FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

Dr Jim Haendiges
Associate Professor of English / Director of FYE
Dr. Jim Haendiges is an Associate Professor of technical writing here at Dixie State University. When it comes to his students, his mission is to illustrate that it’s acceptable to think “outside of the box.” He finds that college students tend to limit themselves to what they feel they are good at, but instead should strive to work across multiple disciplines. This will allow them to have a lifelong pursuit in obtaining new skills after they graduate, making them much more valuable in the workforce. Someone who can write is good, but someone who can write and transform the piece into another type of media is great.

A common misconception about active learning is that it needs to literally be physically active, a conception that therefore excludes the English classroom. However, the definition of active learning is actually “a method of teaching that engages students more than passive listening does.” Dr. Jim does an
exemplary job showing that there are many ways to actively teach a class, even in an English course. For the past five years, he has engaged his English 3180 (Writing for Multimedia) students in a semester long project to create a podcast and short documentary!

Upon the announcement of this project, students give two distinct reactions. Half of the class is ecstatic because they finally feel liberated to do something beyond “just” writing. The other half’s eyes are filled with sheer terror because this is NOT what English majors typically do. The latter reaction is exactly why Dr. Jim wants to use these active learning methods. Pushing students to adapt their scripts into another medium promotes their growth as writers, since they see their pieces from another perspective. Dr. Jim doesn’t expect the best videos or sound quality, because it’s not a film class. What he does look for is groups who adapt their writing when needed and put forth a sincere effort in creating a new end product.

In phase one, small groups are tasked with planning their concept and writing a script for their podcast. Many groups utilize the resources available on campus, such as the recording equipment from Radio Dixie in the Jennings Building, while some choose to record at home. In the second phase, groups go back to the drawing board and plan how they will transform their podcast into a video. Sometimes the leap from the podcast to video is seamless and other times groups have to scrap the original idea and move forward with another. After planning again, groups re-work their scripts so they will function with the video. When it’s time to record the footage, some are hesitant because it is out of their comfort zone. But Dr. Jim’s students ultimately love this course as they grow and firmly grasp new concepts. For example, students have gained insight on writing more realistically for the recording, such as condensing a paragraph into a sentence.
Another outcome that has emerged from this course, beyond the skills learned during the project, is that students get a "real world" group work experience. Typically, group work in college has a bad reputation because students work pace, learning style, personalities, and motivation drastically differ. Dr. Jim knows that everyone works in some sort of group after college, and stresses the importance for students to be adaptable. He purposely incorporates activities like this, which both weigh heavily on their final grade and mimic actual situations that occur in the workplace. His students have responded phenomenally over the years. Dr. Jim said, "The students in my Fall 19 class really took this project to the next level and did as much as they could in every step. In the end it helped them get the most out of the project."

I think the key to active learning is that the focus shifts from the instructor reciting information to the students working with the information to create something new or discover the information in a hands-on way. In English we do this with almost every paper we write, but a class like English 3180 takes that experience off the printed page and into more diverse tangible, visual forms. We take our most basic English major building blocks and adapt them to different mediums, which results in projects that an English major may never have set out to do-like writing and producing a mini-documentary.

- Brianna Velling
My experience in Dr. Haendiges’ English 3180 actively engaged my mind as I participated in meaningful group discussions, multimodal project planning, and strategic collaboration with my fellow students. I used critical thinking to become a problem-solver, a researcher, a peer tutor, and a better communicator. Instructors who challenge students to learn unfamiliar concepts, techniques, or technologies create an exceptional learning environment.

- Rachel Christ

DR. JIM’S DOCUMENTARY

While groups create their short documentary, Dr. Jim is alongside of them, filming his own documentary about the semester project. He prefers working with his students instead of solely instructing them because it creates synergistic environment that motivates and supports the students. Not only is it a benefit to the students, & Dr. Jim learns from this experience, finding ways to improve the project for future sections. Through Dr. Jim’s creative efforts, he has demonstrated that active learning can be done in any discipline.