Innovation in Teaching and Learning Grant Proposal
Inclusive Pedagogy in Encounters: Addressing Sense of Belonging and the Problem of
Exclusion Among Students and Faculty
Final Report
ITL Participants: Sarah Davies, Juli Dunn, Courtney Fitzsimmons, Kurt Hoffman,
Delbert Hutchison, Helen Kim, Libby Miller, Adeline Rother, Jenna Terry, and Devon
Wooten

- **Did recipients complete what they set out to complete?**

  The proposed goals of this project were the following:
  1. To centralize the importance of belonging in Encounters;

  In our proposal, we indicated that we would accomplish this goal by first generating a
reading list that focuses on belonging and also includes best practices regarding pedagogical
tools that operationalize, actualize and assess belonging in higher education courses. We
indicated the importance of arriving at a definition of belonging to ground interest and technical
capacity within Encounters for faculty and students.

  We accomplished this initial goal through generating a reading list and meeting multiple
times throughout the summer to help us think about how to understand and frame belonging. In
addition, we discussed what "sense of belonging" is in the literature and what it might look like
in Encounters vis-a-vis student learning goals including discussion and writing as well as
assessment of student learning.

  Finally, in our revamped summer faculty development session (LAUNCH), we explicitly
devoted time to centralizing the importance of belonging among faculty in a couple of ways.
First, we conducted small and large group work to establish ground rules and guidelines for our
day-long session and our weekly work during the academic year. In addition, three members of
the ITL devoted an hour and a half to discussing our work on belonging and the importance of it
for Encounters.

  **2. Focus the Encounters Instructor Summer LAUNCH (previously called
  Bootcamp) to underscore the problem of exclusion and to introduce belonging as a
  necessary pedagogical goal and foal point.**

  We accomplished this goal during the LAUNCH. Previously, the entire day devoted to
faculty development prior to teaching Encounters in the Fall has historically focused the majority

of time on discussion of the intellectual aspects of texts with some attention paid to writing pedagogy. This year, our ITL overhauled the LAUNCH. The text below between the asterisks details our agenda:

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Encounters LAUNCH

August 24, 2017

Agenda

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8:30-9:   **Coffee, tea and treats available in the Staff Lounge (Penrose 318)**

9-9:05:   **Dalia Corkrum welcomes us to Penrose Library (Quiet Room)**

9:05-9:30:   **Introductions (Quiet Room)**

9:30-10:45:   **Faculty Development in Encounters during 2017-2018 (Quiet Room)**

We will do some exercises and talk about our own learning and our students' learning. We will also think about the implications of campus climate and larger social and national contexts as they pertain to learning. Finally, we will establish ground rules and expectations for each other that will help guide us as we begin our year as a community of Encounters faculty.

10:45- 11:   **BREAK**

Coffee, tea and snacks available in the Staff Lounge; feel free to use the time to stretch, move, close your eyes or anything that helps give your mind and body a break

11-11:30:   **Discussion of ITL on Inclusive Pedagogy in Encounters (Quiet Room)**

Kurt Hoffman, Delbert Hutchison, and Libby Miller will give an overview of this ITL with individual thoughts on this work in their own teaching.

11:30-1:   **LUNCH!**

Groups of 6 will decide on a place to go for lunch in town. Your task is to talk about ideas for the first day of Encounters over yummy food and drink. Please pick someone from your group to take notes and come back ready to write down your ideas to share with the larger group. VERY IMPORTANT - If one person

can pay with a JP Morgan card and save receipts, this will help tremendously. You can give me your receipt when you return.

1-2: **Large group sharing of ideas for the first day; white boards, walk around, and sharing out (Quiet Room); Courtney Fitzsimmons, Chair of the Encounters Syllabus Committee (ESC) will talk to us about the ESC's work during the 2017-2018 year.**

2-2:45: *Frankenstein* **Breakout Sessions (Penrose 318, Penrose 317, Semi Circle area on second floor)**

Sharon Alker (close reading), Courtney Fitzsimmons (deep discussion), and Adeline Rother (thematic connections with other texts) will facilitate sessions devoted to the topics that emerged as strengths and concerns with Frankenstein. In the breakout sessions you attend, feel free to contribute ideas that have worked well for you as well as any questions that you have pertaining to these topics. Also, you can take advantage of one, two or three breakout sessions. Ideas will be recorded on white boards in each space.

2:45-3: **BREAK**

Coffee, tea and snacks available in the Staff Lounge; feel free to use the time to stretch, move, close your eyes or anything that helps give your mind and body a break

3-4: **Perspectives on Writing in Encounters (Quiet Room)**

Sally Bormann and Devon Wootten will talk about their approaches to writing in Encounters. A handout with some key pointers from Lydia McDermott will be provided. We will have time to share the knowledge in the room as well as time for Q and A. At 3:50 PM Amy Blau, Scholarly Communications Librarian, will talk to us about important changes to MLA citation style.

4-5: **Reflecting on our day together, moving forward into this year (Quiet Room)**

We will use this time to address any loose ends and any outstanding issues you would like to raise. Tim Doyle will talk a bit about the Cleo site. Also, in preparation for our meeting on the first day of classes from 4-5 PM, Juli Dunn will come toward the beginning of this hour to hear questions re: what faculty would like to know from Student Affairs pertaining to first year students in Encounters.

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In addition to our work during the summer LAUNCH, weekly faculty development session have paid some attention to issues of belonging and problems of exclusion in our classrooms. Specifically, we have had various discussions as an entire group of faculty regarding classroom dynamics, instilling a growth mindset for students and ourselves, emphasizing multiple models of learning, and emphasizing intentionality regarding belonging in the classroom. Specific to Encounters texts as connected to belonging and inclusivity, the Encounters Syllabus Committee (ESC) has sought feedback that explicitly seeks to understand how the texts taught during the current academic year do or do not support inclusivity and belonging in the classroom. Many faculty have provided thoughtful and anonymous feedback regarding these connections and the ESC's work to change the syllabus is based very much on this input.

Regarding interpersonal dynamics, the faculty development sessions have changed substantially in tone. Numerous faculty currently teaching in Encounters have voiced that the Tuesday sessions from 4-5 PM are more supportive, less combative, and generally more inclusive. In addition, faculty who do not teach in Encounters have in various formats voiced to the Director the noticeable differences that they see in their colleagues and their experiences teaching Encounters. We take these expressions as evidence of our work in trying to foster belonging for Encounters faculty in addition to the trickle effects on other non-Encounters faculty.

- **What are the products of their efforts in terms of content, format, and public dissemination?**

  The intended results of this project included the following:
  1. Development of faculty development opportunities, specific to Encounters, focused on various aspects of inclusive pedagogy. These may include sessions devoted to syllabus design, fostering inclusive classroom discussions, scaffolding assignments, universal design in writing;

  Many of these results have occurred in the summer and spring LAUNCH sessions with explicit attention paid to fostering inclusive classrooms, diffusing problematic classroom dynamics, scaffolding assignments, and writing assignments. Syllabus design and universal design in writing emerge as more informal results, achieved primarily through sharing and dissemination of materials from individual instructors, not as pointed topics of faculty development meetings.

2. Development of assessment tools to measure impact and effectiveness of belonging within the classroom;

We have not developed standardized assessment tools to measure the impact and effectiveness of belonging within the classroom. Some instructors have independently included measures of belonging in their own classroom evaluations. We see this as a potential area of continued work.

3. Development of assessment tools to measure the impact of faculty development workshops on inclusive pedagogy;

After the summer LAUNCH, a follow-up survey was administered to faculty participants. Of 17 respondents, 12 indicated that they would like see more faculty development sessions devoted to developing a toolbox for inclusive pedagogy in Encounters. Also, in response to the question, "The Encounters ITL group on inclusive pedagogy is thinking about ways of assessing "belonging" in this course. Would you be interested in working with members from our group toward this goal?" 8 out of 15 respondents indicated "yes" and 6 out of 15 respondents indicated "maybe."

4. A change (hopefully a positive one) in sense of belonging among first year students and faculty coupled with a decrease in the problem of exclusion and isolation;

We have yet to figure out a way to measure this desired outcome systematically across Encounters sections. Part of this problem lies in the evaluation mechanisms currently in place, which do not measure belonging in Encounters in a standardized way across all sections. Perhaps the future work that is of interest to many faculty members including the incoming Faculty Chair, Barry Balof, to redo our current student evaluations may open up the possibility of effectively and systematically measuring sense of belong, not just in Encounters, but across all courses.

However, a number of faculty members have reported that their work on belonging has resulted in change, either from previous years of teaching the course or throughout the current academic year.

Regarding faculty dynamics, as previously stated we do believe that our work has resulted in substantial changes in faculty dynamics, particularly during our Tuesday faculty development meetings.

5. Public presentation of our work.

Our group has discussed the possibility of a variety of public presentations of our work. CTL sessions and workshops available to the faculty at large are two possibilities. In addition, and as a more focused way of doing more with inclusive pedagogy in Encounters, we have talked about small groups of Encounters Instructors who voluntarily work on specific aspects of inclusive pedagogy for this course during the academic year. The results of this group work would then be presented to the Encounters faculty at large and possibly to faculty beyond the Encounters program. For example, we could imagine a small group of instructors who focus on universal design regarding writing assignments for Encounters. Another group could work on syllabus design for inclusivity in Encounters.

- **Do any of these have potential long-term positive effects on the curriculum or academic program more generally?**

Much of the work of the ITL has the potential for great long-term positive effects on the academic program. Specifically, situating belonging as a vital component to student learning and retention holds great possibilities for changes to the curriculum in terms of content and to pedagogical practices to effectively teach content. In addition, as many Encounters instructors do teach other courses, we have heard reports of the effects of work on inclusive pedagogy and belonging on instructors courses outside of the Encounters program.

- **How many students were directly involved or indirectly impacted by the grant?**

While we do not know the entirety of the direct or indirect impact, we can speak to impact through the experiences of ITL members. Below are individual reports from ITL participants:

Davies: Pre-fall training of RA's and SA's (approximately 50 students). This training included a discussion panel with Davies to discuss the Summer Read, *Make Your Home Among Strangers*. This text was also on our reading list for our ITL. The RA's and SA's then went on to lead discussions, in part on the subject of belonging, with their respective first-years.

Rother: 12 students in French II and 15 in Comp 170

Hutchison: 16 students in Encounters; 9 students in Bio 350 (Evolutionary Biology)

Wootten: 15 students in Encounters

Terry: 16 students in Encounters, 28 students in Comp 170, 13 students in the Summer '17 Fly-In (not including 1 already counted in Comp), 3 pre-major advisees (not including 2 already counted in the Summer Fly-In), 5 students trained and working as Writing Fellows in Encounters.

Fitzsimmons: 9 students in REL-209: Jewish Texts & Traditions, 6 students in REL-301: Reason & Madness. 3 incoming premajor advisees.

Hoffman: 12 students in Encounters sem. 1 and 16 students in sem. 2. This program has also affected the other courses I taught this year: 32 students Phy103 (Sound and Music), 20 students Phys357 (Thermal Physics), and 16 students Phys146 (General Physics).

- **Did the project enhance the quality of learning experiences offered to students?**

  Yes.

- **What evidence do you have that demonstrates impact on student learning (if applicable)?**

  Again, while we do not know the full extent of impact on student learning, we can speak to impact through the experiences of ITL members. Below are individual reports from ITL participants:

  From Delbert Hutchison:
  "As this is my first time teaching Encounters I have no comparative experience. However much I wanted to teach the course, I was very concerned with how it would go. A direct result of the ITL summer work (launched by Mary James' workshop), followed by the productive LAUNCH and weekly meetings, has been one of the best teaching experiences of my career. I specifically and vocally made inclusion a key goal from day one. My group quickly gelled and although there is no question directly inquiring into inclusion and belonging, the most common thing mentioned in the teaching evaluations from the first semester was how comfortable they felt in class and what a supportive environment it was. That would not have happened without the concepts and strategies I garnered from this ITL experience."

  From Jenna Terry:
  "My Fall 2017 Encounters section included JanStarts, nontraditional students, and students from backgrounds not well-represented at Whitman, and thus there was atypical opportunity for inclusivity to founder. However, mid- and end-term peer- and self-evaluations showed a strong value for difference, with multiple students expressing (absent specific prompt)

their gratitude for and ability to learn from perspectives and approaches far removed from their own. In addition, one of my Fall 2017 Comp 170 sections presented a curious crisis of inclusivity between certain US-born students and those who either were, or merely *appeared* to be, International students. In assignments and activities, I drew upon Mary James's May 2017 Workshop and our ITL discussions and readings to improve peer interactions, attitudes toward Encounters, persona- and audience-sensitive communication, and habits of writing. Changed attitude toward others was visible in classroom behavior and acceptance of peer feedback."

From Courtney Fitzsimmons:
"While I was not teaching Encounters this year, I brought what I learned in Mary James' workshop and our ITL to my courses in Religion and changed how I conducted my premajor advising. I focused on assignment transparency in both courses and scaffolding in my 300-level course. I also changed the way I conduct my first meeting with premajor advisees. For example, I gave each student information on how to find work on campus as part of a general packet of information. I regularly emailed my premajor advisees and had them check in with me more frequently than I had in the past."

From Kurt Hoffman
"The greatest impact of the activities centered around inclusivity has been on my approach to the personal exchanges I have with students and colleagues. As we discussed various methods to improve student connections to the classroom, I came away with a new focus on relational aspects of productive learning environment. I first recognized the value of community in the ways our Encounters faculty meetings prior to the fall semester focused more on issues of respect, collegiality, and support rather than solely on content. Similarly, my encounters class has benefitted from emphasizing a healthy community in the classroom. By taking the pressure off of the content coverage piece and letting students have the freedom to be goofy at times or speak about ideas that aren't fully formed, we have actually covered more ground than in previous versions of the class I taught. In the process I have developed a closer connection to my students that permits broader conversations about their classes, plans for break, or other interests on campus. In short, we have a community that has quickly absorbed four new students this semester."

- **What were the limitations or failings of this project, and how, in retrospect, might they have been better addressed or remedied?**

The tight sequencing of faculty development session focused on texts in Encounters limited the availability of time to devote to doing more direct work with inclusive pedagogy. Given that next year's syllabus will see a significant reduction in the number of texts, the program will theoretically have more time available to devote to pedagogy, broadly speaking.

This time could be used to further the work of the ITL around specific areas of inclusive pedagogy.