

Teaching American Literature in Inter-Cultural Contexts

Mary Ellen H. Schmider (China 1997, Macedonia 2005)

Biography

Mary Ellen Heian Schmider, who holds the Ph. D. in American Studies, has held two U. S. Fulbright Lecturer Awards: at Lanzhou University; Gansu Province, China in 1997, and at Sv. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, R. Macedonia, in 2005-2006. Teaching American literature in English Departments at both universities, she developed syllabi encouraging continued second language learning along with enhancing knowledge of the cultural and historical contexts for literary texts. The Bologna Process for integration of universities into a European system spurred an even more conscious effort to prepare and teach in terms of the needs of the host university. Currently a member of the Board of the Fulbright Association, Dr. Schmider teaches online for the University of Maryland University College after working several years under its military contract in Europe, offering courses in Women's Studies, U. S. History, and Literature. In 1995, she left Minnesota State University Moorhead as Graduate Dean and Research Officer Emerita. She has just returned from presenting a paper at the 50th Anniversary of the Faculty in Philology in Skopje, and she continues to work with students as well as with the Gender Studies Institute, for whom she was a resource faculty member.

Background

"The Interconnected World" assumes interconnected understandings of language use and cultural settings. Teaching American Literature in China ten years ago and in Macedonia recently as a Fulbright lecturer, I have worked to incorporate cross-cultural perspectives on American Literature while offering students insights on the American cultural and historical contexts of its production. Further, I have seen literature classes as workshops in improving language skills by syllabus development that involves speaking and writing as well as reading and listening.

Discussions Questions

- How can the historical and cultural groundings of American authors be conveyed by American faculty?
- How can "readings" in other cultural/historical contexts be included in critical discussions?
- How can the four linguistic skill sets: reading, writing, listening, and speaking in English be engaged and developed while literature is the focus?
- How does one develop an appropriate syllabus within, for instance, the Bologna Process in a European setting?
- How much should one expect of assistance and coaching from faculty within the assigned university in order to have maximum impact on students?