

Collaboration in the Classroom: The Collective Commentary

This paper argues for the importance of collaboration in the development of pedagogy and scholarship and discusses the production of a collective commentary as one type of collaborative project. Collaboration is integral to a student's development as a leader, teacher, and scholar; the creation of a group commentary provides an opportunity to develop in each of these areas. I elaborate on this idea through discussing the growing prominence of digital commentaries of classical texts, and through discussing my own experience in creating a group commentary for a digital publication as part of a class. In my courses, students are often required to work with their peers on group presentations and discussion questions; this term, we are comparing commentaries of Tacitus' *Agricola* in order to question the purpose and success of different commentary styles, and then we will be writing our own online commentary on select passages on women and family in the *Agricola*.

Over the past decade, online commentaries have continued to grow in popularity and utility in the classroom. In addition, post-docs and other teaching positions in digital humanities have increased visibly in the years since I received my Ph.D. While my experience in contributing to online commentaries does not extend to advanced coding or other technological skills, my teaching in this area has provided a foray for my students to explore a growing academic field. In the past few years, I have integrated the Dickinson College Commentaries (Francese et al.) and the *Online Companion to The Worlds of Roman Women* (Raia and Sebesta) in my teaching as both primary readings and as practice materials for sight-reading, grammar review, and other activities. Both sites provide a range of texts of varying difficulties, as well as interpretive essays and bibliographies for further reading. Raia and Sebesta also supply extensive instructional guides and suggested syllabi, which add to the utility of the site (see Pendergraft's

review). These are just two current sites readily available for use in the classroom, and I will discuss some of the ways they may be integrated at all levels of language teaching.

This fall, I am teaching a graduate-level Latin seminar on Sallust and Tacitus. Through this seminar, I aim that my students will advance their knowledge of the styles and subjects of both historiographers, build their skills as teachers and researchers, and start making connections with academics involved in the study of these authors outside of our university. Since this seminar is currently under way, I have yet to formulate my conclusions about the process; nevertheless, we expect to complete our commentary by the end of term, and that it will be available well in advance of the conference. Our main challenge will be to make Tacitus accessible to our intended audience of intermediate students; not only do grammatical explications need to be clear, but the complementary visual material needs to be accessible and closely connected to the passages at hand. The concise introduction to Tacitus, the *Agricola*, Tacitean style, and the women of Tacitus' world must match the tone of other entries on our intended publication site, and I will challenge the students to find the best sources for further reading and to formulate discussion questions aimed at undergraduate students (see Gloyn on the process of writing such a commentary). Commentaries on Tacitus appropriate for intermediate and advanced undergraduates are rare, although Damon's *Agricola* (2016) and Fratantuono's *Annals XVI* (2017) prove that this enigmatic author can indeed become accessible.

Our commentary focuses on the women of the *Agricola*, and our introductory essay and related material will offer a new angle for the study of these passages by introducing feminist scholarship. My students will collaborate on the project and receive feedback from the editors regarding suggested improvements and modifications prior to online publication. They will thus learn about the publication process and gain insight into the ways in which outside readers

provide feedback at the various stages of publication. Through this talk, I hope to show the accessibility of this type of project, and to contribute to an ongoing conversation about collaboration and active learning in the classics classroom.

Bibliography

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