

Making College “Worth It” – Season 3, Episode 2

Course-Based Undergraduate Research Experiences in the Humanities

Nolan Schultheis (00:07):

Welcome to Making College Worth It, the show that examines engaged learning activities that increase the value of college experiences.

Jessie L. Moore (00:13):

In each episode, we share research from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning and our international network of scholars. We explore engaged learning activities that recent college graduates associate with their financial and time commitment to college being worthwhile.

Nolan Schultheis (00:28):

I'm Nolan Schultheis, a third year student at Elon University, studying psychology with an interest in law. I'm the Center for Engaged Learning's Podcast producer and a legal profession scholar.

Jessie L. Moore (00:38):

And I'm Jessie Moore, director of Elon Center for Engaged Learning and a Professor of Professional Writing and Rhetoric.

Nolan Schultheis (00:45):

In this episode, we'll explore course based undergraduate research in the humanities. We'll talk with Kevin Ostoyich, a professor of history at Razzo University, and Mary Isbell, an associate professor of English and Assistant Dean for Student Recruitment and Retention at the University of New Haven. Let's meet our guests.

Kevin Ostoyich (01:05):

Okay. My name is Kevin Ostoyich. I'm professor of history at Valparaiso University in Indiana, but I'm also a guest professor at the Center for Applied Policy Research at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. And I'm also the historian for the Florence and Lawrence Spun and Family Foundation, which is a Jewish foundation that has one of the largest Holocaust collections in the world. How I got involved in university undergraduate research based courses was basically a love of research that I conducted as an undergraduate and thought it was a wonderful experience having a mentor who really brought me under his wing and revealed to me how exciting research can be. And I realized that undergraduates can do very valuable research. They just need to be given the opportunity and the encouragement, and thus that is what I've been trying to come up with different ways for young people to express themselves even when they may not have that much confidence to do so, but just being there to kind of say, Hey, you can do it, and let's see what happens.

Mary Isbell (02:30):

And I'm Mary Isbell. I am an associate professor of English at the University of New Haven. I also have a position right now as assistant dean for our College of Arts and Sciences. I focus on recruitment and retention. I first got interested in course-based undergraduate research. I actually learned the term while I was our university's first ambassador to the New American Colleges and Universities consortium and the president of that organization that time was putting a book together. I was just meeting other ambassadors and talking about what I was doing, and she said, could you write a chapter for my book on

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course-based undergraduate research? I realized that term then I actually didn't have the term for it before. I would say that my interest in engaging with students as fellow researchers comes from a dissatisfaction with, I can only speak really for my discipline, but the idea that students produce baby papers, that they produce work that is sort of a small version of what a professional in the field would create. I found that very uninspiring as an assignment to give students, and I was always trying to find ways for them to not only do something that was hypothetically valuable, but something that literally was going to be impactful. So I'll leave it at that. It was kind of a dissatisfaction with pedagogy, with the way I was engaging with students and what I was asking them to do in the classroom. Having just come off grad school and knowing how thrilling research is, I wanted them to feel that.

Jessie L. Moore (04:07):

I love that both of your introductions give a nod to your own research experiences. One as an undergraduate, recognizing that you had a great mentor and wanting to replicate that experience for other students. And then the others recognizing that the undergraduate experience wasn't living up to what you'd experienced as a graduate student. So I really appreciate that. I hear echoes of that in other scholars that I've worked with that support undergraduate research in the classroom as well. And Mary, as your introduction alluded to, you both contributed chapters to course-based undergraduate research, educational equity, and high impact practice edited by Nancy Hensel. Would you share with our listeners an example of how you integrate undergraduate research experiences into your classes?

Kevin Ostoyich (04:58):

Well, the course that I wrote about in the book was called History Mystery, and what the genesis of that was that I saw that a lot of students, as well as non-students have this kind of knee jerk reaction that history is somehow boring, that it's useless and so forth, that they just have no fire for it. So I wanted to come up with a course that try to reorient how people would view history and closer to the way I look at history, I see history as one big mystery. We're surrounded at all times by mysteries, and you just have to look and start asking questions about the things around you, and then you find out there's history all around you. So it's about how you redefine what history is. And a lot of people are put off from the history by their high school experience, which they believe it's just memorizing people, places they've never heard of, never have been to, and they really don't see any reason for doing so.

(06:05):

I wanted to see if I could come up with a course which put curiosity in mystery in center stage and really challenged the students to come along with me in this journey. Now, this involved really going the extra mile in this course. I died three days into the course, and then the course became a murder mystery in which the students then had to use different tools such as microfilm, microfiche, going to the university archives, finding things, which in a way was a misdirect because they were learning the techniques of research, but doing it in a fun way. They were trying to figure out, well, who killed this guy? And as they were going through, they'd find out clues that just about everyone at the university had a motive to kill me. So everybody at the university became a suspect and thus the course actually drew more and more people to it.

(07:10):

And that's when that's where that curiosity kicks in and that's when they start doing extremely good research and they don't really care about page lengths and so forth. They don't really care about it

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because they want to find out the answers to these mysteries. So that was really what it, and then I realized by being in character for a full semester, I mean the Professor X who took over the course and Professor Stoic who continued to teach his other courses, never acknowledged that this course existed. But then Professor X would never acknowledge that Professor Ostoyich could possibly be alive. So that experience, I realized theater could be used as a way of generating interest. And then the successor of History Mystery has been this course called Historical Theater in which students write plays about Shanghai Jewish refugees, which is my specialty, and then actually act those out.

(08:25):

But again, they don't care about the number of pages or all those types of things that you're used to hearing once they realize they are in charge and they're writing a play and they're going to have to act it, they want to make sure it's good. They don't want to look silly on a stage. So it's about coming up with a framework, encouraging and then getting out of the way and then letting them shine. And I learned that by being in character as Professor X for a full semester, wearing an eye patch and a black rose and channeling the spirit of Kevin Ostoyich every once in a while, you name it. Some of the looks I got from the students throughout the semester were like, what is this guy doing? But they did extremely good work and they really wanted to know who killed Kevin Ostoyich.

Jessie L. Moore (09:17):

Kevin, I love that. And I love, I'm grateful that you survived this semester and are able to join us today on the podcast, but I also really appreciate how your example highlights the ways that undergraduate research can also be a community effort, just all of the different people that you named that were involved. Mary, what are some of the ways that you integrate undergraduate research into your courses?

Mary Isbell (09:44):

Well, yeah, I just have to comment on Kevin's what he shared because the theatrical aspects are so beautiful. And it's interesting, I think as I've been, I mean that book came out a long time ago. We've been at this for 10 years, plus I have engaging with these practices and it seems like my trend is to kind of not realize for a long time that two different parts of my scholarly work kind of touch each other. And so I was writing my dissertation working on amateur theater, and I wound up having opportunities both as finishing up PhD graduate student to go with students on and exploring the blue scenario on the us Bri Niagara on Lake Erie. We did sail training on a tall ship for a month. And so I got to go as a grad assistant and I convinced the organizer of the trip who happened to be an advisor on my dissertation who knew about my interest in Melville's actual engagement with theater when he was writing and his accounts of that, but also all of my research about shipboard performance.

(10:52):

And so she agreed to let me work with these students who had not signed up to put on a play, to just put on a play and reproduce one of the performances from my research. And so that's actually not what I thought I would talk about, but as Kevin's talking about theater and the performative aspects, I didn't even go into that. I was approaching that in the frame of practice-based research. And my interest was really in better understanding the dynamics of staging a play on a tall ship when you have to stand watch, how do you rehearse, where do you set up the stage? We did a lot of playing around with that in the process. I learned that that collaborative act of making theater together led to all kinds of other

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historical curiosity, Kevin, to your point. And so anyway, I want to mention that in passing, I got to do that again.

(11:39):

When I was a postdoc at Yale on the constitution in Charlestown, Massachusetts, we also reconstructed a performance that actually had been given on that same vessel with some students in a class at Yale that I created. And so that was in both of those cases. The big thing that drives my engagement here is that the students are going to make discoveries alongside me that we're going to figure things out together. And that is a fundamental shift from I think, the way some people think about it. And once you have that mindset, then you can do all kinds of fun collaborative things together. I would say there's that, it's clearly related, the same person, but there is this other interest, and it's different than what Kevin's talking about because it's more directly addressing the problem I see in the classroom. So instead of I do this cool thing that makes you not realize how much fun we're having, which I kind of love and I want to be good at that, instead, my students are not reading what I assign.

(12:41):

Do you read what is assigned to you in class? Can we talk about this as a problem and how could we solve this problem? The very challenge of getting students to read becomes the task we're all trying to solve. And usually I'm thinking of making something with students in this class that will be useful for students in the next class in the form of open additions. And like I mentioned, there are these two worlds I learned about open educational resources. I was kind of learning about open pedagogy when I wrote that chapter. I learned a lot more about it, but I had also been trained in scholarly editing and in the text and coding initiative, and there's a scholarly way of doing that. But I sort of over time started to bring those two things to together and try to teach students about the principles of scholarly editing while producing an open edition with them for future students. And that has proven really engaging for students. And just like what Kevin's saying, there is no limit to what they will write. They have so much to say. They have so many research questions, and they're really dogged in their desire to figure out what's going on. And there's no one saying, is this sufficient for credit that goes out the window.

Jessie L. Moore (13:52):

But lots of great examples there in your introductions and your discussions of the chapters that you contributed and the other ways that you've integrated undergraduate research into your courses. So it's just a really rich set. So thank you for that. Nolan, I'll let you go ahead and jump in with the next question.

Nolan Schultheis (14:13):

So you were actually just touching on this a little bit, Dr. Isbell, but you're chapter focused on collaborative annotation to support reading comprehension in a literature course, but you also offer an example of using this approach with university common reading. So how might this activity support students reading comprehension in other areas of study?

Mary Isbell (14:32):

Well, it's a kind of complicated answer I'd give to this because I was really excited about the possibilities of collaborative annotation when I wrote that chapter. And I was just like, ping, ping, ping. The technology was making possible so many exciting things. It's been around for a while. And what I'm

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learning is that now the thing that I thought it cleared away, actually, I was thinking this as Kevin was talking, you're kind of surprising students. You're doing something they don't expect it's going to startle 'em awake because they're like, why does he have an eye patch on? Or in my case, why can we all see what everybody else thinks as they read? That's like, what? But then it doesn't take long for that to kind of become a performance. And what I noticed in recent years is that any kind of collaborative annotation tool when graded and when used to kind of surveil whether students are doing the work or not, leads to less authentic responses basically. And that it also can kind of facilitate, I'm not actually going to read the thing on the screen. I'm going to read what other people think can then come back. So my shift away from that has really moved more to, I've been working in the Pressbooks platform. Students when we create open additions together are creating notes that we're not using hypothesis. Those notes go into the HTML of the addition that gets updated over the summer and the next class uses it. And so annotation is still happening, but it's definitely structured differently.

Nolan Schultheis (16:12):

No, I know exactly what you're saying actually. And funnily enough, that's a psychological concept. When people know they're being observed in any capacity, their behavior changes. So that makes perfect sense to me. And even as a student who's had to interact with something of that same kind of variety, I used to do discussion boards all the time, and it was like the go respond to this student, go respond to this student. And you force yourself to interact with it in a certain way because you're being graded on the criteria for it. And I can fully understand that it takes away from the authenticity.

Mary Isbell (16:53):

Yeah, I mean, what I've started to call it is a performance of whatever, fill in the blank, but usually it's a performance of knowingness that's getting in the way of learning, trying to make sure you know that they're on board. And what's sad about that is that the real curiosity that you want is hindered here. You want them to feel like they don't need to perform so that we can actually do some exploration together, but there's so much in the way that you have to clear out in order to get at that. Yeah.

Jessie L. Moore (17:24):

And both of you have mentioned really the authenticity that can be associated with research, the curiosity that can be associated with research. We and the Center for Engaged Learning do a fairly regular national survey of recent college graduates, and one of the things that we've learned is that alumni are more likely to consider college worth the time investment and the financial commitment if they've had opportunities to think about how what they're learning authentically, meaningfully relates to the rest of their lives, to their futures, et cetera. And so as I was revisiting your chapters, and then also thinking about the examples you've shared so far, I hear those lifelong and life wide skills embedded in what you've shared. But I wonder if you could just name some of the skills and strategies that you see your students developing as part of these course-based research experiences beyond what we might have named so far, what are some of the takeaways that you see your students having from these experiences?

Kevin Ostoyich (18:33):

Well, the word that we haven't used yet, and it's the one that guides everything that I'm doing now, is empathy. And what I have found is that in the early part of my career when I was teaching more in a

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traditional format, the students were learning, they were learning usually courses about Hitler in the Third Reich or the Holocaust. They were learning the material. It seemed that they were learning it ultimately in a surely academic way and seeing very little interaction with their own lives with any sense that they're actually connected to the themes that we are exploring. And it was through the history mystery class that I evolved to thinking about coming up with ways for students to channel empathy and thus become connected to history and those who are part of that history. And this is very much front and center in the Holocaust world because we're in a situation where a lot of our education about Holocaust is dependent on visits with survivors.

(20:01):

And of course, a visit, an interaction, an actual interaction with a Holocaust survivor tends to trigger an emotional response. It is very difficult not to have an emotional response. But the issue now, and it's the big challenge for Holocaust educators, is how do we try to replicate that looking down the road at the reality that we're not going to have survivors around to tell their story? How do we do that? So that was the challenge. And I channeled back to the history mystery experience and said, well, maybe theater can be the answer. And maybe theater practiced by people who are not theater majors gives them an opportunity to channel that internal empathy that they may not be using in the academic setting, but now they're being welcomed, I don't want to say challenged. They're being welcomed to channel that empathy and kind of see connections.

(21:17):

Now, it's not to embody the survivor, that's not what we're all about, but it's about seeing maybe, hey, this is a human being. I am a human being. This is not just a person that appears in a Holocaust film or someone who appears in textbook on page 532 to 534, and then we never hear about that person again. Or what I find to be the most problematic is people tend to see Jews as being part of this story and only part of this story and define only by this story. And my idea was, well, how can we break that and have students get involved? And that is a skill that I think is not really given enough focus or attention at universities that empathy is a skill that perhaps we do not develop enough in the university setting. So for me, these theater courses are ways in which students are welcomed to tap into their empathy and find out that Holocaust survivors are human beings that can be approached.

(22:47):

And as students write, what I have found is they start to see connections between their own lives with the experiences that the Holocaust survivors had. Not necessarily in a concentration camp, no, not in a ghetto, but the familial relationships, the love, the sadness, the tragedy. These are things that we all experience, and thus the students start really connecting. And as they connect, they then want to do the research that is necessary to make it as authentic as possible. My goodness, if you just set it up and allow the students to go down this route, they're going to produce things that are, I dare say, more meaningful than a lot of the books. They collect dust and were written not for a public, but for other academics. And the examples I have of that are that the plays that undergraduate students have written with me have then been translated into German, have been performed by high school students in Germany, have been performed by high school students in Edinburgh, Scotland.

(24:08):

And as this happens, you see that the course no longer is one semester long. The course has no end because what the students produced now has a much longer trajectory and more people get involved. So we have, for example, this one play called the Singer of Shanghai, which is about a sewing machine,

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not a vocalist, right? The singer of Shanghai written by students at Valparaiso University translated into German, performed in Augsburg, Germany by students from two different high schools, and the actual sewing machine was sent from Cleveland, Ohio to Augsburg to be there for the performance. And the man whose history is on display, he came and he met with the students and he met with the young man who played him, and he said, I can't believe it because the young man who played him is Muslim and himself, his mother was a survivor of Bosnian genocide. And he said, when I play the part of Harry, this Jewish refugee, I think of my mother, and I think of her experience.

Jessie L. Moore (25:38):

I love the reach of those examples. It's really exciting just to hear how students are embracing the challenge that you're offering them. And I just think it's so important that we recognize that if we offer the opportunities, students will run with them and it will really lead to more meaningful learning. Mary, what are some of the other takeaways that your students experience from their undergraduate research opportunities?

Mary Isbell (26:09):

Yeah, thanks. So the first thing that came into my head was confidence. And I'm going to talk about that in terms of the sort of collaborative editing projects. But then I want to describe this sort of new project I'm working on for a different set, especially because Kevin's mentioning emotion, empathy, recognizing that emotional intelligence is something that we definitely engage within the humanities, and we could perhaps focus more on what we're doing there with students and what they're gaining. But first for the confidence element as we were talking about all of this performing knowingness or performing preparedness or whatever students are doing to kind of make sure that they're not going to receive a bad grade, that ultimately what that shows me is that they don't believe that if they did something authentically, whatever, they thought that it would be good enough. And so I think one of the first things I'm trying to help them realize is their own ideas are very good and that they should have that confidence.

(27:16):

And I think that does come through eventually, especially in the editing project where they're picking what passages they think needs a note for future readers. What that allows them to say is, instead of, I don't understand this, I obviously am not good enough to read this text. I'm saying everyone struggles to read this text. So I'm going to give the example of the confessions of Nat Turner, which was an addition that I created with students over multiple semesters and is available online with their notes. It does something pretty remarkable for a student to realize that the thing that first they didn't quite get, others might not as well, and their role can be naming that as hard to understand and seeking a solution to that problem and kind of attach their labor to helping other people make connections and understand things in a different way.

(28:12):

So I do think that confidence is an important part of this. But then I also want to say that what's shifted a bit is that I've taken my, let's call it what it is mentality to an extreme. I am now recognizing that when I put texts on a reading list, students don't usually read 'em. And so I wrote a book over the summer called Searching for Wonder, teaching Literature with student selected texts. And the cure part of this that emerged as I was starting to put it together was I'm going to let students choose what they want to

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read within the parameters of the course. What happens then is they don't know what to pick, so they might turn to Google, and that's going to kind of reinforce whatever's trendy. They're not going to find the really incredible texts from the past. And so there's lots more detail about this book, and I won't go into it, but ultimately I'm creating now a relational database of not the creative works, but experiences with the creative works.

(29:21):

And this gets to Kevin's point about empathy. One of the experiences you might have when reading a creative work is empathy. You might also feel identification. This is another one, Kevin, that I think you're especially as powerful about the plays that are circulating now, is that people really are identifying with these characters. And that's an important part of what history does and literature and theater does. But the cure part of it is that we have a glossary of terms, right? To describe the experiences that you might have. We also have a glossary of technologies, the things that creators use to make that happen. So using the first person, using suspense, et cetera, I won't go into the details on what they all are. Those glossaries are helpful for students to wrap their heads around this. Essentially, it's kind of a Aristotelian task of naming and picking apart how a thing works.

(30:16):

But the cure part is that students can propose new terms for the glossary. And so I have students in my class saying, I had this experience. I don't think it's in the glossary. I think this should be included. One of the first ones was amusement. We didn't have that in there, but I'm genuinely amused. And another one that I added early on that I was really glad I did was confusion. If you read the sound in the Fury Faulkner's complex novel for the first time, it would be empowering for a student to know that a legitimate way to feel perhaps even the way the author wanted you to feel a little bit was confused. Giving students a chance to kind of add terms to that. I really see what we're building together as a new way of helping people discover creative works that aren't in the public discussion because they're old or they're a little challenging, they're not trending on book talk.

(31:10):

This is a new way of thinking about it. And there, I would say in those classes, when we do that work, the skill students are learning is how to say, well, how do I feel? I just experienced this? What is that experience that I'm having? And that is emotional intelligence. And I had so many students at the end of, I did this in the spring semester, students saying, listen, I'm not an English major. I'm studying forensic science or what have you, but having to name how I felt after reading a novel was really valuable. I think I'm going to use this emotional intelligence going forward. And I was happy with that.

Jessie L. Moore (31:49):

I really appreciate how both of your examples, and we didn't know this was going to play out this well when we invited both of you for this episode, but the ways that you are inviting students into authentic situations, that it is no longer just a, we're learning for learning sake, but it's really strong connections to the broader context in the world around them, opportunities for them to make meaning not only for themselves, but to think then about how they might inform the learning of others and help others explore the topics that you're teaching and engaging students with. So it's really fun hearing the synergies between your responses, and I appreciate that. One other synergy that I'm hearing, I think leads into Nolan's next question, so I'll let him take it.

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Nolan Schultheis (32:40):

I did really quickly just want to say I enjoyed how, in the last answer, you both gave one word and then completely elaborated on it. Kevin's was empathy and Mary's was confidence. And I feel like even just those two terms in relation are two very good characteristics to have just as a person. And I think that interfacing with the material is also really good. Those are two really good, just kind of characteristics to have as a student especially. I mean, both are great, but I would say confidence, especially just trusting in yourself. Even I lack the confidence sometimes to raise my hand if I'm not 100% certain of something. But going into our next question, what role do Groupwork and social cohesion play in your course-based undergraduate research activities, and how do you help students develop or advance their collaboration skills?

Kevin Ostoyich (33:40):

Well, we have not had a one person theatrical production. So historical theater course is predicated on the notion that every student has to write part of the script. Every student has to have a speaking role, and every student has to have a behind the scenes role. I'll tell you, we've had some pushback sometimes because the majority of the students over the years that I've taught the course, the majority of the students are not theater majors. When you tell everybody that they're going to be doing all those things, sometimes there's this disconnect in their head that they, they're like, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, you're right. Okay, yeah, and let's just keep going. And then as you start to remind them, then there's some pushback because then you get somebody who's says, the last time I was in a play was like third grade, I can't speak.

(34:43):

They would get to that confidence. And I remember I had a student, for example, the first time we did it, it was undergrad and graduate students together. Let's do a course where it's common room, it's two courses. Then eventually they come around and then it's not a problem. And I had this student who was a graduate student who really fought about having a speaking role. And of course she was assigned by this democratically who assigned, she got assigned the lead role. She's the mother in this, right? And she was, oh, I'm not going to do this. I'm not going to do this. Well, she was fabulous, of course. And then she was selected as the keynote speaker, the graduate speaker, student speaker at the graduate commencement. We had someone who did not want to have a speaking role, and then she is giving the speech to the commencement. So I guess that's just a comment to all professors are who get that pushback to say sometimes if you just show a little backbone and say, Hey, this works, you're going to do it, but it's best not to give in and just keep saying, you're going to do it, it's going to happen. And then you provide that support and you're doing a great job. And then eventually they don't need you anymore. Right.

Nolan Schultheis (36:20):

Very quickly before we ask Dr. Isbell for what she thinks about this question, I just wanted to say, I noticed within your answer this theme of a tough love and I know better. Just trust me. And I liked that theme, especially because having grown up with a father who kind of acted in that sense, not in a bad way, he just was like, if I was scared to do something, he would push me out of my comfort zone. He was like, listen, I know you're going to love it. I mean, specifically for me, it was roller coasters. I was so afraid to get on a roller coaster, and he was like, just trust me. Just get on one. And I haven't turned back

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since. So I just want to say I like that kind of mentality is being taken and applied in an education context because ultimately I feel like an education context is one that you can trust that mentality in the most because you're the professional on the matter. You're the most educated. So you do know best when it comes to applying the material,

Kevin Ostoyich (37:16):

But it does have to be done with respect. So tough love, but always with respect. And it's not intended at all. I'm not really into the whole power play, that kind of stuff. And when I detect anything like that's happening, there's a time to alter course. Alter course. We don't need that type of dynamic in clay. And we try to then all see, especially with the theater, we're all in it together. And that's why we want to make sure everybody's involved. And if we see that somebody's having some trouble, then you kind of do that management and more encouragement, but never fear. And I'll tell you somebody who played sports all my life, if a coach yelled at me, not happening, I'm not reacting to that or throwing a chair, all that kind of nonsense. So I know in the theater world, maybe just like in the sports world, some of that seems to creep in a little bit. Like directors being overly, I got to say, we've never experienced anything like that. Everybody is respected,

Jessie L. Moore (38:28):

And I appreciate that you are. In both of your examples, we're hearing elements of challenging students, but also recognizing where they need support behind the scenes or the emotional support as well. We know one of the salient practices of excellence in undergraduate research is balancing rigorous demands with emotional support. And that is really coming across in the examples you're both sharing. Mary, let's give you a chance to jump in on that question too.

Mary Isbell (38:59):

Sure. So it's really interesting to hear this perspective because as I've learned more about open pedagogy in particular, this idea that I'm co-creating things with students that we would make open, that we would openly license, I've actually shifted a few practices that were more in the vein of what Kevin's describing. It's going to be scary. You're going to do it. So I started 10 years ago teaching with Wiki education. So having students edit and there they create pseudonymous names for Wikipedia and they enter the fray of that public space, and they say what they want to change about an article, and then the other editors speak back to that, and they challenge the reliability of their sources. And that space is so rich, and it was always to me, just best learning they could possibly do was in that real environment. And then I started realizing we need to be more cautious about making students required to be public online.

(40:05):

And so I think there's a pretty big difference here between producing a production together that's private to the space of the class, to the space of who's invited guests, and then the internet. And so I've made it now so that students are invited to create Wikipedia accounts and edit an article, but they can also complete that assignment by remixing an article on our course website, which is private. And that is not as fun and not as many students do the work, but it's just something that I feel I need to do that way. And I wouldn't even say it's the standard with Wiki education to think about it that way, but I will say that in conversation, I mentor people who are teaching with Wiki education and in helping someone

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who was in a state where they were fearful about the kind of work they were adding to Wikipedia and what students would feel afraid of putting on Wikipedia, my advice to that professor was let the students choose if they want to go there or not.

(41:02):

And then suddenly you didn't have to scrap the assignment because you gave them agency and you let them choose. So I'll speak to that on the front of this class I have where students are describing their experiences with creative works and they're classifying them. They're coming up with terms, and they're potentially, if they want at the end of the course proposing those terms to the public tool, their terms could be part of that public glossary. That's a kind of culminating part of the class. And so far, I've said after grades are in, if you want to submit this, go ahead and do it, but it has no bearing on your grade. I'm not requiring you to make it public. So in our class, we have our own private glossary that they share with each other, and I'm navigating it, and I tend to worry that I'm too tentative, but I'm just always realizing that if students have agency and choose to put themselves out there, that's different than being pushed.

(42:00):

And so in the classroom setting, I have, well, I'm using something called Open Lab, which is a WordPress multi-site, but it's customized by the folks at City Tech cuny. And so we have that at our university, and I can create a WordPress site for the semester that's private just to our students in the class when they make a post, they can share it with their classmates or they can make it private, and I only I see it. And so what I learned by doing that is I could say to them at the beginning of the semester, if you want to share this with your classmates, they would love to see it. This is just so much different than any learning management system where all their work is just direct student to professor and it's not seen by the students. And so what I like about Open Lab is that it allows me to say, if you want to share it, you don't have to.

(42:50):

And what I learned was that students, one student shared for the first assignment and everybody saw her post and we could all talk about it and we workshop drafts together. But as far as really making it available where if they wanted to go see your post, they could, over the course of the semester students, as they reflected on their assignments, they were saying, I think I'm ready. I think I'm ready to make this post public. And so then more and more we're making them public. And by the end of the semester they were sharing with each other. And so it was neat to see that if I didn't force it, they would gradually do it. But it's like this art of making sure they see how cool it is to share and how much we all benefit. Currently, I'm teaching two classes with the same open lab, one class.

(43:34):

A lot of people are sharing the other class, no one has shared yet, but it's early days in the semester. And I'm like, at what point is someone going to share? And then everybody's going to say, oh, now I know about their project. I want people to know about my project. That's where I am on this. And I do think that goes to, all these projects are private, they're about your own experience, but the collaborative nature of the class is that we really all learn better if everybody's feeling like they can share. And so I'm alluring them into sharing instead of saying, you must,

Jessie L. Moore (44:07):

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And your example. And in thinking about all of the plays that Kevin has mentioned, it also highlights that part of it is building our students' confidence in us as instructors that we have rationales for what we're asking 'em to do, but also that other students have done it before and have had positive takeaways. And that as they start to see that then I think sometimes makes it a little easier to buy into what may feel like a risk and to recognize that there's value in embarking on that new activity that they may not have as much comfort with.

Mary Isbell (44:49):

I just want to say one more thing about this because I think Kevin, the class you're describing won't work if they don't do it right. You need everybody to participate in that way. And what I was thinking as you were describing that is I want a class that I can advertise and be very explicit about, this is what's going to be expected of you. But I have to say that I'm working in covert ways because we don't have a lot of humanities majors and we have courses in the core curriculum that students are taking to engage with humanities. And so I don't want to scare anyone away, and I want to bring in as many people as I can and I want to invite, right? So it's just a different dynamic. I would be so delighted to say on big letters, everyone's going to share, everything's going here, this is what we're going to do, and maybe we'll get there at some point, but right now it's more a kind of careful encouraging

Jessie L. Moore (45:43):

And reiterating that context matters and all of these practices we have to think about not just a copy and paste to our institutional context, but really adapting in meaningful ways to our students, our programs, our institutions, et cetera. We've really enjoyed this conversation today. Our last question for you is if there's anything else you'd like our listeners to know about as they're thinking about fostering or engaging in course-based undergraduate research. You've shared a lot of tips throughout our conversation, but is there anything else that you'd like our listeners to know as they're thinking about these experiences?

Kevin Ostoyich (46:20):

For me, one thing that I realized thinking about being on this podcast, thinking about my own growth and what type of student I was when I was in undergrad, why did I kind of gravitate to history and research? And one thing that we haven't really spoken a lot about, I think I mentioned it very briefly and saying that I came up with ways to get students into the archives, is that archives are so underrated at universities. And I remember specifically having to go into the university archives at the University of Pennsylvania, and I think that really was quite a moment for me. And it's just too bad that it happened so late in my time at the University of Pennsylvania, and I actively have made it my mission to get students into the archives because they are so full of mystery. And I just challenge universities to get first year students active right away.

(47:45):

Don't wait until their senior thesis project to then say, this is what it really is. This is what we really do. The first three years you've just been kind of doing those baby papers, but instead saying, Hey, first year, freshman year, here's an archive. Here's a football helmet. Figure out the history of it and just let 'em out. And I think we hold students back until we find the ones that we think have the potential to go to grad school and say, okay, now we're going to tell them we're give the skeleton key. We're give them all

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the secrets of what it's really like everybody else. And I just find that that is really a shame because once the students get that fire, that curiosity, the rest of their four years are just going to be so much different because they're going to be doing all the things that they wanted to exploring, and I think they're just going to be doing much better work with that. So that for me is the thing that we have left out is this challenge to universities to say, treat first year students with respect and allow them to do the things that scholars do. Don't wait until their last year when they're already kind of halfway gone thinking about interviews and so forth. Get 'em at the beginning and tell them all the joys and the mysteries of conducting research,

Jessie L. Moore (49:16):

Which also addresses access to these experiences as well, opening up to more students. So Mary, what would you add?

Mary Isbell (49:23):

So I am so excited that you were saying what you did Kevin about we're not letting them have the really rich experiences. And I've thought a lot about why we don't or why we haven't or why others don't. And I think I'm experiencing right now and a first year writing class where I'm having students try to do this, kind of identify how the writing was made to make you feel the way it does. It is complicated. It is surprising. It's different and it's scary. And the only way I feel like it works is because I have a structure where I'm not giving them grades, but I'm saying, did you complete the assignment? If yes, you get complete, you get full credit at whatever time it clicks for you. So I have been engaging with grading practices since the pandemic, and I think that's really key to doing this kind of work, especially if you want to invite students in a thoughtful way that meets them where they are, then you have to take, I mean, they'll be so frozen with panic that they couldn't possibly engage.

(50:26):

I'm thinking about the kinds of things I'm asking my students to do right now, and if what I said was, yeah, you got it A, or you didn't get it F or C or whatever, I actually need to create a structure where they can experiment and it's actually, it's hard work for me to convince them that just you're going to try again. You're almost there. And that it's important how we evaluate that work and how we assess that work in order to make it possible. But actually everything opened up once I realized you can kind of do anything with students. They're capable of a lot more than they've ever been asked to do. If you set up a structure where they're invited to do that and you give them tons of feedback and there's no grade penalty for failing, failure is part of the process, then it's pretty cool. You can do a lot of things.

Jessie L. Moore (51:14):

Thank you for sharing your adventures with undergraduate research experiences. I really appreciate the themes that we've heard about developing confidence about supporting students along the way about fostering curiosity and really introducing students early to what it means to be a researcher, to be inquisitive and to explore the tools that allow them to investigate, whether it is related to something that they're reading or something they're finding in an archive. It's just a really dynamic possibility for how we can integrate undergraduate research into the university experience. So thank you very much for sharing your time with us today. We appreciate it. So Nolan, what stood out to you as you reflect on our interview?

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Nolan Schultheis (52:09):

Dr. Ostoyich and Dr. Isbell had two different emotions whenever it came to what they prioritized when looking at their assessments, and they were empathy and confidence. I thought it was funny that the two were somewhat related in terms of just the type of category they fall under, which is emotional intelligence and emotional intelligence ties into just interacting with other people. It's funny how there's almost this big culminating idea that there just needs to be a greater relationship with professor and student, but it also at the same time needs to be structured enough so that there's still valuable learning being taken place.

Jessie L. Moore (52:54):

Absolutely. And that theme that was carrying through about the relationships involved in all of this, that they knew their students well enough to recognize when they were stressed about something, when they needed a confidence boost, when they needed different tools or resources, but also the intent of trying to facilitate those relationships earlier hearing, for example, the challenge to invite first year students into these spaces and to provide authentic opportunities for learning that students can rise to that opportunity. I really appreciate the confidence, and they were talking about building confidence, but the confidence that they have in students, students can certainly be partners in learning, and we see that in the examples that they shared and then just the curiosity that they're trying to foster across their courses. We had two really rich examples of undergraduate research and the humanities that really were threading back and forth in ways that we might not have anticipated, but hearing those themes of relationships, empathy, confidence, curiosity, and just trust in students to rise to the occasion. Anything you want to add?

Nolan Schultheis (54:16):

Yeah, so you had mentioned the pushing the students out of their comfort zone, but also kind of being safe with them. And I had kind of diluted this point from Dr. Isbell, and that is controlled agency. I think controlled agency is a great thing that a lot of professors need to start applying, and it's that allow your students to have some input, but at the same time, you're still controlling the class, you're still controlling the course and you're guiding them, but it's almost unknowingly to their degree.

Jessie L. Moore (54:52):

Brilliant collaboration. Once again, I'm Jessie Moore.

Nolan Schultheis (54:59):

And I'm Nolan Schultheis. Thank you for joining us for Making College Worth It from Elon University Center for Engaged Learning.

Jessie L. Moore (55:05):

To learn more about course-based undergraduate research, see our show notes and other resources www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org. Subscribe to our show wherever you listen to podcasts for more strategies on making college worth it.