

COUNCIL ON TEACHING
Follow-Up Report for
Teaching in Higher Education Conference Award

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Department/Unit: Division of World Languages, Literatures, & Cultures

Conference Attended: 2025 Modern Language Association Annual Convention

Date of Conference: January 9-12, 2025

Award Amount: \$1,000

Briefly summarize how your attendance at the conference enhanced your professional development and allowed you to gain a better understanding of teaching in your discipline or trends in higher education in general.

I participated in a roundtable, “Trigger Warnings And Teaching East Asian Literature,” focused on navigating ways to handle sensitive content in East Asian literature courses in the classroom. Participation in the roundtable afforded me the opportunity to learn about how others teaching similar areas approach teaching difficult material. The roundtable heightened my awareness of the fact that those of us who teach about East Asia are often teaching literary and cultural traditions that are drastically removed from the everyday lives of our students, and this adds an extra layer of complexity and requires instructors to have additional sensitivity when introducing difficult material. My contribution focused on best practices in implementing content alerts in the undergraduate classroom. My copanelists discussed strategies for engaging students in conversations on difficult issues, and ways to re-envision the learning process as a shared experience for everyone in the classroom, the instructor included, and the importance of allowing students to see that difficult material can also be difficult for the instructor. The discussion also hit on the importance of having some kind of debriefing or reflection later in a course, after a pause to allow calm reflection and more settling of emotions, so that students can revisit the material and associated issues with more critical distance. The discussion definitely transformed my approach to teaching challenging topics in the undergraduate classroom.

As I wrote in my application, at the University of Iowa, I’m the only faculty member engaged in teaching the literature and culture of premodern China, and I also teach the only course that covers premodern pan-East Asian literature (China, Japan, Korea); as I had hoped, I was able to meet colleagues teaching in similar areas other institutions, and we have already shared resources such as reading lists and teaching materials, and have continued to engage in fruitful discussions of pedagogical approaches to teaching East Asian literature in translation.

I was also able to attend many other panels on a variety of topics, including narrative theory and translation, all of which have enriched my approach to teaching literature.

How have you been able to share what you learned about teaching with your department, the University of Iowa, and/or beyond?

In addition to having *numerous* conversations with colleagues at Iowa about how they teach difficult or sensitive topics, and whether or not they provide trigger warnings or content alerts, on Thursday, February 20 from 4-5pm, I led an event for instructors (including faculty, grad students, and staff) called “Don't Panic! Rethinking How We Frame Difficult Content in the Classroom”. It was co-hosted by the Center for Language & Culture Learning (CLCL, in 120 Phillips Hall) and the Chinese Humanities & Arts (an Obermann Working Group) and CAPS/IP. The event was well-attended; approximately 20 people participated, including grad students and faculty from several departments and disciplines (including but not limited to DWLLC, Translation, English, Rhetoric, Religious Studies, Art History, and the Center for Teaching). A few teach in Asia-related areas, but most do not. I shared what I had learned at the MLA panel, and after this, attendees engaged in a thoughtful, insightful, and informative discussion on the pedagogical issues associated with teaching difficult content. Afterward, several colleagues told me how helpful the event was to them. My impression is that they learned from me, and I certainly learned from them.

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I'd like to add, I am very grateful for the change to attend MLA, and also for the requirement to share with the community. The conversation with U of Iowa instructors was incredibly valuable, and as we left, several attendees remarked that it was great event, and we should do more like this. Thank you!