Transforming teaching materials into research for promotion

Gregory B. Kaplan

University of Tennessee

One of the most important acts that current medievalists can perform in order to encourage the growth of Medieval Hispanism is to assist junior colleagues earn tenure to associate professor, and then promotion to full professor, so that a new generation of scholars and teachers can develop. An important component in the process of tenure and promotion is the compilation of a promotion dossier, which is the document by which a candidate is introduced to reviewers, and must therefore be carefully crafted. A dossier presented for promotion, whether from Assistant to Associate professor with tenure or from Associate to Full professor, typically contains three sections: a section dedicated to service, another dedicated to teaching, and a third dedicated to research. In this essay, in light of the fact that the topics that Hispano-medievalists teach are often distant from the Middle Ages, my goal with respect to the compilation of such a dossier is to present manners by which one’s teaching and research profiles may be enhanced simultaneously.

The first thing I suggest is that every candidate for tenure and promotion know exactly where they stand on the tenure clock. If you don’t currently have department bylaws, lobby for a clearly defined research agenda for promotion in Department by laws. An example of a clear set of criteria for promotion that is incorporated into departmental bylaws are those in the Department of Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures at my institution, the University of Tennessee (these criteria may be consulted on the UT-MFLL webpage).

I also suggest recurring to departmental bylaws in order to formulate strategies by which success in teaching and research may be achieved simultaneously and, of course, communicating these strategies to one’s department head or chair during annual performance reviews. For example, at UT, annual performance reviews take into account evidence of successful teaching, which can be demonstrated in part by “on-going revision of class materials.” I propose that such revision constitute a bridge between teaching and research. As early as possible on the tenure clock, one should, in consultation with one’s department chair or head, identify venues where studies that cross this bridge might be published, which in my case has included: *Área abierta*, *Global Business Languages*, *Foreign Language Annals*, the MLA *Approaches to Teaching* series, and McGraw-Hill. For assistant or associate professors, preparing new courses can be very time consuming, as can incorporating new materials within courses. Since one is also essentially required to be doing research at the same time, I suggest using these opportunities as the foundation for research projects.

When I was a visiting assistant professor of Spanish at Boston College in 1994-95, I was entrusted with teaching an upper-level course in business Spanish, and I agreed even though I had little past experience. I worked with a colleague (Dr. Irene Mizrahi) on developing a set of actual case studies from the files of Latin American businesses and U.S. businesses that had a presence in Latin America into a textbook, *Español para los negocios: Estudios de casos*, which was first published in 1996 and then as a revised and expanded edition in 1998 by McGraw-Hill. While as medievalists our primary research interests are in areas far from business Spanish, in addition to saving time when I prepared subsequent offerings of business Spanish at UT, *Español para los negocios: Estudios de casos* also served within my promotion dossier to supplement my publications in medieval Spanish literature.

One of the reasons I was able to move from visiting assistant professor at Boston College to a tenure-track assistant professor position at UT was my continuing work in business Spanish, which ultimately lead me to serve as director of the Language and World Business (LWB) program from 2002-14. LWB is a major within the Department of MFLL at the University of Tennessee that combines one of eight language tracks (Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish, with a track in Arabic to be added in the near future) with a specialization in one of three pre-professional concentrations (international business, international retail merchandising, or international agricultural economics). LWB majors also perform at least 3 hours of experiential learning, whether an internship, community service, or in conjunction with study abroad, as a requirement for completing the major. In order to promote LWB program cohesiveness and enhance the cooperative effort between LWB and the Haslam College of Business Administration at UT, there existed a need to redesign a required gateway course (MFLL 199) for students in 8 LWB tracks (MFLL 199 is offered once a year and typically draws students from most if not all of the tracks each time it is taught). MFLL 199 is taught in English but, in order to enhance the foreign language component, needed to incorporate at least some activities in all 8 target languages. After redesigning this course, I published a study on the new MFLL 199 in *Global Business Languages*, which is one of a number of venues that disseminate studies related to pedagogy.

Another such venue is *Foreign Language Annals*, in which I published a study involving the typical process of creating a new course, “Introduction to Hispanic Culture” (SP 331). SP 331 is a required upper-level course (taught in Spanish) for majors and minors in Spanish at the UT. For over a decade 331 has served as a gateway course that offers students a panoramic vision of Hispanic and pre-Hispanic cultures in Europe and America, thus providing students with a solid foundation for a variety of upper-level courses in Hispanic cinema, civilization, and literature. Prior to the fall semester of 2003, five sections of 331 (15–20 students per section) were offered each year, with three being offered during the fall semester and two during the spring semester. Increased enrollment resulted in the need for four sections during the fall semester of 2003 and an anticipated need for three sections during the spring semester of 2004. This increase created a staffing problem for the spring, namely, a lack of available faculty to cover the extra sections. In response to this situation, the Spanish section of the Department of Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures decided to combine the three spring sections into one large lecture course. As a long-term solution, it was decided that, beginning with the 2004–2005 academic year, all seven sections of 331 would be replaced by one large lecture course, which would be taught annually each spring. I was entrusted with developing and implementing the course. As I created the materials and designed the syllabus for 331, I wrote a study devoted to analyzing the design of the course as well as to discussing its successful implementation over several years, which I published as “Teaching to the Masses: The Design and Implementation of a Large Lecture Hispanic Culture Course.”

At some institutions of higher learning, including the one I attended (the University of Texas at Austin), an undergraduate course dedicated exclusively to Miguel de Cervantes’s masterpiece, *Don Quixote*, is available to undergraduate majors in Spanish. However, a course that focuses on only one text is frequently impractical, as is the case at UT. Creating space within a survey course for a portion of both parts of *Don Quixote* is challenging because of its length and because of the need to contextualize the work. After I developed a unit on *Don Quixote* for SP 334, an upper-level literary survey course in medieval and Golden Age Spanish literature, I wrote a study (“Using an Anthology”) describing strategies for using an anthology to teach excerpts from both volumes of the work. In particular, I propose specific examples to illustrate how an anthology can be employed as a gateway to covering chapters not read for class and as an effective tool for considering the artistic, historical, and social influences on *Don Quixote*. This study appeared in a venue long known for publishing volumes dedicated to pedagogy, the Modern Language Association of America (MLA) *Approaches* series, and faculty should consider collaborating on future volumes in this series as a means of enhancing their tenure and promotion dossiers.

As faculty move along the tenure clock they should also keep in mind that presentations of papers at professional conferences form an essential component of promotion dossiers, and such presentations can evolve from pedagogical materials as a means of perfecting a theme on the road to publication. For example, I presented “From the Screen to the Chalkboard: Teaching *La lengua de las mariposas*,” in October, 2001, at the Mountain Interstate Foreign Language Conference (MIFLC), U of North Carolina, Wilmington, NC. In this paper, I presented techniques for teaching the film, *La lengua de las mariposas*, in conjunction with the three short stories by Manuel Rivas upon which the film is based. This unit on *La lengua de las mariposas* forms part of a course, SP 434, which I teach on a regular basis. And which deals with cinematographic adaptations of literary works involving the dictatorship of Francisco Franco in Spain. I continued developing the link between the stories and the film and, a decade later, I published my conclusions in “La visualización de la represión franquista en *La lengua de las mariposas*.” Indeed, the development of a class can lead to multiple publications, and concerning a unit in 434 that involves the 1959 cinematographic adaptation of *Lazarillo de Tormes* by César Ardavín, I co-wrote a study, “Una revisitación franquista del *Lazarillo de Tormes*,” which appeared in an interdisciplinary collection of essays (*La novela española y el cine*). In light of the current importance at U.S. institutions lent to interdisciplinarity, publications in such venues can be presented on one’s dossier as being tied to that component of an institution’s mission.

I believe that one of the most important facets of good teaching is constantly striving to find innovative methods of delivering content. With respect to innovation, I hope to have demonstrated that, just as research can be transformed into pedagogical materials (indeed, when one does teach in one’s area of specialization, is it possible for such teaching not to be informed by one’s research?), pedagogical materials can be transformed into research.

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