April 28, 2023

Dear members of the UCCC:

I am writing to nominate three Core courses in the Jewish Studies program for the Christopher Haufler KU Core Innovation Award. The nomination focuses on our collective effort to improve students' oral communication skills through a series of innovative podcast and oral presentation assignments, which allow the learners to acquire experience of research-focused public speaking individually and in groups. In this nomination, we are including three courses: 1) JWSH 410 Israel: From Idea to State, which is approved for KU Core Goal 2.2 Oral Communication 2) JWSH 305 Language, Gender, and Sexuality, approved for Goal 3S, and 3) JWSH 347 Jewish Ethics, approved for Goal 5, Outcome 1. They are taught by Dr. Rami Zeedan, Dr. Renee Perelmutter, and Dr. Bogi Perelmutter respectively.

While these courses cover different materials and theoretical approaches, all three train students to communicate complex and nuanced ideas to a broad audience. Even though we are a small program in terms of faculty and majors, our courses serve a large and diverse body of students coming from across campus. Our courses are cross-listed with multiple other departments, such as POLS, HIST, ANTH, WGSS, REL, CGIS. In the past few years, we have invested in transforming many of our classes using backward design and other pedagogical methods, which helped us approve many of our courses to fulfil KU Core learning outcomes.

JWSH 410 Israel: From Idea to State (Dr. Rami Zeedan)
JWSH 410 is designed to explore Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people and its challenges in balancing Jewish and democratic values. Israel-related topics are constantly discussed in the global news, and JWSH 410 provides the students with the opportunity to engage with this topic. The course is divided into two parts, where the first part surveys Jewish history in the 19th century, the birth of Zionism, and statehood's progress through the British Mandate. In the second part, students learn about Israel's major contemporary issues. This course's primary focus is on developing and improving students' oral communication skills, which includes producing a podcast episode on one of the contemporary issues in Israeli society.

The course features several assignments that provide ample opportunities for students to present orally, each with a different purpose and audience. First, students participate in structured group discussions in every class session. Students are divided into groups that run throughout the semester, and each class session, the group discusses a series of questions. A rotating recorder is responsible for presenting the team's outcome to the other teams.

In addition to these informal presentations, the course includes three official presentations. The first presentation is for students to record a short podcast episode on historical events. The target audience is high school students. The second assignment it to work with their assigned team to present in class their topic using a current event (see Appendix for examples).

The target audience is college students. Third, is to record a long podcast episode for the final assignment. The target audience is the general public, but they first present a draft in class.

Students receive feedback on their contributions when they act as a recorder for their team. Additionally, each assignment has a rubric used for grading and providing feedback. Their peers also provide additional feedback on at least three different occasions, allowing students to continuously improve their communication skills.

The primary assignment of this course, the final podcast episode, is a scaffolded assignment with 12 steps. Students start working on it during the first week of the semester and receive feedback for each of the steps. Students gain experience from presenting the first two assignments and from presenting a draft of the final project, getting feedback on them, and getting better prepared for their final version. This structure allows for weekly feedback on the progress made, enabling the students to revise their work multiple times.

The grading structure of the course also adheres to the guidelines for KU Core goal 2.2. Evaluation of oral communication is a supermajority (at least 60%) of the final grade. This course meets this requirement by including different types of speeches or presentations. The course design and teaching strategies demonstrate a significant focus on student engagement and active learning. The group discussions and presentations allow for students to learn from their peers. The scaffolded assignments provide students with a foundation for continuous improvement, allowing them to take an active role in their education.

Finally, the course has a plan for sharing the results of its achievements. A chosen selection of the final podcasts are shared with the public, providing a record of the student's achievement (see Appendix). By sharing the results of the course's success, the course can help other students as well as faculty members improve their course design and teaching strategies.

JWSH 305 Language, Gender, and Sexuality (Dr. Renee Perelmutter, GTA Chul Hyun Hwang) JWSH 305: Language, Gender, and Sexuality is co-offered with SLAV 305. The course is crosslisted with LING, ANTH, WGSS, and CGIS, and it attracts students interested in issues of language and society, anthropological linguistics, gender and sexuality, and area studies. In this class, issues of gender and language are discussed in a way that seeks to interrogate the gender binary, center marginalized perspectives, examine a variety of non-US linguistic and cultural situations, and create a safe(r) space for learners from a variety of backgrounds. To satisfy Core Goal 3, we gain experience with research methodologies of sociolinguistics and anthropological linguistics, while also interrogating hegemonic practices which may affect theorizing and research methodologies used in studying language and gender. Gender and language is a hot topic in society, from debates about pronouns to questions of gendered language in Jewish religious observance. While this course serves a general audience, it allows students to gain expertise in specifically Jewish topics as they relate to language, religious practices, and multilingual contexts in which gender and sexuality play a crucial role.

During AY21-22, this course has been reconfigured to swap the traditional research essay for a research podcast assignment, and the course was workshopped and benefited from KU Center for Teaching Excellence's Revolutionizing Academia Learning Community (RALC). Prof. Renee Perelmutter's work in RALC focused specifically on the podcast assignment, which would combine two main goals: 1) allow the students to collectively research and reflect on an issue related to language, gender and sexuality (such as Language, Gender, and AI; Religion, Language, and Gender; and others). 2) prepare the students to publicly present nuanced and well-researched opinions to the public. The course allows students to select from a list of topics,

within which they have further freedom in terms of specific focus for each student. Groups also had an option to come up with a new topic not on the list, and have it approved by the instructor.

One of the most important aspects of this assignment, and of the class as a whole, is moving away from hierarchical assignment structure in which students are individually evaluated by an expert as the primary mode of learning, and instead engaging in building a community of learners. Working on podcasts allows the students to hone their oral communication and research skills. The podcast assignment is also a tool for building a community of learners in which students take responsibility to create and disseminate content, and participate in its evaluation. During the course of the class, students engage in scaffolded oral presentation activities related to the assignment, such as reports in class on the progress of the work. As a part of the assignment, student review and evaluate one podcast by another group. To help facilitate this, students engages in an in-class "pitch" session during which students pitch their podcast to other students – encouraging them to select their particular podcast to review in the Podcast reflection. This combination of research-related work and scaffolded oral presentations allows the students to further hone the skills they acquired in Goal 2.2, as Oral Communication is a crucial component of disseminating research and engaging with the public.

JWSH 347 Jewish Ethics (Dr. Bogi Perelmutter)

This course features an innovative assignment using the approach of *futurism* to enable students to engage with Jewish ethics. The assignment requests students to work in groups of 2-3 to come up with an ethical problem that they can see becoming important in the future – for example, problems related to artificial intelligence, spaceflight, genetic engineering and more. They apply Jewish ethics to this problem first in a classroom presentation, then in a term paper. They are required to use both traditional and modern Jewish ethical texts of their own choice that they think are applicable to this future ethical problem.

The course outcomes include not only learning about Jewish ethics, also practicing tasks such as working together in groups to create a presentation and a term paper. Learning outcomes are assessed by multiple well-defined products such as presentations and papers. Smaller assignments are also included that ask students to reflect on their own presentation, another group's presentation, and their own term paper. These reflections provide feedback for the instructor for further adjusting the course and its requirements. This course was recently redesigned to align it better with Core goals and to have a clearer set of aims and milestones. We sought to use assignments that enable students to acquire and practice general academic and intellectual competencies, with a focus on working in small groups.

This course is highly interactive and taught using a series of text studies of Jewish ethical sources that we discuss among ourselves in the classroom. This process is also replicated during the student presentations, where one third of the time – and in practice often more – is devoted to students posing questions to the presenters and engaging in further discussion.

While the issue of quantitative data is less applicable to Jewish ethics, the assignments do encourage students to follow an evidence-based approach: their statements in their presentation and paper need to be cited from Jewish sources, and whenever they rely on factual statements about the world in their arguments, they need to bring a source for those as well. In the process of doing so, they build text-critical skills.

Dr. Bogi Perelmutter has worked on disseminating the educational approach and results from this assignment with colleagues both within the department and outside of it. With Dr. Rami Zeedan they have participated in each other's courses as guest lecturers, further

interlinking these Jewish Studies Core courses that have innovative pedagogical approaches. They have also begun to share the pedagogical learnings from this assignment with a broader scholarly audience. They submitted an analysis of this assignment as part of a broader panel of presenters discussing innovative uses of futurism in pedagogy to the international conference SFRA 2023: Disruptive Imaginations in Dresden, Germany, where it has been recently accepted.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we believe that our approach to focusing on oral communication will greatly benefit our students both in academic and workplace settings. We begin this emphasis with the first year seminar, then proceed through the JWSH 305 and JWSH 410 courses, finally giving students the opportunity to close their degree while transforming their capstone into a publishable project.

We hope you find our course sequence for the Jewish Studies Program a strong candidate for the Christopher Haufler KU Core Innovation Award.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Renee Perelmutter
Professor and Jewish Studies Director

Appendices

This Appendix contains the following documents in support of this nomination for the Christopher Haufler KU Core Innovation Award:

1.   Syllabi –
                1.1 Syllabus: JWSH 410
                1.2 Syllabus: JWSH 305
                1.3 Syllabus: JWSH 347

2.   Assignment Instructions and Grading Rubrics
                2.1 Assignment Instructions and Grading Rubrics: JWSH 410
                2.2 Assignment Instructions and Grading Rubrics: JWSH 305
                2.3 Assignment Instructions and Grading Rubrics: JWSH 347

3.   Student Final Podcast Episodes- examples: JWSH 410 and JWSH 305.

4.   Presentations:
                4.1 Group presentations examples: JWSH 410
                4.2 Group presentations examples: JWSH 347