrocities, running in a loop on the walls around us. In Goethe, in contrast to Marlowe, Faust is finally redeemed, and the closing coup here was for the paper partition dividing heaven and hell to be ripped down allowing the audience to recombine and exit towards freedom. As the partition came down, our first unforgettable glimpse of heaven was of Fred and Ginger dancing across the wall in front of us.

Portfolios (aka Faustbooks) 50%

This was the most contentious and fretful aspect of the entire module. None of the students had been assessed in this fashion before and it was worth 50% of the module grade. In these portfolios, students would be required to join the dots, to grapple with the contents of the syllabus as it unfolded, to reflect, to make connections:

1) Chart and record your progress through the module - from the beginning, I have strongly encouraged you to make regular entries, reflecting on anything and everything relating to the Faust myth. This might be thoughts on the sessions we've had; attempts to read further round any of the subjects we've explored; anything (newspaper articles, historical figures, and so on and so on) that has struck you as Faustian. You might also include here your research towards your essays - were there things you'd have liked to have included but didn't have space in the essay? Throw them in to the Faustbook!

In short: the Faustbook is where you show evidence of your intellectual and creative engagement with the contents of the module as it has evolved.

2) Record your individual contribution to the group project - when the second marker and I look at the group project, it will not, of course, be clear to us what you, as an individual, have contributed. The Faustbook is therefore your place to describe your contribution. What research have you undertaken? What has been your logistical contribution? What have you learned in the process about: collaboration, interdisciplinarity, creativity, the Faust myth, the translation of different types of knowledge into a public event? In short: Record, reflect, critique. Structurally: you could either divide the portfolio into the two sections above, or it could simply be a chronological account.

In an attempt to assuage anxiety, I devoted two mini sessions to the idea of a portfolio, sharing examples from other modules ('Drama, Performance and Identity', 'Shakespeare and Law') that use this form of assessment. Interestingly, when the Faust students had these portfolios in their hands they were more than able to critique them and to appreciate why some portfolios were better than others.

In the event, the more impressive of the Faust portfolios were characterised by an appropriately Faustian restlessness and used the pages to delve, forage and explore in all directions. One portfolio, for example, ranged well beyond material covered in or even suggested by class work and the frames of reference were staggering: vampires, Deleuze, Tom Waits, folk tales, Dostoyevsky, gap year travels, Jung, Barthes, Korean gangster movies, Angela Carter. It read like a detective story as the student pursued multiple quests: for the genealogies of the Faust myth, for the Eternal Feminine, and – perhaps most strikingly – for an attitude to his own biography, his own sense of past, present and future in relation to the Faust legend. Weaker portfolios were marked by occasional superficiality, lack of self-reflection and a reluctance to chase down intellectual ideas. Nevertheless, despite the unconventional mode of assessment, the overall range and distribution of grades was consonant with any other module. Most strikingly of all though, nearly all of the students developed a proprietorial, highly personal relationship with this piece of assessment: on the day of submission, one asked when her portfolio would be returned to her as she wanted to show it to her family. It is very rare to hear such an enquiry about the return of an essay; this is partly because many students might see their academic work as irrelevant or uninteresting to their families; partly of course because an essay is now invariably a digital object, infinitely reproducible and hence easily distributable. Conversely, each Faustbook was doubly unique: in it, the student had been obliged to personalize their curriculum in an object that is highly resistant to mechanical reproduction and thus imbued with its own aura and value.

5. Outcomes

I would distinguish three different ways of evaluating this project: a) student feedback; b) an external report written by Alex Mockridge for the Reinvention Centre; c) the ways in which the module functioned as a template and reference point for wider pedagogic initiatives undertaken within the University in 2009-10.

5a) Student Feedback:

In the English Department we use a standard form for student feedback. Students complete this in class (after the tutor has left the room) in the penultimate or final week of the module; these are then returned to the convenor for quantitative and

(briefly) qualitative summary on the following meta-form. (Twelve of the fifteen students attended the session in which the forms were distributed):

Module Evaluation Form – Convenor Return Form – 09/10

Module: EN272: The Faust Project

<u>The module as a whole</u>	5	4	3	2	1
Did the module fulfill its aims?	7	5			
Was the module well structured?	5	3	4		
Did you find the workload manageable?	6	6			

Written Comments:

Extremely stimulating on academic and personal level; Enron and psychology of education highlights; very interesting and varied seminars; ‘although the content was superb, the course was initially very unstructured’; ‘the interdisciplinary nature of the module is extremely refreshing’; ‘It’s so different from any other modules offered and has changed my experience of 2nd year’; shame we couldn’t do the last few planned seminars because of group project; more focus on core texts, more performance history.

Conclusions: opening structure needs some re-thinking, but students generally happy with workload and expectations largely met.

<u>Seminars</u>	5	4	3	2	1
Were the seminars stimulating?	4	8			
Was discussion well guided?	4	6	2		
Were you encouraged to speak?	8	2	2		
How would you rate your attendance at seminars?	9	2			
How would you rate your preparation for seminars and contribution to them?	3	6	3		

Written Comments:

Sometimes difficult to see links between Faust and some of the sessions; varied in quality depending on visiting speaker; sometimes too lecturey – more hands-on; seminars enjoyable with a very friendly atmosphere.

Conclusions: again, generally positive but with room of improvement; even though inevitable risks taken by visiting experts, still gratifying that all students experienced seminars as above-averagely stimulating

<u>Written Work</u>	5	4	3	2	1
Have you benefited from the written assignments?	6	5	1		
Was feedback on written work helpful?	5	5	2		
Was the library provision adequate?	4	2	4	1	1

Written Comments:

Love the idea of portfolio allowing more personal response; direction on essay could have been clearer; might have helped to have practice essay; definitely needed more library resources;

Conclusions: the unconventional challenges of writing an interdisciplinary essay and creating a portfolio clearly demand more preparation and guidance from convenor.

General Comments

5 4 3 2 1

Would you recommend this module to future students?

9	3			
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Written Comments (continue on separate sheet as necessary)

‘I absolutely loved this module and would take something like it again’; more music and paintings!; more preparation for group project, more guidance on portfolios; ‘It’s amazing – do it!’

Self-reflection played a key role in the students’ Faustbooks and it was in these that some of the best qualitative material could be found.

5b) External Reports on the module:

Alex Mockridge’s full report on the module can be found as a separate attachment. Here I would simply flag the fact that the interviews and focus groups conducted by external researchers over the course of the module were invaluable in a) providing me with a non-partisan account of what the students were thinking and feeling, and b) gathering far more information than is possible on our standard departmental feedback forms. Focus groups with the students allowed more space for reflection such as this:

I really value the idea of interdisciplinarity. I think that being at university we often have our choices quite limited. Whilst I knew that I wanted to specialise in Philosophy and Literature, at the same time I have lots of other interests, for instance the sciences. Once you go to university you have all those choices automatically cut off. I thought that the Faust Project was a good way for me to remain grounded in literature, but at the same time branch off and at least learn a bit more about other subjects.

It was through these reports also that I was able to access the students’ anxieties about e.g. assessment. It was also reassuring to read the following conclusion roughly half way through the academic year:

In the focus group, a student said that Faust was ‘so different to every other module’ and this rings true. It is important as it shows how some of the real strengths that you expect from a successful and prestigious University, such as a wide range of world leading academics in different disciplines, good quality facilities and cutting edge approaches to teaching and learning can be tapped to provide students with a unique experience that they would not otherwise have the opportunity to receive. (Mockridge, p.)

5c) The module’s role in wider pedagogic initiatives:

Whilst convening the Faust module I was simultaneously part of a team working on the Interdisciplinary strand of the King’s-Warwick Graduate Pledge project. The team also included Manus Conaghan (Learning and Development Centre) and was led by Professor Karen O’Brien (English). Over the course of the year – and in tandem with a small team at King’s – we were tasked with: summarising the extant literature on

the benefits and challenges of interdisciplinary teaching and learning; surveying the current state of inter- and multidisciplinary within the undergraduate curriculum at Warwick; investigating transferable models at analogous institutions both in the UK and worldwide; consulting students, staff and employers for their perceptions on the place of interdisciplinarity within the undergraduate curriculum.

To give one example of the work in which we were engaged: in Spring 2010, we carried out a questionnaire survey of 220 students at three careers fairs; this survey included three questions related to disciplinary awareness. The students were 81.8% home and 19.2% overseas, and 56.8% science, 29.5% social science and 13.7% humanities. Key findings from the full analysis were that:

- 92.7% have a clear sense of what they think their chosen discipline is about (many cited key skills as well as subject specific knowledge)
- 63.6% felt that they had had an opportunity to gain insight into other disciplines: although this affirmation was much stronger in Maths (a degree with a relatively high degree of optionality), and much lower for social science and humanities. Of those who said that had had this opportunity 90.7% said it was of value to them.
- 85.9% felt that knowledge of other disciplines would enhance their career prospects

[KWP Interdisciplinary Report, p.6]

Overall the survey data provided strong encouragement for the foregrounding and increased provision of multi-/interdisciplinary opportunities for Warwick undergraduates. The response we had from employers was similarly encouraging. Although employers are not always clear what is meant by interdisciplinarity, they generally value graduates who have developed a “well rounded” approach, “breadth of perspective” and an ability to “make parallels between things” [BBC employer]. 40% of those consulted said they noticed a positive difference in graduates who had taken more than one subject, while around a third associated broader exposure to disciplines with improved problem solving and creativity. “I think students who studied different disciplines tend to bring a better variation in terms of problem solving” [ERAC employer; KWP Interdisciplinary Report, p.13].

It was therefore the case that while the Faust module was running, other findings were providing encouragement for the type of teaching and learning that was taking place in the module. Reflexively, Faust was equally being used as a test case, a template and point of reference for new initiatives within the University. Towards the end of the one-year King’s-Warwick project, and taking our lead from the stated goal of University Strategy to ‘enrich the learning experience of all students using digital media to develop additional self-standing modules on a wide range of themes and subjects’, we invited academic staff from across the university to formulate proposals for undergraduate interdisciplinary modules which might be delivered on a cross-faculty basis either as part of the curriculum or as an additional element. The Faust Project was offered as a flexible model that staff might draw on in whatever fashion best suited their chosen theme/s. We also supplied a template document for 10-15 CAT modules, drawing attention to our intellectual rationale. In addition, each module convenor was been asked to consider strategies to accommodate the different assessment approaches found within different departments (group work, performance

elements, peer assessment, exams, essays, portfolios, project work), and, where possible, to think about how their proposed module might experiment with innovative forms of assessment. As our final report summarized:

The *intellectual rationale* for these [proposed] modules centres upon a) research-informed undergraduate teaching b) interdisciplinarity as bringing to bear multiple staff and student disciplinary perspectives upon a nodal theme, problem or question c) using different learning styles and environments (in one case our own Coventry environment), including open spaces, digital media, performance, and diverse textual material [...] In relation to a) we asked that these modules should offer undergraduates some exposure to the new and future areas of research which will reshape their discipline and other disciplines. Advanced study modules would engage students, from the beginning, with research, and also implicitly enable them understand the historically situated and developing nature of all disciplines.

[KWP Interdisciplinarity Report, p.10]

In response to this invitation, we received from colleagues across the University a range of fascinating and plausible proposals with working titles such as: Beauty and Society; The Brain in the West: From Divine Instrument to Human Essence; Fashion: How People Style Themselves; Green Planet: Global Warming, Sustainability, Development; Identity: A Transdisciplinary Approach; Performance Cartographies: Locating Coventry; Visualising the Body in Medicine and Society; Sleep and Society; The Nano-Future; and A History of Infinity. It is hoped that at least some of these will be piloted within the next two academic years and that, in time, a range of such modules will be available to all Warwick undergraduates.

Seen in this broader perspective, the Faust Project has clearly played a small part in a larger trend. Its first iteration in 2009-10 was broadly successful, not least in helping to confirm or identify some of the pitfalls inherent in this kind of undertaking. The students (and I dare say most of the staff) sometimes felt like guinea pigs, sometimes like canaries in the coalmine; moments of identification with Faust himself were rife throughout the year, not least (I suspect) the intermittent feeling that one had signed up for something that would ultimately escape one's control. But if the experiment was partly stressful it was also wholly satisfying. Such an experiment requires time, mental space and the opportunity (perhaps the right) to fail. For the time and space, I am immensely grateful to the Reinvention Centre and its excellent fellowship scheme; for the opportunity to fail, I am indebted to the fifteen students who took a risk and chose to become 'the family of Faust'.

7. Conclusions

A series of short summaries, some arising from points already made, some of which could not easily be accommodated in the narratives above:

- A late correction: despite the long title of this module ('Interdisciplinary and Creative Collaboration') this was actually a multidisciplinary rather than interdisciplinary module. While some modules might seek a synthesis between two or perhaps three disciplines, the Faust Project was more concerned with accumulation rather than strict integration, in many ways mimicking the peripatetic, episodic nature of Marlowe and Goethe's plays.

- Recruitment: this kind of module can only guarantee widespread participation if it carries a lighter accreditation; e.g. between 10-15 CATs rather than 30.
- Syllabus design: students generally felt that the most effective sessions ran over two weeks; this tended to reduce the feeling that they were merely sampling a new discipline.
- Convening: ideally there would be a co-convenor present, like the convenor, at every session and thus there would be another person (partly) qualified to second mark assessed work.

Finally, two principles that underwrote our work on the Interdisciplinary strand of the King's-Warwick Graduate Pledge project and which were amply supported by the experience of running the Faust Project:

- 1) interdisciplinarity is valuable in promoting greater critical awareness in students of the knowledge and skills sets peculiar to their discipline [“informed disciplinarity”], and in giving them a sense of how issues, themes and problems may be approached in different ways
- 2) interdisciplinarity in the undergraduate curriculum is most effective when it is a) highly reflective on the part of students and staff b) linked to flexible and more collaborative teaching methodologies c) assessed in appropriate and non-standard ways, with assessment criteria made very explicit d) delivered through a variety of learning media and methods e) based on a nodal theme or problem approached from a variety of disciplinary perspectives

(KWP Interdisciplinarity Report, pp.13-14)

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I want to close with an instructive passage from Goethe's *Faust*. The scene is Faust's study but Faust is offstage and Mephistopheles is impersonating Faust in order to receive (and deceive) a callow young freshman. The student has come for advice on the direction of his future studies. Mephistopheles interrupts: 'Tell me, before you ask my views, / What faculty you mean to choose.' They go through various options, each of which Mephistopheles-as-Faustus subtly undermines. Some choice must be made but they're running out of tenable disciplines. The student complains:

Suppose my choice should light on Medicine.
God knows, I view the subjects with dismay,
With three short years to fit the whole lot in,
A hint from you would help me feel the way.

Mephistopheles encourages the choice of Medicine as the most viable profession for the erotic exploitation of the 'aches and sighs that come to vex the tender sex' and the student goes on his way.

Clifford Geertz described disciplines as 'a way of being in the world' and this passage comically captures a student exactly at the point of deciding what way he wants to be in the world. In the UK (no less than in Goethe's Wittenberg) that decision tends to be taken at a very early age and often proves to be binding and restrictive. For the vast majority of undergraduate students (and probably for many staff), knowledge of what happens in their university is restricted to at best two or three departments within their own faculty. Students are rarely encouraged to venture

into other faculties, and few formal curricular opportunities exist for inter-faculty teaching and collaboration. A range of developments – both global and local – invites us to re-examine the organization of knowledge and space in the twenty-first-century university. The introduction of broad, interdisciplinary degree programmes at the University of Melbourne (the ‘Melbourne model’) has sparked interest internationally with many institutions likely to follow suit. Much closer to home, the creation on the Warwick campus of non-discipline-specific spaces (such as the Teaching Grid, the Reinvention Centre and the CAPITAL Centre) should also inform and inspire our teaching practices. These spaces – no less than examples of curricula reform elsewhere – require us to rethink not only how we teach, but what we teach and to whom in those ‘three short years’ in which most of our students must ‘fit the whole lot in’.

7. Resources and references

Neelands, J. ‘Acting together: ensemble as a democratic process in art and life’. *RiDE: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 14(2), 173-189. (2009)

King’s-Warwick project report

http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/rsw/undergrad/cetl/fundingopps/centre_projects/graduatepledge/the_graduate_pledge_-_report_by_the_reinvention_centre_research_team.pdf

Module website:

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/undergraduate/current/modules/fulllist/special/interdisciplinaryandcreativecollaboration>

Theory-Building Kit:

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/undergraduate/current/modules/fulllist/special/interdisciplinaryandcreativecollaboration/faustimages/>

King’s-Warwick Graduate Pledge project:

<http://www.kingslearning.info/kwp/>

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