

## Sarah Anderegg

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**From:** Jonathan Eldridge  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 26, 2023 12:04 PM  
**To:** Jonathan Eldridge  
**Subject:** Fall 2023 Faculty Information & Updates, Volume VIII  
**Attachments:** Student Contributions.pdf

Dear College of Marin Faculty:

The attached article outlines a few easy ways to engage students in co-creating some (not all) class policies and expectations, as a way to foster their investment in the learning process. I hope you enjoy it!

Also this week, see below for updates on the work (and associated noise) at the New LRC site, as well as a reminder about the upcoming Emory Douglas exhibit, which is a great opportunity to engage your students in a variety of conversations that can connect back to their learning.

**Construction activities** happening on the site of the Learning Resources Center, **September 25 – October 1:**

1. Grading to continue on site
2. Shotcrete for shoring wall to be installed this week – 10 to 15 concrete trucks will be onsite each day
3. Installation of temporary ADA walkway to begin this week. Area will be closed off until complete.
4. Off haul of materials continues

Noise you will expect to hear onsite:

1. Large equipment such as drills/augers
2. Idling trucks
3. Back up alerts

If you have any questions please reach out to Klaus Christiansen at [kchristiansen@marin.edu](mailto:kchristiansen@marin.edu).

## ***The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas: Black Liberation, Global Solidarity***

**October 2, 2023-October 27, 2023**

**Monday-Thursday, 10-7 pm**

College of Marin Fine Arts Gallery

Kentfield, CA

Admission Free, Open to the Public

Thank you for all you do.

Jonathan

# Student Contributions

Beckie Supiano writes about teaching, learning, and the human interactions that shape them for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Recently I [wrote about](#) one professor's experience co-creating course policies with his students and asked readers to share whether they do something similar, and what advice they'd offer others interested in giving it a try.

Here's what a few had to say:

Louis Epstein shared some observations from co-creating attendance policies with students last fall. "One thing I learned was that as with all activities, students need a clear prompt," wrote Epstein, an associate professor of music at St. Olaf College. The students, he wrote, "mainly approached the question philosophically rather than mechanically. No one mentioned how many classes it might be reasonable to miss, or what kind of penalty might be incurred by a student who misses too much class. I had already decided that I wasn't going to grade attendance, but I was interested to know how many classes students thought it was reasonable to miss, and that never came up."

Epstein took some of the students' ideas, but not others — a reminder that co-creation doesn't mean students have unilateral control, which Johnathan Flowers, the professor whose approach I wrote about before, emphasized. Epstein told students he would not give extra credit for attendance, as they had suggested, because that further aided students who weren't struggling as much and because attending class was such a basic expectation that he didn't want to penalize or reward it. "But the students' idea that I could do other things to incentivize attendance was one I took to heart," he wrote. "I brought my dog to class, brought a Nespresso machine one day, dressed up like a hot dog, and did other things to ensure that attendance wasn't a chore but a delight. And ideas like 'assume best intentions' and 'communication is key' were really valuable to highlight early on — it set the right tone for the rest of the semester."

If he included them in making the attendance policy again, Epstein shared, "I'd send students a more detailed prompt in advance of the conversation. I'd ask them to consider philosophical and mechanical elements, I'd ask them to bring ideas they've seen from other classes, and I'd provide a preformatted template so that it feels like we're really producing something together."

Ann M. Peiffer described starting her Language, Culture, and Psychology course with "no syllabus and a desire to use collectivist culture principles to design policies and grading with my students." Peiffer, an associate professor in the Department of Social Sciences, Psychology & Art Therapy Programs at Mars Hill University, had sketched out three projects but left a lot of the details up to her students.

Peiffer found that this setup worked well for some students, but not for others. Some with a reputation as strong students dropped the course during the add/drop period, Peiffer found. But it worked well for others.

“Those labeled hardworking students that were not necessarily the ‘best’ students were uncomfortable with not knowing what to do for the grade,” she wrote, but were good sports about the process. The system worked especially well for students seen as “difficult,” for whom the traditional approach didn’t connect. These students, she wrote, “dug in with enthusiasm and really embraced the idea of owning the course’s learning process. Many of these students requested make-up work and completed it when life events had them missing a class session, resulting in meaningful option-B assignments throughout the semester.”

Lance Eaton wrote that he has co-created course policies with students for several years, and also often allows them to select which assignments to complete. Eaton, who teaches at North Shore Community College, in Massachusetts, and is director of digital pedagogy at College Unbound, offered five tips for instructors considering a similar approach:

1. Make sure you as the instructor are *really* ready to do this. This requires power-sharing and some ego-massaging for some folks. If you aren’t prepared to really listen and hear students, then don’t do it.
2. For the first time or two, you can provide the syllabus to the administration and give a blank template to students to see what they come up with, so as not to influence their thinking. After a few semesters, try using the set recommended by previous students, and let students know that it was created with guidance from previous students — this then becomes an interesting evolution and indirect interaction between current and past students.
3. Dedicate time to what it means to co-create. Emphasize what the institutional requirements are and ground things in the course objectives (but give some room to allow adjusting/tweaking them).
4. Help students understand some of the unspoken structures, assumptions, or background of the course, such as the difference between stand-alone and iterative assignments; formative and summative; the underlying pedagogical beliefs that structure the course; the things that you need to be able to do this effectively (e.g., the right amount of time between assignments to get feedback).
5. Revisit the syllabus and its policies every quarter of the course to assess how they are working and if changes should be made.

## **The Catch**

Christa Craven, who teaches a pass/fail course called Feminist Pedagogy in Action at the College of Wooster, in Ohio, shared one of the most thorough examples of co-creating a course with students.

Craven, a professor of anthropology and women's, gender, and sexuality studies, wrote that the course is one of her favorites to teach. Still, she added a note of caution that professors pursuing this kind of design should keep in mind:

"As well as policies, we also collaborate on class assignments and final projects, which — to be honest — have ranged from outstanding to disastrous, which I feel like is an important point that even with the same prep on an instructor's part, the students' contributions matter intensely and can vary substantially."

To co-create a course with students is to take a risk. I asked Craven why she's kept up this approach despite the uneven results.

"It's an approach I value because of my own time as a student at New College — with no grades and lots of opportunity to collaborate with other students to build self-designed tutorials, but also as part of my own work as an activist that showed me that you accomplish far more by working in coalition with others," Craven wrote. "I want students to have a taste of that. It's not always the right time in their life for them to really engage with that lesson, but I hope that some can find it meaningful later on, even if the experience at the time was difficult. For the groups that really engage collaboratively, it's electric! They form strong bonds that last long after graduation, and I hope that the skills they take away about collaboration and work in coalition will serve them well, whatever paths they choose to follow."

I was struck by Craven's hope that students find courses they struggle through meaningful later on. It's a good reminder that learning doesn't end when the semester does — and that many attempts to quantify the value of college can overlook something important.