# HUM&101 Instructor Guide

Dear Humanities Colleagues,

Greetings! Welcome to Introduction to Humanities, HUM 101. The purpose of this Instructor Guide is to provide some insight into the course structure, as well as to highlight the strengths/weaknesses of this course. It is my hope that you will personalize these materials to fit your expertise and methods, so that we may provide truly interdisciplinary instruction to our Humanities students. Thank you for considering this class for your pedagogical journey.

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## Why to teach this course:

The short answer: because it’s awesome. The long answer: because teaching “open courses” helps us to embrace the powerful attitude that knowledge cannot be privately owned, and access to knowledge is a human right. Using these materials, by either adopting the course wholly or parting out bits-and-pieces to support your own course will help to reduce the price of materials and instruction to our students, keeping education accessible to us all.

## How to teach this course:

However you like! Most of the items in this course are covered under “Creative Commons” licensing, which means you are free to use and/or modify them to suit your specific needs. Because every instructor is different and our classrooms often have a different dynamic from term to term and year to year, we must always be in the business of adapting and improving our materials and methods. For instance, my syllabus is fairly “cheeky” because I try to infuse my personal humour into the materials. But if that simply isn’t your style-- change it! Let’s put our resources together through open courses to provide our students with the best in high-quality learning. You might wish to supplement this course with ancillary materials such as traditional instructors texts or research articles. The course contains enough dedicated content to be taught as a stand-alone without the use of supplementals; however, including additional resources can only help to strengthen the breadth of how we approach the Humanities.

## Notes on specific activities:

I have found that a combination of engaging online discussions work well to promote student engagement throughout the week, and these discussion forums also give the instructor the opportunity to get to know students throughout the course. Furthermore, in the pilot of this course I found the “weekly reflections” activity to be much more fulfilling and outcomes-related than activities I’ve used in prior Humanities courses. Feel free to modify the reflections to relate course concepts with current social issues, as desired. Finally, the “capstone project” final assessment at the conclusion of the course is, I feel, a very important component of a core Humanities course. I’ve facilitated this project in all of my Humanities courses for the past few years, and I’ve found it is very important to encourage students to choose unique topics and clear those topics with the instructor, in order to avoid a plethora of monotonous subjects that are simply the result of students doing a web search of “humanities topics”. Also, I’ve found that offering students a creative video option in addition to the standard powerpoint provides opportunities for more tech-savvy folks to express their topics in new ways. I’ve encouraged students to use YouTube and also the animated site Xtranormal for unusual presentation options. Additionally, for a face-to-face course, the “capstone project” can be adapted to include a brief written paper and some sort of visual representation of the student’s topic.

Although I have required students to conduct formal presentations in years past, I have begun creating a “Humanities Faire” during finals week, which is essentially an exhibition of student projects that other classes on campus can see. Here are some examples of “visual aides” I have seen over the years: posters, art projects, students in costume, various foods/culinary dishes, models, dioramas, musical demos-- the list goes on and on. Don’t be afraid to challenge your students to be creative and take chances! The feedback from our campus community has been outstanding, and I’ve found this to be a very eclectic and poignant way of addressing assessment goals within the study of the Humanities.It is also perfectly feasible to have your face-to-face courses create a video or a powerpoint presentation; just adapt the idea of the capstone project to suit your learning community’s unique needs. You will see in the “capstone project module” that I have included instructions/grading criteria for both the online as well as face-to-face variations; feel free to adapt these tools in whatever way works best for your teaching method. Additionally, the Humanities Faire is a great way to create opportunities for interaction and extra credit. Usually, I offer my on-campus students extra credit for creating advertising posters to put up on campus for our faire. I also give the online students extra credit for attending the faire, thus bridging some of the gaps between the classes and creating a place for mutual Humanities students to meet one another (plus, who doesn’t love free points???)

At about the halfway mark in the course, the midterm exam should be launched if you choose to use assessments. For this activity, the instructor should choose specific historical figures/modern icons/cultural phenomena/etc for students to research. The idea is to engage learners in linking past and present in a meaningful, research-guided way. However, the course can be successfully facilitated without the use of the exam, which may be helpful in abbreviated course terms. The concluding assessment of choice is a creative “capstone project”, which may be varied from term to term depending upon instructor preference and time limitations.

A note about discussions- these were written primarily for the online course, but are easily adapted to a face-to-face classroom. One format I have found to be effective for eliciting student involvement with materials is a ⅔ lecture-to-team ratio. For instance, in a class meeting 3 days per week, the first two days are lecture-based and the third day is a team discussion using the discussion forums and guided responses as templates or guides. Additionally, the discussion forums and guided responses can be chopped up and divided throughout a week for a face-to-face course, with students meeting in teams to examine key questions after a period of lecture, then completing the guided response as an individual or team activity later in the week during classroom meeting time. There are a myriad of options of how to adjust and personalize the format to meet your specific teaching style and classroom needs.

Face-to-face “Challenge Activities”: You will notice that most weeks contain discussions, a weekly reflection, and also a “challenge activity”. These challenges are meant to provide creative alternatives in a face-to-face course to vary the routine away from chronic writing. These are examples of activities I have used with success in my own on-campus courses, but feel free to adjust them to fit your specific group. I have included a note on grading in the syllabus. As a general rule, you can substitute one “challenge activity” for one discussion, so that the total course points remain the same. These activities can add tremendous variety to the classroom. I even keep a box of puppets in my office for just such occasions. The Humanities is an “active” discipline; do not be afraid to challenge your students in unusual ways. As adults, we can all benefit greatly from creating a “safe place” in our learning environment to let down our guards and be creative and risk-taking. You have the opportunity, and the power, to create this perfect storm for your students. I can tell you from experience that if you build a sense of trust for the sanctity of the learning environment, the rewards of having your class follow you out on a limb to engage with materials in a new way are tremendous and barrier-breaking.

## Student feedback from the pilot:

After piloting this course during the fall of 2012, I received many positive responses from students. Specific to the open course format, students expressed extreme gratitude at not having to purchase a textbook. While some open courses use materials that are lower priced than traditional textbooks, I designed this course using materials that are 100% free to students and the course can be taught with or without using supplemental printed texts. This was overwhelmingly the most positive feedback from the pilot course, and it is my hope that instructors adopting this course will teach it in the true spirit of open-source learning.

Thank you for considering this course and these materials, and I wish you the very best as we bring the Humanities to our students.

In the Humanities,

Professor Angela M. Lohr (aka “The ProfessLohr”’)



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