RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Refusing to Wait: Just-in-Time Teaching
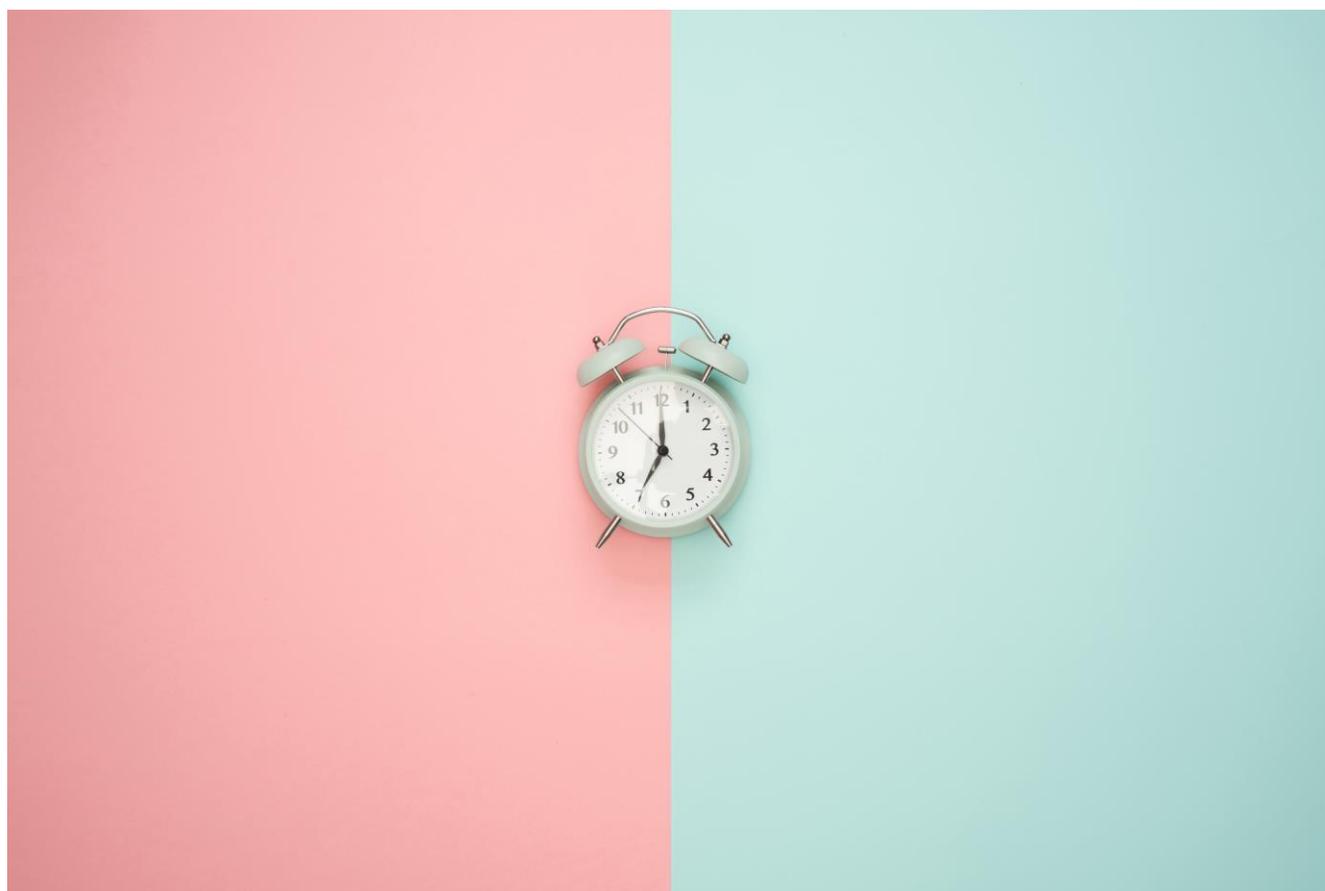
by Ann J. Cahill and Tom Mould

PHOTO BY ICONS8 TEAM

Three days after the 2016 presidential election, a professor at Elon University (a medium-sized, private university in North Carolina) emailed a group of colleagues, students, and friends, suggesting that they brainstorm ideas of how to respond productively to the election results. That email conversation led to several initiatives. An early concrete action was a letter signed by over 500 faculty and staff and published in the university's student newspaper that stated support for students belonging to groups who experienced increased vulnerability in the wake of the election (Huber et al 2016). Community members interested in sharing ideas about activism and engagement began to meet regularly. By the end of the month, several of the faculty and staff on this original email thread had signed on to perhaps the most audacious idea that had been generated: to develop and offer a one-credit course in the upcoming spring semester designed to provide students with intellectual and practical skills that would be useful in facing the social and political challenges that had been revealed in sharp relief during the campaign.

This article describes the process of developing the course, its structure and content, and its effects on the students, faculty, and staff who participated in it. The article also discusses strengths and weaknesses of the course design as a means of helping to ensure the success of any future endeavors. The course, which eventually came to be titled "Refusing to Wait: Intellectual and Practical Resources for Troubled Times," is an example of how institutions of higher education can respond quickly and effectively to political developments, while keeping student learning at the center of their mission.

> *The course, which eventually came to be titled "Refusing to Wait: Intellectual and Practical Resources for Troubled Times," is an example of how institutions of higher education can respond quickly and effectively to political developments, while keeping student learning at the center of their mission.*

The Origins of "Refusing to Wait"

The faculty and staff who committed to working on the course were motivated by what they perceived as profound and imminent threats to democratic institutions and ideals. They believed that students would be well-served by a class that focused on utilizing the disciplinary knowledge of the university's faculty and staff to both understand and respond effectively to the current political situation. What began as a series of informal conversations and brainstorming soon led to an interest meeting with more than thirty faculty, staff and students. By the end of the first week of December, dozens of faculty and staff agreed to participate in the course, while eight faculty and staff committed to developing and organizing the one-credit-hour, pass/fail class, to be offered in the spring semester.

University administrators quickly gave their approval, the Peace and Social Justice program agreed to offer the class under their program, and in the third week of December, the university's registrar sent an email to all students, informing them of the class and inviting them to register for it. Detailed planning for the course began in early January. By the time the class began less than a month later, we had assembled a teaching team of 22 faculty and staff members who would serve as presenters, organizers, and discussion leaders, all of whom offered their time and energy in addition to their regular course load and professional obligations (in other words, participating in this class did not count toward a faculty member's course load, and no additional compensation was provided for staff who participated in it). Over 80 students registered for the class.

The process of designing the class was challenging, for at least four reasons:

1. Time pressures: we began the process of designing the class in earnest in early December, and the first class meeting was on February 1.

2. Uncharted territory: we were designing a highly unusual class, the likes of which had never been taught at Elon University, and so there were no ready templates or norms that we could rely on.

3. The number of cooks in the kitchen: as the planning continued, the core organizing group eventually consisted of five faculty and staff: Professor of Religion Toddie Peters and Professor of Anthropology and Folklore Tom Mould who served as lead instructors, and Assistant Dean of Campus Life and Director of Residence Life Uchenna Baker, Professor of Philosophy Ann Cahill, and Director of Inclusive Community Well-Being Leigh-Anne Royster. Not surprisingly, there were differences of opinion about the focus of the class, the details of the course description, learning outcomes, and so on. While we were lucky to have a high degree of collegiality and honesty among the core organizers, the number of people involved combined with the time pressure meant that the planning sessions could be somewhat fraught -- but also invigorating. It was important to all involved with the course that there were both faculty and staff participants involved in every step of planning and implementation; this wide representation from across different programs and offices allowed for a deep understanding of students' intellectual needs and interests.

4. Navigating the political waters; this was a major topic of discussion among the core group of organizers from the very inception of the course. There was little doubt that it was the presidential election of 2016 that motivated the course, and for the core organizers as individuals, it was the particular result of that election that provided a sense of urgency. Yet everyone agreed that our responsibilities as educators required us to design

a course that was resolutely nonpartisan. To be nonpartisan, however, is not to be value-neutral or value-free; we wanted the course to focus on, among other things, understanding the value of democratic institutions and principles that we believed to be at the heart of both the role of the university and democratic society in general. The challenge, of course, was that one of the two major political parties in the US had selected as its standard bearer a candidate who espoused profoundly undemocratic beliefs, and in doing so had politicized principles that had previously been understood as nonpartisan and foundational to our democracy, for example, a belief in an independent, free press, or the epistemological value of evidence and science. To take a stance in favor of evidence, then, or against clear, explicit forms of white supremacy (such as the brandishing of Nazi flags), could be read as being biased against the Republican party. Ultimately, the group committed to being as transparent as possible about the ethical, political, and epistemological assumptions upon which the class depended, and took the position that those assumptions were not ones that should serve to exclude the participation of any reasonable member of a democratic society, regardless of party affiliation.

The Structure of "Refusing to Wait"

The class was designed as a one-credit class that would meet once a week throughout the spring semester, at a time that minimized schedule conflicts with other classes. All students would take it on a pass-fail basis, and their grade would be entirely based on attendance and participation. The guiding principle in developing the structure and the scheduling of the class was to make it as accessible to as many students as possible.

The final course title and description were as follows:

PSJ 171: Refusing to Wait: Intellectual and Practical Resources for Troubling Times

The recent US presidential election sent shockwaves through a variety of political, academic, and social communities, both within the US and abroad. In its wake, people are seeking resources to participate effectively on a variety of levels, from the familial to the federal. While leaders in every party expressed shock and outrage at the discriminatory rhetoric that emerged leading up to the election, figuring out a path forward has proven difficult. In this course, we will dig into issues of race, gender, economic injustice, and xenophobia in the evolving, post-election landscape. We will focus on developing intellectual and practical resources for responding effectively to threats facing individuals, communities, and democratic institutions. This course will be pass/fail with grades based on attendance and participation.

The core organizing group also developed the following list of student learning outcomes:

Students will:

- be able to evaluate news sources and stories including identifying fake news
- be able to rhetorically analyze the arguments made about racism, sexism, etc.
- be able to develop rhetorically sound, evidence-based arguments
- be able to recognize confirmation bias in their own lives and apply tools to avoid it
- be able to clearly articulate how racism, sexism, etc. are structurally embedded in society
- be able to evaluate the effectiveness of various types of social action for various contexts and issues
- be able to have constructive conversations with people who didn't vote the way they did
- be able to actively listen
- be able to talk with people different from themselves
- learn to grant their peers the space to work through complicated and sensitive issues
- learn to accept feedback when their words cause harm or distress
- be able to understand how legislation is built on and will contribute to beliefs and actions that have very real impacts on people
- understand how symbols can be used to make arguments
- be able to discuss the tension between politicized issues and partisan issues
- learn to identify and challenge dominant discourses

In addition, during the first class meeting, one of the organizers presented the underlying assumptions of the class, articulated as follows:

- Evidence matters; we will interrogate claims, particularly empirical claims, based on the quality of evidence that is offered in favor of them;
- No party has cornered the market on racism, sexism and xenophobia, but in this current political context, some of these ideas have been tied explicitly to parties and politicians;
- We share a commitment to democratic (small "d") ideals (such as freedom of the press, freedom of expression, pluralism, and so on); and
- We share a commitment to fight against systematic inequalities (there exists significant disagreement about how to

understand those inequalities, and how to address them; but we're not going to spend time arguing about whether they exist or whether they matter)

In designing the daily structure of the class, the organizers had multiple pedagogical goals. Part of the urgency of the course came from a sense that there was important disciplinary knowledge that would be useful to students in this particular moment. This disciplinary knowledge included historical information about white nationalist movements in US history; theoretical frameworks regarding gender inequality; and cutting edge research regarding algorithms, social media, and propaganda. While we valued the transmission of such disciplinary knowledge in short lectures, we also knew that students would need to discuss the primary course content in small groups in order to process it effectively. Finally, we wanted to create the opportunity for students to put what they were learning into action, to emphasize the connection between disciplinary knowledge and the need for social and political engagement.

Accordingly, we decided that each class meeting would have three distinct parts: a plenary presentation by a member of the teaching team (25 minutes); small group discussions, with the membership of the small groups remaining consistent throughout the semester (25 minutes); and social action work (25 minutes). The topics of the social action groups would be developed by the students over the first several weeks of the class, and then students would decide which groups they wanted to join.

For the plenary presentation, the presenter(s) would assign relatively short readings that would take no more than an hour to read and provide discussion leaders with at least 3 prompts to guide the small group discussions. Plenary presenters remained in the class throughout the small group discussions and were available to answer any emerging questions that the students and facilitators had.

Each discussion group had 8-10 students as well as two discussion leaders (it turned out to be useful to have two discussion leaders in case one of them could not attend the class in any given week). The discussion leaders committed to being familiar with the course syllabus, policies, and discussion norms; attending the plenary presentations; taking attendance; bringing the prompts to the discussion group; and being available to the action groups on an as-needed basis.

For the first two weeks, the social action segment of the class was a two-part introduction to social change that focused on the history of social change in the United States the first week and introducing students to various strategies of social change in the second week. This brief introduction to social action work was intended to help guide students in developing their social action plans. After identifying various topics of interest, the third class session included a process for students to discuss various options and coalesce into working groups. From week four on, the action groups were led primarily by students, with some involvement by members of the teaching team. Eventually, 8 action groups coalesced, with the following themes:

1. Advocacy and Direct Action

2. Inclusive Community at Elon University

3. Art as Social Protest

4. Climate Change

5. Responding to ACTBAC (a local white supremacy nationalist group)

6. Talking Across the Aisle

7. Immigrant and Refugee Rights

8. Criminal Justice Reform

There were thirteen class meetings during the spring semester. Although the organizers were aware of the possibility that political events would require some last-minute adjustments, they scheduled the first ten plenary sessions, leaving the last three open for an additional plenary session and presentations from the action groups (although, as we describe below, the last few weeks did not go exactly according to plan). After some on-the-fly adjustments during the semester, the topics for the first ten plenary sessions were as follows:

Week 1 Plenary: Why this Election is Different

Guest lecturer: Jason Husser, Assistant Professor of Political Science

Week 2 Plenary: Democracy and Critical Thinking

Guest lecturer: Stephen Bloch-Schulman, Associate Professor of Philosophy

Week 3 Plenary: Fake News

Guest lecturers: Derek Lackaff, Associate Professor of Communications, and Jonathan Albright, Assistant Professor of Communications

Week 4 Plenary: Oppression & Intersectionality

Guest lecturers: Ann J. Cahill, Professor of Philosophy, and Leigh-Anne Royster, Director of Inclusive Community Well-Being

Week 5 Plenary: The Creation of a Narrative of White Oppression

Guest lecturers: Tom Mould, Professor of Anthropology, and Jim Bissett, Professor of History

Week 6 Plenary: Freedom of Expression

Guest lecturer: Brooke Barnett, Professor of Communications and Associate Provost for Inclusive Community

Week 7 Plenary: Locker Room Talk

Guest lecturers: Leigh-Anne Royster, Director of Inclusive Community Well-Being, and Detric Robinson, Community Director for the Daniely Neighborhood

Week 8 Plenary: Islamophobia

Guest Lecturer: Brian Pennington, Professor of Religious Studies

Week 9 Plenary: Build a Wall (The Ethics of Borders)

Guest lecturers: Uchenna Baker, Assistant Dean of Campus Life and Ryan Johnson, Assistant Professor of Philosophy

Week 10 Plenary: Make America Great Again (Unpacking a Slogan)

Guest lecturers: Rebecca Todd Peters, Professor of Religious Studies, and Jason Husser, Assistant Professor of Political Science

The specific topics chosen for the plenary resulted from an intersection of priorities identified by the core organizers, the students (determined by a survey that went out in mid-January to students who had registered for the class) and the availability of specific faculty and staff on campus. We were painfully aware, of course, of the many topics that we could not address directly, but we were confident that the ones that we identified were well worth our students' time and attention.

The core organizers continued to meet on a weekly basis throughout the spring semester, adapting the schedule and topics as necessary, and addressing challenges that arose with individual students or the class as a whole. Most of those challenges were fairly predictable -- there were some discussion groups that didn't gel, for example, and time management was a constant struggle, given the size of the class, the brevity of the plenary sessions, and the need to rearrange the room twice during the 100-minute period. Not surprisingly, there were two or three students who challenged the content of the course, and accused it of having an anti-Republican bias. The core group of organizers and the discussion leaders worked together to respond to such challenges as constructively and clearly as possible, referring back to the learning outcomes and the guiding assumptions that were presented in the first class. Finally, as the semester continued, some students dropped out of the class, citing other time pressures and commitments. A total of 70 students completed the class.

On the whole, though, as the semester started coming to an end, the teaching team was pleased with the way the class was going. Conversations were generally lively and substantial (although discussion leaders always saw room for improvement along these lines), the material presented was obviously related to current events, and students were making important connections between the material being discussed and their own rights and responsibilities. However, the action groups seemed to be lacking in focus and momentum, for a variety of reasons. Perhaps most importantly, it had taken longer than we had expected for the social action groups to form –several weeks were spent on brainstorming ideas, and so students didn't commit to specific groups until about halfway through the semester, leaving insufficient time for both planning and implementing a project. In addition, making progress on any particular project was difficult with only one scheduled meeting a week, and the quality of student leadership was lower than we had hoped for.

As the end of the semester grew closer, the core group of organizers started talking about different ways of concluding the class. We wanted the students to feel empowered and inspired, and to have the feeling that the class was launching them into their communities with a renewed sense of purpose and urgency. We had planned to have each action group make a presentation on whatever project they had undertaken, but thought that one class period was sufficient for those presentations. What we needed, we thought, was a "ringer" – a surprise guest from outside the university community, perhaps a well-known activist, politician, or community leader who could give our students a rousing send-off. Working from the assumption that it didn't hurt to ask, we began sending emails to public figures, inviting them to help us to conclude this unique class in a fittingly dramatic way.

Our audacity resulted in something far better than any of us had imagined. At the beginning of the second to last week of the class, none of our inquiries had borne any fruit; our invitations had been met with refusals (which in some cases were accompanied by enthusiastic support for the class and its goals) or had been ignored, and we began planning for a final class that would bring together multiple plenary speakers to discuss how their different topics were related. Then, two days before the second to last class, we received an exciting invitation. Melissa Harris-Perry, the prominent journalist, author, and speaker who holds the Maya Angelou Presidential Chair at Wake Forest University (while also directing the Pro Humanitate Institute and serving as the founding director of the Anna Julia Cooper Center) responded to our email by inviting the entire class – all 92 faculty, staff, and students – to join the class she was concluding at her house for dinner in two days' time. We scrambled to arrange transportation (her house was about an hour's drive from our university) and to encourage our students to take advantage of this remarkable opportunity. And so the penultimate meeting of the Refusing to Wait class took place at the welcoming home of our generous host, who shared with us her bracing responses to the current political situation.

We still had one class meeting left, and dinner with Melissa Harris-Perry was a tough act to follow. But the core group of organizers wanted to return to the theme of social and political engagement one more time. We began the class in focus groups to synthesize course material, encouraging students to reflect on what they did, and did not get out of the class. We then asked them to reflect on the work they did in their Social Action groups and to jot down on a Post-It note what they planned to do related to their topic. Finally, we asked them to think about their own personal commitments they would make by completing the following sentences: "I refuse to wait for…" and "I commit to…" The questions were strategic because a few minutes later we presented them with two gifts, generously funded by a variety of university departments and offices: a copy of Timothy Snyder's *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (2017) and a custom-designed T-shirt with the phrase "Refusing to Wait" on it. We then provided paint pens and encouraged the students to customize their

shirts by adding exactly what they were refusing to wait for, and what steps they were going to undertake toward that end. For example, some wrote that they were refusing to wait for "LGBTQIA equality," and that they were going to "work toward equal rights and representation of trans people." The final act of the class was taking a photo of the assembled faculty, staff, and students:

Assessment

Throughout the designing and implementation of the class, students were invited to provide input and feedback in multiple ways. Before the course began, as mentioned briefly above, we surveyed students asking them four questions:

Generally, what do you hope to get out of this class?

Specifically, what intellectual skills do you hope to develop?

Specifically, what practical skills do you hope to develop?

Do you have any concerns or reservations about this class?

During the course, students developed ideas for actions, voted on them, and engaged in social action groups accordingly. We also asked students to propose ideas and vote on plenary session topics in order to ensure that we captured evolving student interest as well as the changing landscape of current events. More informally, we talked to our discussion groups to see what was working and not working for them in order to tweak the class as we went. We held similar conversations with the discussion leaders, focusing particularly on how we could improve discussions and facilitate social action group work.

The data below, however, focuses on the formal assessment measures we conducted at the end of the course. For students, our questions focused on the course goals. We conducted both an online survey to gather quantitative data as well as an hour-long focus group to gather qualitative data. Students remained in their same discussion groups for the focus groups, but we rotated discussion leaders so that the students would feel more comfortable commenting honestly on the discussion portion of the class. We also followed up with a brief survey approximately one year after the class began to assess any long-term impacts of the course.

For the teaching team, our questions focused on the course structure. We combined quantitative and qualitative measures in a single online survey that asked both open and closed-ended questions. The vast majority of the data is therefore direct assessment. Final grades do not provide indirect assessment since they were based on attendance and participation rather than graded work. However, we did ask the teaching team to comment on student presentations to provide some indirect assessment of student work.

Student Feedback

Students filled out a 15-question survey targeting each of the course goals. 59 of the 70 students completed the survey for an 84% response rate (Figure 1).

Combining the "strongly agree," "agree," and "somewhat agree" columns for all 15 questions suggests the relative success of the course for each question (Figure 2).

Overall, the majority of students agreed that all fifteen of the course goals were met. In particular, students felt that the class was most effective in improving their abilities to rhetorically analyze arguments about key course topics; develop their own rhetorically sound, evidence-based arguments; articulate how social inequities such as sexism and racism are structurally embedded in society; evaluate news sources; and recognize confirmation bias in their own lives. They found other goals somewhat less effectively met, including accepting feedback when their words cause harm or distress; understanding how legislation is built on and contributes to beliefs and actions with very real impacts; and having constructive conversations with people who voted differently from themselves.

The focus groups we held on the final day of class provides some insight into the statistics as well as identifying more clearly the specific areas of the class that did and did not resonate with the students. Focus group facilitators used five questions to structure the conversation, though discussions often moved in additional, productive directions:

- What did you get out of the class?

- Have you changed and if so, how?

- What will you do differently if anything?

- Did you engage others outside of class and if so, how?

- What did you hope to get out of the class but didn't?

Many of the conversations focused on what students got out of the class. The responses were wide and varied, but mirrored many of the course goals. With so many, we have listed them below, beginning with those comments made most often.

FIGURE 1. RESULTS OF STUDENT SURVEY TARGETING EACH OF THE COURSE GOALS

- Chance to discuss current events with accurate information. Chance to delve into these issues much deeper than casual conversations.

- Chance to hear from students with different views, different academic backgrounds, different personal backgrounds.

- Interdisciplinarity. Saw how the same subject could be approached from many different lenses.

- Seeing faculty and staff working together, learning together.

- Chance to think critically with others.

- Learned to identify and avoid logical fallacies.

- Explored underlying causes to major issues. Saw patterns. Learned about intersectionality.

- The energy and passion of everyone in the class. Peers who really wanted to be there rather than having to be there for some requirement.

- Opportunity to talk personally about how these issues affected them. A relief to be able

to share with a group of caring peers. Felt like they were truly heard.

- Chance to work with students who shared similar views about social justice.

- Encouraged questioning. Saw faculty and staff modeling what it looks like to be an engaged citizen.

- Opportunity to explore areas of disagreement rather than stop once I realized I was in the minority.

- Practice and confidence to tackle challenging questions

- Humanized current issues that changed how I view current events. Different impacts for different groups.

- Helped remove the barrier between academics and "real life"

For many students, simply having peers committed to the same goals of social justice, who were in class solely out of interest rather than as a curricular requirement, made this experience a particularly memorable and invigorating one. They were similarly energized by seeing the teaching team engaged in the same questions they were. Noticeably absent was mention of the social action part of the course. When conversation shifted to areas of

FIGURE 2: COMBINED STUDENT RESPONSES OF "STRONGLY AGREE," "AGREE" AND "SOMEWHAT AGREE."

found their most fruitful conversations to be outside class with their fellow RTW classmates. When they spoke to friends with staunch partisan views, conversations were less productive, falling into a he said/she said pattern. Some students felt that there were people in their communities who were simply "unreachable." When they engaged friends with less entrenched views, they found their peers generally receptive, though many students noted that their friends would appear initially interested, but not for a sustained conversation. The same was true for some family members.

A handful of students mentioned bringing the conversation into their other classes, particularly Women, Gender and Sexualities Studies, Poverty and Social Justice, and International Studies classes. Although students were overwhelmingly satisfied with the course, not all of their expectations were met. Some wanted clarity on their own views but felt they got complexity rather than conclusions. Many wanted an opportunity to practice "talking across the aisle" more. A few mentioned wishing they had been asked to write an op-ed or a letter to their representative to apply the skills discussed in class. By far, however, the most common disappointment involved the social action groups. Everyone agreed that we simply did not have enough time to develop much less carry out a significant action plan.

the class that did not work as well, the social action groups were mentioned in virtually every focus group.

In terms of how students changed, some noted that they did not feel they had changed, clarifying that they came to the class committed to social justice, and left the same way. Many, however, commented on changes to how they approach and discuss difficult topics, noting that they are more conscientious about using evidence to support their claims, more open minded, less likely to believe they are right, less likely to judge, and more interested in listening to others to truly understand their point of view rather than just win an argument. While some said they felt much more informed and aware, others commented on realizing how little they know and how much they have to learn. Even still, there was general consensus that they felt more confident and comfortable engaging in difficult conversations. At least one student noted that issues they once dismissed as insignificant they now saw as significant.

Moving forward, many students said they would seek out people who have different ideas from themselves. They were tired of the echo chamber and excited about having discussions with people with different views. Others were more specific about preparing for such conversations, working to get the facts before throwing out their opinions, looking for evidence before believing something, and getting their news from multiple sources. The fact that so many of the students' plans for the future revolve around having difficult conversations is no doubt tied to their experiences attempting to do so. Students discussed their efforts to engage others outside of class, identifying roommates, friends, and parents as their most common conversation partners. Perhaps not surprisingly, many

Teaching Team Feedback

At the end of the semester, we asked all of the discussion leaders and plenary speakers in the course to fill out an online survey with a mix of 16 open and close ended question. 15 of the 22 members of the teaching team completed the survey for a response rate of 68%. It is relevant to point out that only 2 of the 5 members of the core organizing group completed the survey so the responses do not overly represent their views.

Members of the teaching team were fairly consistent in seeing the overall structure of the course as a basically good one, rating it as either "very effective" (67%) or "moderately effective" (33%), but with areas that could be improved. The plenary sessions were viewed as particularly valuable for the salient topics selected and depth speakers achieved in such a short amount of time (17% found them "extremely effective" while the remaining 83% found them "very effective"). Those sessions that were identified as particularly effective noted the clarity of the readings, the inclusion of concrete data, the application of theory to

relevant current events, and the development of thoughtful and thought-provoking discussion questions. Those plenaries that were viewed as less successful were too complex, too vague, or too ambitious.

That ambivalence about the overall structure of the course seems to have centered particularly on the discussion groups. Forty percent of respondents found them "extremely effective," while the same number found them only "moderately effective" (with the remaining 20% finding them "very effective"). During the semester, our informal discussions among the discussion leaders often focused on issues with the discussion groups, including uneven participation, lack of depth in the comments, and disconnect with the plenary session.

Particularly effective aspects of the discussions included the opportunity students had to discuss current events in an intellectually informed but informal way. Some felt that students do not typically get such opportunities at Elon University, and that the chance to address social action within this conversation was particularly impactful. One particularly effective discussion occurred when that day's plenary session speaker joined the group. Other powerful moments occurred when students got comfortable enough to really open up, whether in confronting another group member for dominating discussion or expressing one's political frustrations that did not easily conform to the rest of the group. Generally, discussions improved over the semester as students became more comfortable with each other, but some members of the teaching team felt the amount of time allocated for discussion was not sufficient.

As with the students, the social action component was viewed as being one of the weakest parts of the class, due primarily to time constraints. While the teaching team felt that at least some groups were effective in synthesizing course material into a clear action plan, all or most did not. Weaknesses identified among less successful groups included on the one hand reinventing the wheel rather than building on previous work, and on the other, simply participating in existing organizations without carving out new ground.

Finally, we asked what the teaching team took away from the course. Many of their responses echoed the students. They appreciated having the opportunity to learn about areas outside their own expertise from multiple disciplinary perspectives and talk about current events with similarly engaged people. More than anything, the teaching team expressed excitement, inspiration and gratitude in working with students so passionate and committed to social justice.

Recommendations for the Future

At the end of the course, many students asked if we would be teaching this course again. Colleagues asked the same question, both those who did not participate and those who did. Our answer was fairly uniform: we would love to, but we don't think we will. Among the course organizers, our reasons included the incredible amount of uncompensated time and energy, the concern that we would not have the same level of interest among either the students or our colleagues to do it again, and the sense that this course erupted out of a moment that was both emotionally and intellectually challenging, and that while we see the importance of maintaining that energy and refusing to allow the acceptance of sexist, racist, Islamophobic, homophobic, xenophobic, and anti-intellectualism to become the new normal, this class may have been a powerful but only a first response.

> ***...We see the importance of...refusing to allow the acceptance of sexist, racist, Islamophobic, homophobic, xenophobic, and anti-intellectualism to become the new normal[;] this class may have been a powerful but only a first response.***

However, it is possible that the labor involved in designing and running the course could be redistributed by moving to a more student-led model, a move that could potentially be more sustainable either on a short-term or long-term basis. Different models would be possible depending on institutional structures and resources; at Elon University, we currently have a program that allows students to take primary responsibility for teaching non-credit classes. A course like Refusing to Wait could be adopted by students and adapted to fit this program. The model for Refusing to Wait might also allow the university to consider a new program where the students took the lead in determining topics and inviting guest lecturers, a possibility that would continue to leverage the considerable expertise of the faculty while ensuring that students were responsible both for the specific themes addressed in the class and the daily logistics. Of course, such a student-led course would still require an unusual sense of political urgency (at least for typical students of Elon), and it is unclear whether the sense of urgency that inspired the creation of this course is persisting, or even could persist across multiple years. And of course the matter of whether the course would receive credit may influence student interest in taking the course. Finally, the development of such a course would still take considerable investment, in terms of time and energy, on the part of the faculty who would guide the students in at least its first incarnation and perhaps beyond.

Although we have no plans to attempt to teach such a class again, many of the students and the teaching team offered suggestions for improving the class if we did, or if other universities wanted to attempt something similar. Those suggestions included the following:

- Reconsider the social action component. Reduce the number of groups. Students suggested having more faculty guidance to help them avoid dead ends that cost valuable time.

- Flip the classroom. Videotape the plenary sessions and have students watch them

- before class, allowing our meeting times to focus more on discussion.

- Include time for Q&A with the plenary speakers.

- More aggressively recruit students from diverse political viewpoints.

- Scale back the number of course goals.

- Find time to address current events.

Aspects of the class that worked well and should be maintained if a course like this was to be taught again, include informative plenary sessions to provide foundational knowledge, discussion groups with the same students each week to develop trust and rapport, and a diverse group of instructors to ensure multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives.

Conclusion

Just as the students took away lessons learned from the course, so, too, did we. Many of us have revised sections of our own courses to draw in some of the course content from the plenary sessions. Others of us have been working to provide more opportunities for our students to build social action plans into. As course organizer, administrator, and staff member Uchenna Baker explained, "An important aspect of the course for the staff was the idea of modeling for our students the democratic practices that we are calling them to espouse within and beyond the walls of the classroom. That is, as educators we must have a willingness to be in the gap, in the breakdown, and reconcile the cognitive dissonance that is unearthed. We have to be willing to inquire into the premise of our beliefs to reveal our faulty assumptions; otherwise we put them in action and they become the truth. The truth becomes something to protect and we hold on. This course invited both educator and student to collectively think and dialogue more critically about the implications that the 2016 elections had for all of us. More importantly, the course called for all of us to commit to action beyond the walls of the classroom. As an administrator, the beauty of dialogue across race, gender, political affiliation, and one's role at the university was realized. But more importantly, the belief in the power of collective action was renewed as a result of the course."

Course leaders were not the only ones to leave with renewed confidence and commitment to civic engagement and dialogue. In the focus groups, for example, a number of students commented that they felt better prepared to engage in conversations with their peers. Students in Ann Cahill's focus group spoke animatedly about the opportunity to talk with peers with very different views in a space of shared respect and interest. Another student recalled an experience from class just one week earlier: "One student had very different opinions from the rest of the people in the van. I saw many moments of using evidence and facts. Before this class, I would not have been able to respond effectively." Tom Mould was in that van as they drove back from the prominent journalist's home and was similarly struck by the conversation. One of the students in the van shared their story of being a Dreamer, a minor brought to the U.S. by undocumented parents. Another student asked a number of questions, and the two of them respectfully disagreed about some key issues surrounding immigration. Other students on the van entered the conversation in one of the most thoughtful and mature conversations Tom had heard on immigration between people of varied viewpoints. It was not a pile-on. While only one student shared views similar to Trump's "Build a Wall" ideology, students diverged greatly on how to resolve thorny immigration issues. No one raised voices. Some shared statistics and research findings; others shared personal experiences. People took turns and the conversation slowly shifted from the specifics of the initial story to a more robust conversation about immigration policy. At the end of the van ride, Tom privately asked the student whose personal story had started the discussion what they thought of the conversation. "Incredible. I was finally heard." A few days later, the professor ran into the student who had disagreed with many others on the bus and asked them the same question. "I have a lot to think about now. It's a lot more complicated than they make it seem." The professor asked him who "they" was. "The media, I guess." These various comments capture a glimpse of the range of impacts of this unique course. Some were empowered to speak on issues when they normally wouldn't, some shared deeply personal stories and were heard in ways they had not been before, and some were challenged to move beyond the sound bites of partisan politics.

The extent to which the class has continued to impact students is more difficult to assess. Almost exactly one year after the course began, we sent students a short 3 question follow up survey to see what, if anything, they had done or were still doing because of the class. 15 students out of 70 answered the survey for a 21% response rate. However, 49 were seniors and many may not have received the email. Based on the feedback, we know at least one senior did respond, but if the rest were not seniors, the response rate would be 15 out of 22 or 68%.

We asked them what aspects of the class, if any, do you continue to reflect upon? Almost a third of them mentioned the theory of intersectionality. The next most common responses was having tough conversations with people of different viewpoints. Again, although the end of semester survey suggested this was one of the least successful course goals, the qualitative data makes clear that for those students who felt it was achieved, it was a life changer.

Not surprisingly, only 2 of the 15 said they continued work with their social action groups, with most students attributing their lack of follow-through to lack of time. The vast majority of respondents did, however, make good on the promises they made in answering what they were refusing to wait for. A few students didn't answer, a few others didn't remember, but of the nine who did, their responses are worth including in their entirety:

1. Equality. Going to grad school to serve underserved populations!!

2. For people to stop being racist and discriminatory. I am in DEEP which is a social justice club.

3. Equal rights for women; I'm not afraid to have conversations with skeptics or male supremacists.

4. Equal rights and I've supported the women's movement this past year.

5. I am refusing to wait for others to speak for me.

6. Gender equality. Pursuing career in domestic violence and sexual assault victim advocacy.

7. Racial justice. Since our class I've read all I could on the subject.

8. Community empowerment. I was thinking about the work a few of my friends in Chapel Hill do with the Community Empowerment Fund (worth looking into) and searched for similar organizations and programs in the town I moved to. I got involved with SURJ for a brief moment, but there wasn't a whole lot of infrastructure in my city's chapter. I've made intentional efforts to support the local economy, but I'm continuing to look for ways I can apply myself to not only my town, but also other communities in the world. Thinking about community empowerment is helping me narrow my geographic focus when considering locations for potential applied research projects.

But perhaps the most breathtaking answer of all was:

> ***I'm refusing to wait for permission to do what I can to make the world a more empathetic place. I've decided to run for elected office in my hometown.***

While specific impacts may have been fleeting for many, the course seems to have encouraged at least some to believe they can change the world, providing a glimmer of hope that democratic thinking and social justice has a new cadre of defenders.

Works Cited

Huber, Lynn R., Tom Mould and Ann J. Cahill. 2016. "Letter to the Editor: Faculty and staff members stand in solidarity with students who have been made to feel vulnerable." Elon News Network, November 19. http://www.elonnewsnetwork.com/article/2016/11/faculty-members-stand-in-solidarity-with-students-who-have-been-made-to-feel-vulnerable.

Snyder, Timothy. 2017. *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Tim Duggan Books.

Appendix: Social Action and Personal Commitments Made by Participants of RTW

Social Action Commitments

- Work at Campus Kitchen (just got the job)

- Refusing to wait for racial injustice. I commit to challenging white supremacist culture on Elon University's campus

- Trying to engage with groups outside my norm

- Refusing to wait to engage students in politics. I commit to responding and embracing civic engagement initiatives at Elon University and beyond

- Work with Elon University admin to be able to put the bathroom newsletters up on Elon University's campus

- Refusing to wait for equality. I commit to engaging with my local, state, and federal representatives multiple times a week

- I will continue to inspire friends to contact congress members and will help finish all the survey responses

- We commit to being fearless, unapologetic, and mother-f-ing awesome

- Working with the people's assembly and relevant social justice orgs in Alamance County to build and respond to human rights challenges

- Refusing to wait for gender equality

- Refusing to wait for people to care about climate change

- Our social action group didn't really meet our goal, but I want us to continue to have an open mind when having meaningful conversations

- Increase the availability of spaces on Elon University's campus where students can freely and publicly express themselves-- especially via art

- I commit to becoming more involved in my local community's efforts for advocacy and direct action

- Refusing to wait for recognition as an equal. I commit to continue fighting for what I believe in

- Climate change, education, and support

- I commit to advocate for intersectional goals through my words and actions

- I commit to continue working with victims of sexual assault

- I am committed to further understand the criminal justice system and end the stigma surrounding the incarcerated

- Refusing to wait for human rights. I commit to creating artwork in my personal and public life that calls out social injustice

- Ongoing commitments: photo project (collect stories) and meet up with groups to discuss deadlines

- Informing friends and family about the injustices in the justice system

- I commit to finding creative ways to respond to issues I care about

- Education on campus about the sources of Islamophobia

- I commit to help prevent climate change

- Refusing to wait for environmental action

- Continuing to promote criminal justice reform education

- Getting the Elon University community to have conversations about social action from both sides of the aisle

- I will more actively participate in action that supports my causes in my hometown

- I commit to writing about an education others about conservation issues like climate change and habitat destruction

- Continue to advocate for, educate on, and support women's rights

- I'm committing to continuing open-minded conversations about political topics that are normally difficult to discuss, and not staying silent when I disagree

- I commit to creating a space at Elon University where students feel comfortable expressing themselves through art

- I commit to begin a revolution rather than waiting for it to begin. I wish to eliminate disparities and relieve oppression

- Refusing to wait for increasing global perspectives. I commit to hearing all perspectives before forming an opinion

- I am refusing to wait for community empowerment. I aim to join/volunteer for local organizations that immediate impacts on a grassroots level.

- Educate people about criminal justice system.

- Break stigma about previously incarcerated people.

- I commit to listening to others when they disagree with me and keeping an open mind when talking across the aisle, as to recognize that I am not always correct.

- I commit to actively listening in conversations across the aisle. I'm refusing to wait to… be informed.

- I commit to make Elon University a more inclusive campus.

- Refusing to wait for political action. I commit to contacting my Congressman and voicing my opinion, as well as committing to be the change I want to see.

- To work for a company that seeks to eradicate sexism/racism/heteronormativity in the workplace and beyond.

- I commit to being educated on groups that take part in direct action in order to help others find ways to be involved in aspects of current events they feel passionate about.

- I develop to fight for gender and racial equality.

- I commit to actively listening in conversations across the aisle.

- I commit to actively listening in all the conversations I partake in.

- Spread awareness for climate change.

Personal Commitments

- Work on getting better everyday.

- Refusing to wait for LGBTQIA respect. I commit to speaking out against prejudice and bigotry against this community.

- I am refusing to wait for our "leaders" to make positive change.

- I commit to staying informed.

- Refusing to wait for racial justice. I will be an advocate for people who lack a voice.

- I am refusing to wait to be well-informed.

- Refusing to wait for ignorance. I commit to challenging my friends and classmates to think critically about social issues and to not stand for injustice, especially here on campus.

- Refusing to wait for others to tell me what is right and wrong. I commit to educating myself.

- I commit to remaining informed about the issues facing the Elon University community, as well as the country. As well as engaging in conversations with those that disagree with me.

- I will refuse to let ignorance persist where I can stop it. I commit to promoting analytical conversation with those from different backgrounds from myself.

- I commit to remembering that my marginalized experiences are not universal and listening to the experiences of others different than me.

- I commit to being aware of my words and think about what I say before I do.

- Refusing to wait for sexual and gender equality. I commit to working with local social justice orgs to make Alamance County a safer place for LGBTQ community members.

- Refusing to wait for rights for immigrants and refugees.

- Refusing to wait for criminal justice reform. I commit to educating myself and others about the structural racism in the criminal justice system.

- I commit to being aware of the space I take up in conversations and listening to and amplifying the voices of others.

- Refusing to wait for human rights.

- I am committed to educating myself to see how I can make REAL change.

- I commit to call my congresspeople and voice my opinion regarding legislation I want them to vote a certain way for.

- Refusing to wait for the marginalized, downtrodden, and wronged in our society to be treated with the same respect as the rich and privileged.

- Refusing to wait for others to bring up difficult topics. I can do it too!

- Refusing to wait for racial and feminist justice.

- I commit to maintaining an open mind when involved in conversation with those whose perspectives differ from my own.

- I refuse to wait for political partisanship. I commit to working across political boundaries to find common ground with those around me.

- Refusing to wait for political acknowledgement of climate change. I commit to spreading awareness and information surrounding climate change and its harmful effects.

- I refuse to remain silent and passive on issues that matter and I refuse to lose faith on evidence-based reasoning.

- I refuse to become a "nice white lady" (i.e. a white woman wrapped up in her life and privilege who continues the status quo). I will be challenging and disruptive!

- Refusing to wait for human rights for everyone. I commit to continuing the conversation and my education. I commit to lobbying against legislation I disagree with and pursuing my JD.

- I commit to being informed and offering informed opinions at all times, not just in times of reaction.

- Become more aware of current events through reading and listening to different news sources.

- Refusing to wait for equality and acceptance of all minority groups.

- Refusing to wait for environmental justice. I commit to educating youth about the environment and climate during my summer internship.

- Committed to helping others better understand the importance of the environment.

- I refuse to wait for gender equality. I commit to defending equality and refusing to let sexist or stereotypical gender comments "slide." The everyday rhetoric of how we perceive male and female needs to change.

- I refuse to wait for gender equality. I commit to supporting other women and speaking up against injustice.

- Refusing to wait for gender equality. I commit to questioning both people and institutions when I see/hear underlying sexism.

- Refusing to wait for someone else to start the conversation.

- I refuse to wait to have important and necessary conversations. I commit to engaging in difficult conversations with people with whom I disagree/don't share the same views.

- I am refusing to wait for artistic expression. I will seek to use art to communicate my stance on issues.

- Refusing to wait for racial justice. I commit to not be silent about issues of race when something happens.

- Read multiple news sources.

- I will more actively engage in conversations that make social issues that impact my community.

- I commit to be informed with fact-checked information.

- I'm committed to advocating passionately for disability rights.

- Explore the intersectionality of issues that I will address in my job.

- Question one-sided opinions/comments.

- I will stand up and not be afraid to tell people how I feel when I hear things that are racist or hurtful and make sure that they understand that saying such things are wrong and are the opposite of how we want the world to be.

- Reading more news sources to gain more information of all sides of the issue at hand.

- I commit to informing and lessening the stigma of Islamophobia.

- I commit to keeping myself informed and developing more informed, researched, and well-rounded discussion topics.

- I refuse to wait for women to be treated as equals in the U.S. I'm committed to educating and demonstrating against sexism.