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Integrating ACS Data in Interdisciplinary and Humanities-Paired Courses

This module was designed for a team-taught interdisciplinary course that pairs a "sociology of art" course with a freshmen-level composition course. Because the course meets several core curriculum attributes, including quantitative and scientific reasoning and technological fluency, emphasis was placed on training students to utilize ACS data to examine the role of art and artists in a city's economy as well as use of NEH data on arts audiences and their consumption of, and participation in, the performing arts. The composition half of the course also necessarily stressed writing skills; students were meant to gain comfort and familiarity with various styles of writing, including writing about, and reporting on, data.

Learning objectives of module
* Students will receive a basic introduction to reading and interpreting data tables, and will learn to effectively communicate their interpretation in written form.
* Students will assess how arts and arts-based activities contribute to a city's economy, will examine patterns of residence for arts and arts-related workers, and will critically engage Richard Florida's idea of the "creative class" and its role in revitalizing or sparking growth in a city's economy.

Outline of lectures/activities
* Early in the semester students were introduced to the idea that the arts, arts tourism and arts-related jobs are intrinsic to the economies of many major cities.
* Readings for this module included Richard Florida's "Cities and the Creative Class," Lawton, Murphy and Redmond's "Residential Preferences of the Creative Class," and segments of David Halle and Elisabeth Tiso's *New York's New Edge: Contemporary Art, the High Line and Urban Megaprojects on New York's Far West Side* as well as Elizabeth Currid's *The Warhol Economy: How Fashion Art and Music Drive New York City.*
* Classroom activities (lectures, exercises, discussion) for this module focused on introducing the concept of the "creative class," examining how the term is defined, operationalized and measured by Florida, and why it has been critiqued as both an analytical category and as an engine of urban economic growth. (Related discussion topics included gentrification, job growth, and economic development.)
*Prior to assignment submission, instructors conducted an in-class workshop on how to read the data tables, and, perhaps more challengingly, in which students were asked to "tell a story" about American cities by using *only* the data presented in the tables.

Resource list/guide
* Assignment 1: Utilizing ACS and Census Data to examine "Art Cities" and Florida's "Creative Class"
* Data tables created from University of Minnesota's "Integrated Public Use Microdata Series." (Created by instructor due to password and log-in requirements that prevent students from using the data site directly or easily.)
* Instruction sheet "How to Read a Data Table" (adapted from Ballantine and Roberts' *Our Social World*)

Teaching/facilitation notes
This course was designed as a first-year learning community, meaning that its content was meant to foster retention and connection between students, promote experiential learning, and provide first year students with an introduction both to college writing and to the discipline of sociology. 25 students were enrolled and represented various majors, with the largest component representing computer science or arts &

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[1] Amy Foerster taught the sociology portion of the paired course (Sociology 296U: Art Worlds: Art as Power, Privilege and Persuasion") while Brice Particelli served as the composition (English 110: Composition) instructor. Title of the course was INT 198T "Art Worlds NYC: Exploring Art, Culture and Power in the City," taught fall semester, 2015.

entertainment management. The module was introduced in the third week of the course, and focused on enhancing basic quantitative literary while giving a "hands on" view of how analysts like Richard Florida use ACS and Census data to create policy recommendations for urban planners and city governments. Florida's work (one journal article and one radio podcast featuring an interview with him) was introduced first, and was used as a launching point to discuss arts and the creative economy as an engine for economic growth and, perhaps relatedly, gentrification. Following the introduction of this material, students were also introduced to the Halle & Tiso pieces mentioned above, as well as Elizabeth Currid's work on the role of arts in the economy of New York City. The assignment was then distributed, and we conducted an in-class writing workshop in which students worked together to interpret the data tables and to begin to "tell a story" about the role of arts in urban economies.

The total module, from introduction of the readings, to return of the graded data analysis papers to students, comprised three weeks of a 15 week semester. Grades on the resulting paper ranged from a low of 66 to a high of 98. The highest grades were found among the computer science majors, leading to the recognition that it was perhaps easier or more familiar for them to work with data tables and to explain the social and economic meaning that data can convey. Even so, the primary weakness in the majority of the papers was not in interpreting and reporting on the data (most students did quite well with this, perhaps because additional class time was used to build those skills) but in engaging critically with Richard Florida's larger argument (which was a key learning objective for the assignment). We realized that this could, in part, be due to the simple fact that many students had not read the required materials, and/or did not listen to the required podcast featuring Florida. If the module were to be repeated, perhaps an additional component of the in-class workshop could be a debate or discussion in which students present both the strengths and weaknesses of the concept of the "creative class," which would ensure both that students read the required material, and could utilize and engage with it in their written work.

Assessment
* Attached rubric was used to assess student performance on the ACS/data-based assignment. Weakest student scores were in the third component, which represented their ability to integrate Florida's work into their paper, and to "engage critically" with it.
* Assessing whether learning objectives were met, both for the specific assignment and for the larger course, was more difficult. While student performance on the papers indicated that the goal of attaining basic quantitative literacy was met, the ability to "critically engage Richard Florida's idea of the 'creative class' and its role in revitalizing or sparking growth in a city's economy" was, on the whole, not.
* Course evaluations for the class did indicate that the large majority of students were very satisfied that the learning objectives of the course were met. Several commented on the success of pairing two disciplines together, and a few noted that their comfort and skill in producing different types and styles of writing were enhanced. For example:
> * This course was fantastic. Although I am not a huge fan of English, both Professors made the class engaging and interesting. It was a perfect class for a 1st year freshman to take, because it helped introduce us to New York City and Downtown Manhattan. Even though some of the assignments were challenging (in a good way!) both Professors were extremely helpful and you could tell they both care about the students and they both enjoy their jobs. I am so glad I took this class!
> * I would definitely recommend this class, especially to 1st year students!

And listed as the "most valuable" component of the course:
> * Learning and getting the experience of writing different types of papers.
> * Learning about gentrification and art as a whole.

Bibliography

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