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Application Summary

Competition Details

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Primary School or Department

School of History and Sociology

Primary Appointment Title: Associate Professor

Application Details

Proposal Title

Gerona, Carla: Museum Studies and Southern Trails in Early American History

Nomination Packet Contents for Associate Professor Carla Gerona
2024 Innovation in Co-Curricular Education Award
Center for Teaching and Learning
Georgia Institute of Technology

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Georgia Tech  **School of History and Sociology**
Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts

February 9, 2024

2024 Innovation in Co-Curricular Education Award
Center for Teaching and Learning
Georgia Institute of Technology

Dear Awards Committee Members:

I nominate Associate Professor Carla Gerona for the 2024 Innovation in Co-Curricular Education Award sponsored by the Center for Teaching and Learning at Georgia Tech. I am chair of the Awards Committee of the School of History and Sociology. Gerona's nomination has the unanimous support of the committee as well as the School chair, Victoria Thompson.

For over a decade, Professor Gerona has developed innovative approaches to teaching early American history, helping students express themselves both with hands-on museum exhibits and digital storytelling. Her co-curricular teaching focuses on the rich local history in the Atlanta region, connecting students with local institutions, historical sites, and communities. At the same time, her digital storytelling projects help students share their work with a vast audience.

Gerona's innovations are deeply connected to Georgia Tech's strategic plan, helping produce well-rounded global citizens who can contribute to diverse sectors of society. In her classes, students engage in non-traditional activities that help them "develop respect for other cultures," through respect for voices that have been excluded from our own culture. Her museum-studies courses have spanned a wide range of topics. One class studied the historical Oakland Cemetery, which is one of the largest green spaces in Atlanta. Oakland Cemetery reflects the historical segregation of the city, with separate areas for African Americans, Confederate soldiers, and Jews. Another class focused on Atlanta in the 1920s, covering topics from jazz to Prohibition to racial segregation. Gerona has embraced socially relevant but controversial topics, such as the Confederate monument at Stone Mountain. In all these courses, she inspires her students to create high-quality, accessible exhibits, both as physical displays and online. Online versions of these exhibits can be viewed at <https://carlagerona.com/galleryspaces/>.

Gerona's work is deeply collaborative, connecting students with archivists, museum professionals, and community members, often through trips to historical sites. She also works closely with IAC's DILAC program to develop projects in digital humanities. Her contributions are original, creative, and deeply meaningful. Gerona would be an ideal recipient of this award.

Sincerely,



Eric Schatzberg
Professor

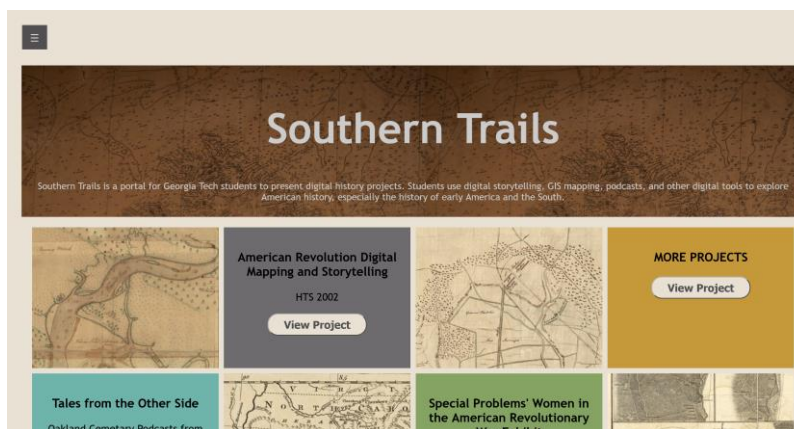
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Carla Gerona Statement for Innovation in Co-Curricular Award, 2024

Museum Studies and Southern Trails in Early American History: Local Histories Across Classes and Communities

Introduction

What is the history of the ground you are standing on? How can local history help you connect with different communities? These are two central questions that my students have focused on the past few years. To help students answer such foundational questions in engaging ways, I have been guiding students to create a series of public and digital exhibits and digital stories that share their historical findings with others, both inside and outside of Georgia Tech. This larger co-curricular quest cuts across classes and communities and has resulted in over ten public student exhibits on and off campus. In addition, by collaborating with the Digital Integrative Liberal Arts Center, my student team and I designed a digital platform, “Southern Trails in Early American History” to explore and showcase all this student work on local history in one readily accessible space. The site currently has links to earlier class exhibits, and it features over fifty new student digital stories from my Early American history classes. Although the portal represents my latest co-curricular initiative, it builds on years of community collaboration with many organizations and individuals. Moreover, “Southern Trails” remains a working and living site, as students develop new early American history projects and I continue to facilitate connections with other people: <https://southerntrails.hsoc.gatech.edu/>



While students and others may be familiar with Atlanta’s significant contribution to the Civil Rights Movement, much less is known about earlier periods of Atlanta’s story. Uncovering this foundational history is a central goal of the Southern Trails portal as well as many of my US history classes. Georgia Tech stands on former Muscogee (Creek) lands; and the South, including Georgia, has a rich, if troubled, early history that included European Settlements, Cherokee and Creek Removal, and the institution of plantation slavery. Southerners also participated in developing new forms of more democratic government and cutting-edge technologies as they created new states in the colonial, revolutionary, and republican periods. At Georgia Tech we have an opportunity to share both the good and the difficult history with our students, whether they major in the humanities, architecture, engineering, computer science or

something else. Indeed, learning about different perspectives and developing rich intercultural understanding is a USG Core Goal that is at the heart of Southern Trails and also advances Georgia Tech's strategic goal of graduating global citizens.

Working in co-curricular ways to advance Georgia Tech strategic goals has been the most central and original aspect of my pedagogical practice for many years, in multiple classrooms, and for multiple projects. In teaching circles, it is well known that students benefit from different kinds of interactions: teacher-to-learner, content-to learner, and learner-to-learner. Whether in surveys, seminars, or in my most experiential classes, such as "Introduction to Museum Studies," I introduce multiple opportunities to engage all these different ways of learning. However, my classes go beyond this important pedagogical triangle. First, I extend the idea of "learner-to-learner" interactions to extend beyond just one classroom. Through the "Southern Trails" portal, students who work on co-curricular projects have a unique opportunity to share across classes -- even across different years. Second, my classes often feature a different kind of interaction: learner-to-community interactions. By organizing different opportunities for students to meet academics and non-academics working in real world situations, learners see first-hand examples of how historical work can help shed light on important ethical and environmental issues. Students directly experience the ways in which local organizations engaged in history can make a positive impact on their local, national, and global communities. Both on-line and off-line, creating such opportunities for significant human interactions enhances our students' sense of well-being while providing models and professional connections for the future.

Museum Studies and Community Engagement

For over ten years, I have been teaching a hands-on course called, "Introduction to Museum Studies." In this experiential class students learn about museum practices and the history of museums while creating their own actual exhibit, usually related to Atlanta's history. Students learn by doing – and more. This class also advances the Social Science Core Goal E (Now Core IMPACTS), in which students **analyze the complexity of human behavior, and how historical, economic, political, social, or geographic relationships develop, persist, or change**. For this "studio history" class, I have also identified three other central goals:

1. **Historical research.** Both the class and the studio work are grounded in history and involve extensive primary and secondary source research.
2. **Museology and public engagement.** Students learn about the history of museums, how museums work, and how these institutions have increasingly prioritized public engagement.
3. **Artistic/humanistic experimentation and communication.** Students have an opportunity to explore their artistic side: by planning and curating exhibits.

Exhibit topics and locations vary with each new semester. Students sometimes curate on-campus exhibits by choosing from a select group of local history topics that I present at the beginning of the semester. At other times, we work with local organizations to develop an exhibit that they requested at their preferred exhibit site. Depending on the topic, I choose one or more relevant historical sites and archives as a partnering organization. Over the years, we have

worked with the Robert C. Williams Paper Museum, Georgia Tech's Woodruff Library and Special Collections, the Atlanta History Center, Emory University's Rose Library, the Georgia Archives, and the Vann Historical Site, among others. Having the Director of the Paper Museum, Virginia Howell explain how collecting works, and showing how pictures of Gandhi and money from the Revolutionary War are stored, is extraordinarily impactful. Similarly, when the Research Manager, Serena McCracken, at the Kenan Center of the Atlanta History Museum pulled out handwritten death records with cause of death listed in separate "colored" and "white" books, students saw evidence of inequality in the nineteenth century in vividly concrete ways. While some of my students go on to intern with these and other organizations, all students come to understand how historic museums meet particular challenges, including collections management, budgeting, and design.

Working with such community partners also allows me to underscore perhaps the most important change in how museums have operated over time. Whether private or public, museums have shifted from focusing on individual treasures selected by curatorial experts to exhibits that welcome community engagement, participation, and inclusion. Therefore, curating exhibits offers unique opportunities to explore important questions that are of concern to the Georgia Tech community and its neighbors. For example, when students worked on their exhibit, "A Walk in the Park: Exploring the History of Atlanta's Recreational Spaces," they researched the landmark desegregation case *Holmes v. Atlanta* in 1955. While visiting the Bobby Jones golf course that Alfred Holmes desegregated in 1955, students met Holmes's son, Michael Holmes. Holmes provided first-hand knowledge about his father's experience teeing off at Bobby Jones for the first time on Christmas Day. Holmes also shared stories about being the first African American to graduate from Stanford's School of Business. Additionally, that semester students learned how recent development threatened the Bobby Jones park.

Historical preservation and sustainability are key concerns for many museums and historic sites. In 2022, Rebecca Watt's Hull (from GT's Serve, Learn, Sustain (SLS) and Mary Fernandez the outreach specialist (at the Historic Oakland Cemetery Foundation) reached out to create a collaborative effort to "help the historic cemetery better understand and serve the diverse kinds of visitors that enjoy this fascinating park every day." In addition to my class, Hull and Fernandez had identified Rosa Arriaga's Computer Interaction course as another partner. Although Arriaga and I each taught separate classes, we all worked together before, during, and after the semester to address Fernandez's goals. Our students visited the cemetery together, discussed initiatives and goals; and attended each other's poster sessions and exhibit openings – collaborating and sharing ideas throughout the process that also included visits from Ms. Fernandez to our classrooms. According to Fernandez, these collaborations "contributed to [Oakland Cemetery's] work of fulfilling that final and critical point in [their] mission—the sharing of Oakland and its history. Whether focusing on the stories that can be found among the flowers and headstones of Oakland's hardscape and landscape or focusing on how visitors to the cemetery can best access all that the cemetery has to offer." She further wrote that "our partnership was an incredibly enriching and fruitful one that has had a meaningful impact on our guests already. The historic site welcomes hundreds of visitors daily who have had the opportunity to learn from Dr. Carla Gerona's students' exhibition in our historic Women's Comfort Station building, "Tales from the Other Side: Oakland Cemetery from the 1850s-1930s."

Since this collaboration, "Introduction to Museum" continues to participate in the SLS program, as I work with local community partners to bring historical preservation and interpretation to public spaces. To do this, the class emphasizes how museums incorporate various elements from Bridger and Luloff's definitions of sustainable community development especially (1) Nurture civic participation and amplify community voices (2) Strengthen social ties and other connections to place (3) Bolster human capital and (4) Preserve cultural diversity.



Introduction to Museum Studies Students outside their Exhibit at the Oakland Cemetery

In 2023, I was asked to join the 15th annual Institute Diversity Symposium Organizing Committee due to my knowledge of Native American history. The Institute wanted to plan a symposium based on Native American communities and knowledge. I was already doing research on the related theme, "Georgia Tech before Georgia Tech," and had been conducting research so my students could do a series of exhibits about Atlanta and the land that GT stands on. The Symposium committee found this topic evocative, and adopted it as a central theme for our program, which we titled, "This Land Before Georgia Tech." The committee also supported the idea of creating a student-curated pop-up exhibit for the symposium, which my students titled, "Etowah: Legacy of the Mounds." To prepare the students to curate this exhibit, I organized a tour at the Etowah Mounds State Historical Site. The students learned about the site's extremely low budgets, the potential of artifact theft, the need to work with primary and secondary school teachers, and most of all the requirement to follow Congress's Native American Graves Protection and Reappropriation Act (museums have been asked to catalogue and return all grave items with identifiable descendant tribes). At the symposium students shared their pop-up exhibit and had opportunities to engage with and receive feedback from experts in the field, including the Southeastern representative of the Muscogee (Creek) Tracie Revis. Students had multiple up-close opportunities to learn about how historic sites and Indigenous nations can work together. The student exhibit is currently on display in the Old CE Computer Lab Gallery Space -- and I will be inviting my two US history classes to visit and evaluate this exhibit this semester. After we take "Etowah" down, the exhibit will go on the

“Southern Trails” site, so future classes will be able to see this important student work long after the class ended.

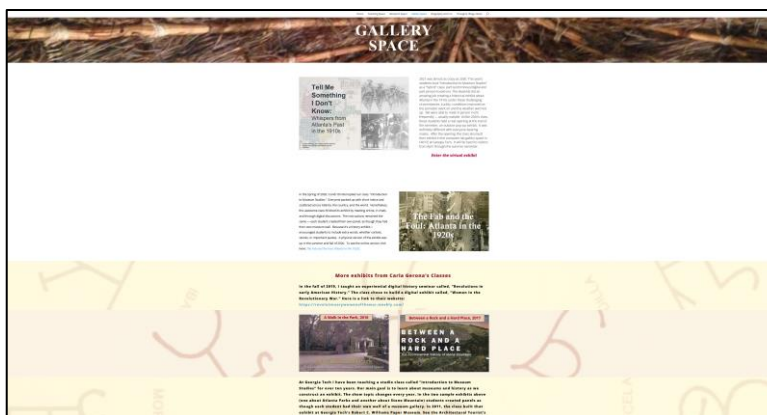


Pop up Exhibit at “This Land Before Georgia Tech” Symposium

Digital History Across Classrooms

A confluence of events brought me to think harder about digital technologies as a way of extending my co-curricular and cross-classroom initiatives and leading to the building of the “Southern Trails” portal. Perhaps most significantly, COVID brought new challenges, particularly a sense of disconnection for students. Rather than tossing in the hat, I made sure to continue – and even enhance – our opportunities to connect with communities and each other. Because students were unable to meet in person and no one could visit any physical spaces on Campus, in Spring 2020 I created a digital gallery space to post the students’ first online exhibit (<https://carlagerona.com/galleryspaces/>). Instead of an exhibit opening, students invited friends and family to comment on their show, and I also continued to share their work with other classes. By thus engaging with people on digital platforms, at a time when face-to-face contact was limited, I found that this could provide yet another way to enhance community involvement at a time when this was especially lacking. Exhibits on the gallery site currently include:

- Tell me Something I don’t know: Whispers from Atlanta’s Past in the 1910s
- The Fab and Foul: Atlanta in the 1920s
- Between a Rock and Hard Place: The Controversial History of Stone Mountain
- “A Walk in the Park: Exploring the History of Atlanta’s Recreational Spaces”



I had identified a need to include more digital opportunities for our History and Sociology majors even before COVID. While interviewing colleagues and students in conjunction with my Provost Teaching and Learning Fellowship, I identified a need to include more digital learning opportunities for the School of History and Sociology majors. With the undergraduate committee, we developed an upper-level capstone experiential seminar that would be taught by different faculty members (as is the case with our more traditional seminars that include long research papers as the main deliverable). I would pilot the first class and focus on new ways of doing history through digital lenses. Learners in the class explored early American historical websites, podcasts, and more as they constructed their own digital spaces and designed a collaborative multi-media capstone project. Students did not have to have prior coding or digital experience, I simply asked that they be willing to try new approaches and accept that things might not always go as planned. Here was my **list of goals for that class**:

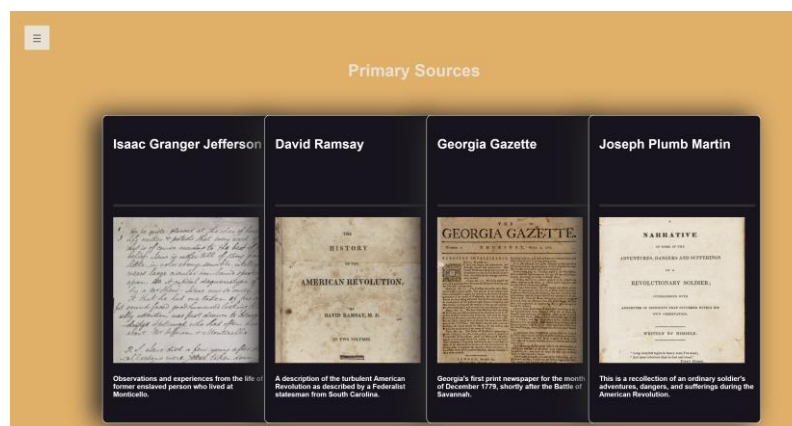
- 1. develop extensive knowledge about how to do historical research.**
- 2. deepen your knowledge of early American history.**
- 3. develop extensive knowledge about digital and other multi-media outlets for doing history.**
- 4. develop stronger collaborative skills.**
- 5. complete a product that you can share with future employers, graduate programs, and/or in the community.**

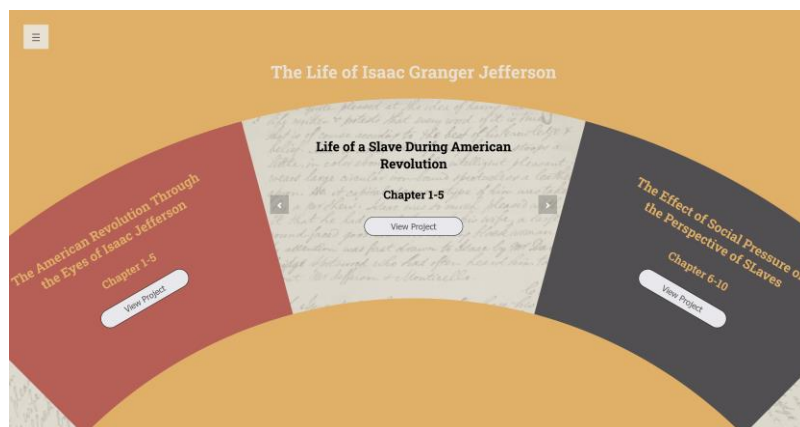
Although I was starting to experiment with digital technologies in my own research, it would have been next to impossible to teach this class without the close collaboration of DILAC's staff, DILAC's graduate students, and the technology experts at the Woodroof Library. Drawing on my own knowledge and that of our collaborators, I was able to create a program for our students to have workshops on a variety of digital tools, including digital publication, content management systems, GIS mapping, text analysis, and more. For their capstone assignment, the students pitched their different ideas. Eventually, they settled on an online exhibit drawing on a variety of software tools. The class further decided on the topic of "Women during the American Revolution" because they felt the internet did not adequately explore that topic. Their carefully researched, engaging, and thoughtful exhibit can be found

at:<https://revolutionarywomenofthewar.weebly.com/> (and I have also made it available through the “Southern Trails” Website).

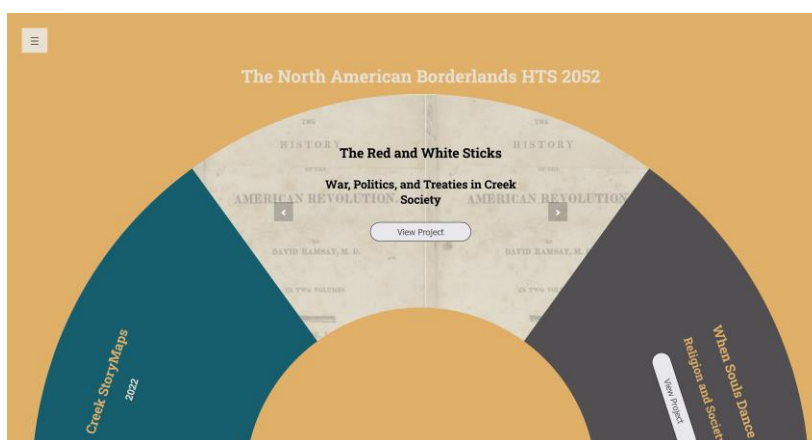


The “Southern Trails” Website was the natural follow-up to these various digital experiments. Above all, “Southern Trails in Digital Early American History” seeks to create a digital historical space for students to explore this important and foundational era using new tools. By bringing together digital and historical explorations in classroom settings, “Southern Trails” contributes to a core curriculum that provides depth and breadth -- and that is relevant to our twenty-first century students. More than that, the resulting student work on early American history in digital spaces provides the larger community with new ways to engage in history of and from the South. Student projects are all accessible and because my team and I coded the portal from scratch there is no paywall. During the first year, my goal was to put together a team that would design this site, which provided useful experiences for my two graduate and two undergraduate team members. The first classroom project directly intended for “Southern Trails” was to create a place-based multimedia map narrative based on their interpretation of a primary source from the Revolutionary Era. The students used “StoryMaps” to analyze and present four sources: an enslaved person, a common soldier, a delegate to the Constitution, and a series of Georgia’s earliest newspaper reports.





Students in my other classes have since looked at how previous classes interpreted these primary sources, and we designed the “Southern Trails” site so that we could build it out, and students in future classes could add their projects to the portal.



I have now used digital mapping in four introductory history classes. The student work is amazing. Knowing that they will present their historical research with other students, friends,

parents, and future employers, has led students to do exemplary work on the early American South.

Assessments and Impact

My work with students has been recognized across the university. Not least of all, I am honored that my colleagues nominated me for the collaboration prize. In Spring 2021 and Spring 2023, I received the “Recognition of Excellence in Teaching: Class of 1934 Honor Roll Award.” I have been fortunate to participate in many CTL programs over the years, including participation and in 2018-2020 Provost Teaching and Learning Fellowship Program – where I had an opportunity to develop and refine many collaborative initiatives. With my PTLF colleagues and the CTL team we explored issues around “Teaching the Liberal Arts at a Technological Community” and student well-being. From students I have received formal “Thank a Teacher” awards and thank you emails and cards. I believe this success in teaching comes from having the courage to be curious and creative. And no matter what, I pay a great deal of attention to what my students want and need. I check in with students in multiple ways. Throughout the semester, I ask – how was a particular assignment? Was it a good learning experience and why? Did students experience any particular challenges? I also use Canvas regularly to create anonymous polls. For these, I can be very specific: What did you like about creating a Podcast? Should I repeat this assignment with another class? Though CIOS has its problems, I learn from these scores and comments to identify to student concerns and see what is working well.

My 2023 North American Borderlands class gave me a rating “5” for both “enthusiasm” and “overall effectiveness.” For the “course best aspect” one student wrote, **“The story map is a really cool project [and] it was hard not to get carried away with making the coolest map.”** Another stated, **“I loved the storymaps project!!!! [and] The content was really interesting THE WHOLE SEMESTER, which can be hard to find sometimes.”** Finally, one student said I was their **“favorite professor at GA tech!”** For 2021’s “Introduction to Museum Studies” the rating was 5 for “enthusiasm” and 4.9 for “overall effectiveness.” For this class, students wrote **“I love how all the assignments led up to the final exhibit, it was a good process”** and **“I loved our project! Designing a museum exhibit was such a fun and hands on way to learn the content”** and **“Visiting the Archives to conduct research was an incredible experience! I also enjoyed collaborating with the class and Dr. Gerona to create an exhibit.”** For instructor’s greatest strength students wrote, **“Her passion for the subject and research made us excited to seek out more historical information and think outside of class how best to design our museum exhibit.”** And **“Dr. Gerona actually cares about students more than any professor I've ever had; she is very accommodating and understanding. Her enthusiasm about the course also makes it a lot of fun, and she is very nice.”** There weren’t many suggestions for instructor or course improvements. One student wrote, **“I have no critiques! Dr. Gerona is stellar!”**

In all my classes, students remark upon my “enthusiasm;” that is not always the case with “effectiveness.” Teaching collaborative classes that are academically rigorous can be challenging. Collaborating with other partners who are on different schedules and have their own goals presents particular difficulties. For example, students usually curate their exhibit as a

final project at the end of the semester. But the Diversity Symposium took place at the beginning of the semester and Oakland Cemetery had to have the exhibit opening before the semester ended due to their Spring schedule. This required me to rethink our class learning modules, and having to complete the exhibit early was hard for some students. And as amazing as it might be for students to create shows on site and visit museums and archives, leaving campus can present some difficulties for our busy students. Nonetheless, I work hard to guide students overcome any hesitancy and see the value of working outside the classroom box. And no matter what, I make sure to prioritize student needs and well-being as I engage in any co-curricular collaborations.

Sharing these experiences beyond the classroom with other scholars at academic conferences is another way that I have been able to make an impact. My commitment to reflexive teaching has led me share these pedagogical experiences with other professionals in various settings. After teaching the Digital Humanities capstone seminar I shared a Power Point presentation of my poll responses and other observations to the HSOC Undergraduate committee. Based on my collected findings, I argued that we should continue offering the experiential capstone option and two other professors have now taught an experiential version of our capstone class (students are still required to take at least one traditional seminar as well). During my PTLF tenure, a group of us had planned a round table around student well-being that was accepted at a national conference. Unfortunately, this was cancelled due to COVID. The interruption did not deter from presenting my pedagogical innovations at the next CTL Teaching Day. I designed a poster based on my work to create the “Southern Trails” portal. The poster, which included a collaboration with my Teaching Assistant, Elise Zheng, featured a series of polls that I had designed to see how students were responding to the StoryMaps digital project. Finally, the conference paper that I presented at Clemson, “Applying Global Questions of Equity in Local Spaces: Georgia Tech Students Study Oakland Cemetery,” considered Museum Studies as an opportunity to collaborate with local partners, with attention to historical inequities and promoting inclusion. For this conference, I also encouraged our graduate student, Alejandra Ruiz, to present her paper on developing a podcast projects with “Introduction to Museum Student” -- yet another collaborative effort. As I continue these collaborations, I expect that I will write a new article about inclusive historical collaborations in a digital age.

Conclusion

Collaboration isn't easy. Yet it is an incredibly valuable pedagogical tool for historians, students of history, and students more generally. Most of all, working co-curricular initiatives into our classes can help students to see different perspectives, a key goal for Georgia Tech and the entire USG Core Curriculum. While my initial collaborative practices began as person-to-person experiences, I have become aware of the need to be equally collaborative in digital spaces. I have said, "With the increasing move to artificial intelligence, students need to know they can tell their stories and control the digital tools, rather than the other way around. This basic principle is hugely important in how we design and use digital tools — and how we think about storytelling in the age of AI." (<https://iac.gatech.edu/featured-news/2024/01/visual-storytelling>) In some ways we can think of machine learning as the most epic collaboration – but I doubt this collaboration will ever be as powerful as twenty students, a teacher, and a community leader in a room or a digital breakout room.

Letter of Support for Innovation in Teaching Award for Carla Gerona

submitted by John Tone, January 18, 2024

On August 31, 2023, I observed Dr. Gerona teach HTS 3100: Introduction to Museum Studies. I did this as part of a regular program of peer teaching observation in my school. The subject of the course varies from semester to semester. In fall 2023 the subject was Native Americans in the Southeast and their representation in museums with a particular focus on the Etowah Mounds. I will restrict my comments to those things that I found most innovative.

As the class began, Gerona asked the students to summarize what they took away from the last class and to comment on some of the images of museums that they had seen. The students thought for a while and then submitted their answers in real time on Canvas. This seemed like a good Canvas tool for learning. I should say that Gerona's approach is not performative or didactic. It is focused on learning. And this came through in this first exercise of the class, in which students took the lead in teaching each other.

Five of the students were eager to discuss their take aways and some of the images in class.

- Will noted that he had learned that libraries and museums broadened their public appeal dramatically in the 19th century, associated with the work of John Cotton Dana.
- Olive also took note of Dana and emphasized his work to move museums beyond high art and into areas such as material culture and history.
- David spoke about the evolution of the role of the curator in the 20th century.
- Kelsey recalled that art museums in the 20th century became "white boxes" that could better focus attention on the art, but that this revolutionary shift was roundly criticized by people in the 21st century.
- Kade discussed the image of the "white box" as well and was able to post an image to Canvas so that other students could see what he was talking about.

In all this, I could see that the students learned from Gerona but also from each other. It was inspiring to see.

Gerona then turned the students' attention to the subject of the day. She asked some interesting leading questions, such as: Who owns artifacts? Why do Native Americans distrust museums? What is the first thing that comes to mind when you imagine an Indian or Native American? Which term should one use: Indian or Native American? Many of the students reported thinking of Indians first as victims. They often thought of Indians in classic headdresses and tepees. They were asked to name some tribes/nations/peoples. They were told that some people prefer to be called Indians and others Native Americans, and that the best practice was to ask whoever you were talking with what their preference was. The purpose of this

exercise was to open conversation about stereotypes and biases and about the subject of identity.

Gerona then turned to a (brief) traditional lecture, discussing the ways that museums have contributed to stereotypes and biases. She highlighted the belief by early European Americans – including Thomas Jefferson – that the Indians could not possibly have constructed mounds, as the technique was beyond them. Instead, they put forward various fantasies about people from Europe or Asia having built them. I didn't know that.

Gerona's lecture covered four main figures from the 19th and early 20th centuries. One of these was Samuel George Morton at Penn. Morton gathered 867 skulls from all over the world. His work argued that different human populations were distinct species and his findings were used by himself and others to justify slavery and genocide. Gerona did something here that I found very effective. She shared with the students the image of one of Morton's books, talking about it as a research artifact, and explaining how it made her feel. It was emotional, and I think it really reached students, who, it was easy to see, were imagining accessing challenging and perhaps frightening primary materials themselves.

Gerona ended the class by preparing the students for their upcoming visit to Etowah Mounds. This sort of field trip and tour is not easy to arrange, and I give credit to Gerona for doing it. It is one of the ways her teaching is so innovative.

I was not there for the tour the following week, but the students enjoyed it a great deal. It so happens that I had one of her students in my own class and know another from another context. I asked them both about it, and both found the experience moving and motivating.

The students in HTS 3100 produce research posters that form a collective installation mounted in the Old CE Building. Gerona does this every time she teaches the class, which always focuses on a different historical subject. I think the students learn a great deal from being given this freedom to explore different aspects of a single topic, in this case the Indian Mounds at Etowah.

To sum up, Dr. Gerona does a great job of alternating lecture and discussion with planned activities, during which a lot of learning goes on without necessarily a lot of performance on her part. I found this commendable. The class is hands on, and project-based, so student learning will necessarily be affected by this structure. The focus of the whole class as a team on one subject is a wonderfully creative technique that works well.

Reading over her syllabi and statement reinforces what I saw in her classroom and convinces me that she would be a worthy recipient of an award for innovation in teaching.

Atlanta,
January 2024

Statement of Support for Dr. Carla Gerona for the Innovation in Co-Curricular Award, 2024

Dear Award Committee,

I am pleased to advocate for Dr. Carla Gerona as a nominee for the Innovation in Co-Curricular Award 2024. As a PhD candidate in the Department of History and Sociology of Science and Technology at Georgia Tech, I have greatly benefited from Dr. Gerona's mentorship and her pioneering approach to museum studies.

Dr. Gerona integrates academic rigor with community engagement in her teaching methodology, highlighting the relevance of historical scholarship in addressing modern ethical and social challenges. Her commitment to fostering connections between students and a wide array of community stakeholders exemplifies co-curricular innovation at its finest.

As Dr. Gerona's research assistant for the Introduction to Museum Studies course, I witnessed how she guides students from varied academic backgrounds in developing key skills in historical inquiry and source contextualization. Dr. Gerona designed a sequence of activities that allowed students to engage with primary sources from several Atlanta research institutions. Notably, our visits to Georgia Tech's Woodruff Library and Special Collections, the Atlanta History Center, and the Oakland Cemetery enriched students' learning experiences immeasurably. Dr. Gerona's thoughtful planning and execution of these activities encouraged students to independently discover resources and integrate them into substantial projects. A prime example of this was the "Tales from the Other Side: Oakland Cemetery from the 1850s-1930s" exhibition and its accompanying podcast.

The exhibition and the podcasts were particularly thrilling for the students and served as an avenue for them to develop independent working skills. Throughout the production, students engaged in rigorous source review, developed their critical thinking abilities, and learned the intricacies of production. This endeavor also enhanced their work ethics and fostered a spirit of collaboration. Observing their transformation and growth under Dr. Gerona's tutelage was truly remarkable.

In her teaching, Dr. Gerona helps expand her student's perspectives, particularly those from STEM backgrounds, by providing a diverse and ethical framework for understanding society and community service. Her ability to create an educational environment that encourages exploration of new methodologies and cultural engagement is unparalleled.

In summary, Dr. Gerona's unwavering commitment to interdisciplinary education and her focus on public engagement in museology make her a standout candidate for the Innovation in Co-Curricular Award. Her significant impact on student learning and her contributions to the academic community are indeed worthy of this prestigious recognition.

Sincerely,



Alejandra Ruiz León
PhD Candidate
History and Sociology of Science and Technology
Georgia Tech

To whom it may concern,

I am honored to write a letter recommending Professor Carla Gerona for an award in innovative teaching. I have had the pleasure of taking two classes with Dr. Gerona, one on the American Revolution and another on Spanish border colonies in North America. Both classes were a positive experience because of Dr. Gerona's enthusiasm for the subject material and her dedication to integrating new technologies and teaching methods into the classroom.

Dr. Gerona employs multiple creative and "out of the box" concepts in her classes that provide her students with unique experiences and allow them to interact with the course content in novel ways. She incorporated a Reacting to the Past simulation of the Constitutional Convention into her class on the American Revolution. This allowed my classmates and I to get into the heads of the Founding Fathers and experience the challenges and excitement of drafting a government. The simulation required that we think critically about the issues debated at the conference from the perspectives of the men living in the context of the American Revolution. This unusual but highly effective exercise brought a fresh energy into content that American students had been exposed to countless times over the course of our education. For many of us, it was the highlight of the semester.

Dr. Gerona's assessments include numerous creative ways for students to express what they have learned. Perhaps the most original form of assessment that Dr. Gerona employs is the use of creative writing in her tests. In both classes that I took under her instruction, I was asked to apply what I had learned in the course to a creative writing prompt. This often required that I draft a letter or diary entry from the perspective of one of the individuals we had studied in the course, choosing a position from which to argue and using what I had learned in the class to validate my claims. This type of innovative assessment requires that students consider multiple perspectives, and it allows them to communicate what they have learned in a creative, low-stress manner that makes the content more memorable than a simple essay question.

Perhaps the best example of Dr. Gerona's innovative teaching practices is her incorporation of story mapping into her courses. In multiple courses, Dr. Gerona has led her students through the creation and publication of story maps as a digital medium for sharing historical knowledge. At the beginning of her courses, she shares with her students her passion for digital history and her desire to teach her students how to incorporate new technologies into their study of the past. I had the pleasure of building two story maps under Dr. Gerona's instruction, and the experience was an invaluable blend of developing technical skills while digging into greater historical research. The process was marked by collaboration and personal growth and the end result was a visually compelling and remarkably accessible display of the research performed by the entire class. The experience was so positive that I have incorporated similar assignments into the curriculum of my own classes.

Dr Gerona's commitment to including innovative and engaging classroom experiences into her courses makes her a favorite among history and non-history majors alike. Her use of simulations, creative assessment, and digital history mean that each student has unique opportunities to learn and to express their new knowledge. It is my pleasure to recommend her for an award in innovative teaching.

Sincerely,

Emma Harper

Bachelor of Science in History, Technology, and Society, 2023

January 19th, 2024

To Whom It May Concern:

As a former student of Dr. Carla Gerona, I am more than pleased to recommend Professor Gerona for the Innovation in Teaching Award.

I had the opportunity to take Dr. Gerona's Introduction to Museum Studies course last semester. She created a unique learning environment uncommon in most history courses that combined traditional lectures with project-based learning. One of the projects involved creating an exhibit about the history of the Etowah Mounds for the 2023 Diversity Symposium, where we researched, designed, and presented our panels to the attendees. In addition, Dr. Gerona's passion for Early American history made this project even more immersive and gave us an unforgettable real-life experience of creating and presenting an exhibit for a large audience.

Throughout the semester, Dr. Gerona went above and beyond to learn beyond the classroom walls. From visiting the Etowah Mounds to various exhibits and presentations related to our projects and museum studies, these experiences helped us to understand how to connect what we learned inside the classroom to the real world.

Dr. Gerona is an exceptional educator who exemplifies the spirit of innovation in teaching. Her enthusiasm, creativity, and dedication to ensuring student success make her a more than deserving candidate for this award. I wholeheartedly recommend her for this honor and am confident she will continue to inspire her future students.

Cordially,
Morgan Kang