

FOOD AND FAITH: HEALTH AND HAPPINESS AROUND THE MANY TABLES OF OUR LIVES

Exploring REL 140 Fall 2022



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PROFESSORS, RELIGION
WINGATE UNIVERSITY

W I N G A T E



Overview

When: Fall 2022
Classes: 4
Instructors: Wright and Watts
Enrollment: 104

Drs. Catherine Wright and Shea Watts at Wingate University implemented the first Food and Faith Community Engagement General Education course in 2022. Our target demographic is freshmen, undeclared, and underserved populations. Thus we worked with Student Success Coaches to help populate our classes. However, we also enrolled upper level, declared students as well.

General Education courses are foundational courses that all students must take to graduate. Developing a high impact course for general education is more effective since it reaches more students and includes undeclared students who may not be in selective programs (e.g., Honors, Biology, Athletics, etc..).

Civic and community engagement (CCE), including service-learning and community engaged courses, is being increasingly used as a strategic approach to:

- increase GPAs and academic achievement (Lockeman & Pelco, 2013)
- increase persistence to graduation (Yeh, 2010; Yob, 2014)
- Improve student attitudes toward institution and learning (Lockeman & Pelco, 2013; Reed et al. , 2015)
- Feel more connected to the spaces where student work, learn, and live (Coleman et al. , 2017)
- Catalyze environmental responsibility and engagement with public eco-social issues (Eisenhut & Flannery, 2005; McDonald, 2011)

The outcomes apply to students from all backgrounds but more so for underserved populations (First Generation, Students of Color, Pell Grant recipients) (Kuh, 2008; Song et al., 2017). Research has suggested that intervention programs, such as SLCE, are especially effective during the first semester for academically underprepared students (Weissman, Silk, & Bulakowski, 1997).

Why a Community Engaged Course?

The pedagogical approach to food and faith shares academic instruction with community partners and focuses student assessment on critical, reflective thinking, and civic responsibility.

This approach recognizes the importance of community wisdom along side substantive academic readings and multimedia resources.

It also expands the "classroom" and decentralizes scholastic learning from being solely found in books and faculty lectures.

Our commitment to community engaged pedagogy gives Wingate students a unique, enjoyable, and intensive study of food and faith--and skills that translate into their lives beyond the classroom.



Fasting and Feasting

In Buddhism, fasting is an initial stage of self-discipline to acquire self-control. By fasting and sacrificing a meal once a day or for any period, we can contribute our food to those who are starving or who do not have even a proper meal each day.

Eating habits:

- Vegetables
- Fruits
- Nuts
- Beans
- No animals products



Student Quotes

"If I were talking to my roommate about this class, I would tell her that I really enjoy it. It is really fun to get to cook something new every Friday, and to get to work together and meet new people. I really enjoy learning about the different cultures and how each of them view food and the importance of food. I actually have talked to my roommates about this class, and they are actually interested in taking it."

"If I were to explain this class to a friend I would say it is different than most other classes. I would tell them how it is more hands-on and less lecture-based than most classes. I would also tell them about how the class is not just sitting at a desk, it is interacting with classmates, the environment, and working in the kitchen. I would explain to them how it is awesome to have a class where homework is sitting in the community garden and appreciating nature"

"I really enjoyed reading ... "A History of the World in Six Glasses." Each and every drink that we consume, played some important role in human history. Who would have thought that drinks could have such a role in shaping human history. Through reading this, it made me think about how my favorite drink, coffee, had such an impact on human history and why it was so important"

Collaborators:

- The Collaborative for the Common Good (CCG)
- NC Cooperative Extension Agents (Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP))
- Farmer Vendors at WU Farmer's Market
- A panel of culturally diverse faculty and students (e.g., guest student panelist from Elon)
- Community members interviewed by students in the class
- Service Project with Heart for Monroe
- Peers - Group Presentation

Module 1: Palates and Plates

A focus on personal issues, like the mental health, personal diet habits, body image, nutrition, media, and gardening

Module 2: Local Food, Feasts, Fasts, & Faith

An exploration of the use of food in religious rituals and ethical practices and local issues concerning food

Module 3: Global Food and Faiths

A focus on global crises regarding food systems and faith-based responses to them

Assessment Tools

Garden Journals
Bread Crumb Discussion Posts
Quizzes & Short Content Questions
Participation in Cooking Class
Letter to 10 year old Self
Group Presentations
Reflection on Community Partner
Lyceum Panel
Community Engagement Portfolio
Reflections on Presentations
Service Project
Experiential Learning Reflection

"If I had to tell one of my friends about this class, I would definitely tell them that it is a class worth taking. This class allows you to learn concepts that can actually help you in the real world. Learning how to cook, garden, and shop are lessons that will be able to help you far past your college days."

Student Quote

Student Learning Outcomes

REMEMBERING

SLO #1 RECOGNIZE HOW BOTH FOOD AND FAITH HAVE CULTURAL, POLITICAL, ECOLOGICAL, AND ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE

UNDERSTANDING

SLO #2 PLAN, SHOP AND CREATE/COOK MEALS THAT ARE LOW COST AND NUTRIENT RICH

APPLYING

SLO #3 ENGAGE IN CONSTRUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS AROUND DIFFERENCE THROUGH THE LENS OF TABLE FELLOWSHIP & FOOD JUSTICE ISSUES

ANALYZING

SLO #4 EVALUATE SCHOLARSHIP AND REFLECT ON ITS CONNECTION TO REAL LIFE

SELF-REFLECTION EVALUATING

SLO #5 CREATE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL FOOD CHOICES AND SYSTEMS

CREATING

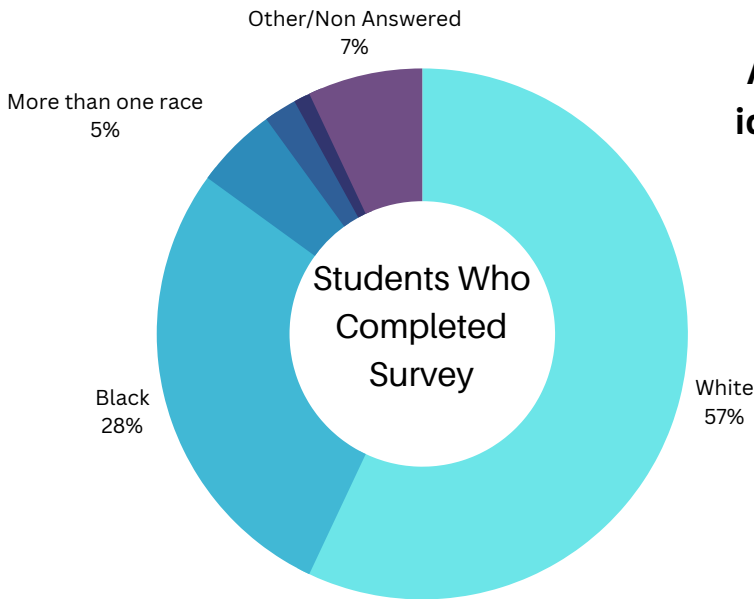
SLO #6 PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY ENGAGED EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Student Quote

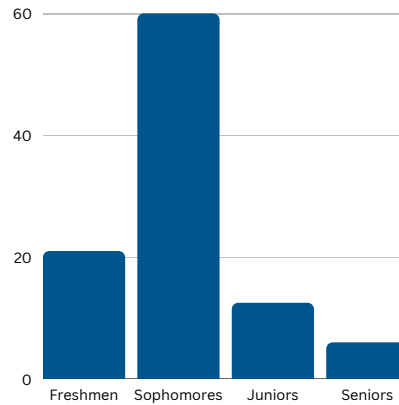
This class brought me a closer connection even in my workplace and all because of the connection of food. ... [a]highlight from this course would be the professor and how she fostered a loving, connected, and engaged classroom. Even the Tests were conducted in a way that gave all students the opportunity and resources to do well. The encouragement of working together every day and using each other to divide the work was extremely helpful in making the classroom a comfortable environment. The professor made us all feel very cared about not just as students but also as individuals.

Preliminary Data Collected via Qualtrics Surveying Conducted by CCG SLCE Coordinator, Dr. Candace Lapan. Further qualitative studies are underway with reporting proposed for August 2023

90% of students never took a Service learning and Community Engaged Course Before ... and **70% of students** said that they be interested in taking another SLCE course.

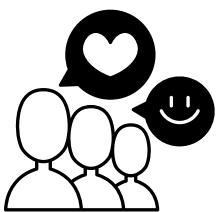


Additionally, 9% of students identified as Hispanic/Latinx.



*75% indicated that they enjoyed this course **more than other courses** at Wingate and more than 70% indicated it was **more beneficial** than other Wingate courses.*

Students **significantly improved** over the course of the semester in terms of their levels of the following:



Civic Engagement



Civic Skills



21st Century Skills

Civic Engagement: As compared to the beginning of the term, students reported spending more time giving back to their communities

Civic Skills: As compared to the beginning of the term, students reported being more adept at the skills necessary to solve social problems (e.g., collaborating with experts, creating an action plan, increasing awareness of social issues, organizing others to address the problem, etc.)

21st Century Skills: 21st century skills refer to the knowledge, life skills, career skills, habits, and traits that are critically important to student success in today's world, particularly as students move on to college, the workforce, and adult life. These include things such as critical thinking, communication, technology literacy, self-direction, social skills and more. Students at the end of the semester reported significantly higher 21st Century Skills.

NC Cooperative Extension



Materials Adapted From:
Expanded Food and Nutrition
Education Program (EFNEP)



Marcus McFarland,
Extension Agent, Family and
Consumer Sciences



Judith Garcia,
EFNEP Educator



Cheri Bennett
Extension Agent, Family and
Consumer Science

EFNEP Topics Taught:

1. Plan: Know What's for Dinner
2. Shop: Get the Best for Less
3. Shop for Value; Check the Facts
4. Fix It Fast, Eat at Home
5. Choosing More Fruits & Veggies
6. Fix It Safe
7. Making Smart Drink Choices

Dishes Cooked: Chicken,
Broccoli, and Veggie Quiche;
Tuna Burgers; Easy Lasagna;
Beefy Skillet; Super Stir-Fry;
Mini Meatloaves; Fruit
Smoothies

Student Quotes

"One thing that I learned from today's cooking class is that recipes can call for one ingredient but you can switch it out for a different or healthier one. For example today we had a recipe that called for ground beef but we switched it out for ground turkey instead. The ground turkey is a more healthy option rather than ground beef."

"One thing that I learned in class today, is the importance of reading the food and nutrition label. This is often something that I do not even think about, but it is very important to look at."

"One thing I learned was about my group members' strengths and weaknesses. Each group member has different experiences in the kitchen and we all don't have the same culture because we all grew up differently. Everyone has a different taste for ingredients like how much salt or pepper they like or if they are a vegetarian. Cooking with my group has helped me see how cultures cook and eat things differently based on how they learned their skills. This idea of people from different cultures eating and cooking differently can be important in my life because it can open up my eyes to how not everyone does things the same way as me and that it is okay to try a different method from time to time."

Wingate Farmer's Market



Wingate University has become home to a weekly farmer's market, thanks to the partnerships between the University's Collaborative for the Common Good, the Town of Wingate, American Heart Association and the N.C. Cooperative Extension. The first market was August 25th and it ran until November 10, 2022. We hosted eight markets (and supported one pop-up Market) that saw over 820 people shopping at our vendors--which range from 5 to 8 with several educational tables.

See Farmer's Market Report ([LINK](#))

FAMILY FALL FIELDTRIP

Wingate Farmer's Market
September 29th, 2022
4:30 pm - 5:30 pm
Corner of Main and Wilson on
Wingate University Campus

Bring Your Family to the Wingate Garden This Thursday
Games in the Garden
Join in the fun with our Sports Exercise Stations & Campus Recreation
Art in the Garden
Chef Cooking Demo by Chartwells
Story Time by our Marketing Intern
Make Slime with WU Biology Club
Chat with Master Gardeners
Comic Book Sale to Fund Our Market Mural
Kids under 12 get a free comic book

Student Quote

"In order to explain how important this class is I would use examples from our farmer's market. ... I would show them the hard-working honey farmer and how proud he was sitting at his table. To see the faces you buy from gives a completely different meaning to the food you eat."

- Parker Farms
- Sweet & Cozy Bakery
- Hobbs Nuts
- Dekenchar Bakery
- Cartwill's Delights
- Little Family Farm
- Crossroads Farm
- Rick's Produce
- Wing-it Apiary
- Tucker Honey
- Peaceful Meadows
- Health Beat Therapy
- Waxhaw Microfarm
- Greenworks Farm
- Chartwells Chef Demo
- Master Gardeners
- Center for Prevention Services
- Eligibility Member for Social Services (Union County)
- MomMom's Bakery
- Heart for Monroe
- Faculty "Jam" Band (Dr Unger and Friends)

Student Quote

"One of my favorite things to do is go out with my roommates to the farmers market. It is really important to support our local farmers who work so hard to give us fresh produce. In "The Pleasures of Eating" by Wendell Berry, he says that it is very important that we learn the origins of the food we buy, and buy the food that is produced closest to your home. The locally produced food supply is the most secure, the freshest, and the easiest for local consumers to know about and to influence."

Community Garden



Wingate University Community Garden started with student interest in 2018 and has moved (and grown) three times. Currently we have 8 raised beds, 8 accessible garden 'boxes', a pollinator garden, a herb spiral, two beds for elementary school planting, many picnic tables, and a new shed. The garden is where we host fall fairs, field trips, service days, and the Farmer's Market. We consider it a fertile site for community engagement

REL 140 classes each received a garden bed to plant, tend, and harvest. Students used Farm Ur Yard Apps to plan their garden bed and took turns watering and caring for the beds--and they had a Garden Journal assignment where they were asked to:

Impact: Self reported in Journals

- less stress, increased mental health
- more connection with nature
- enjoyment
- creation of a safe space
- increased creativity and productivity
- serenity, peace, joy
- desire to share time with friends
- remembering other times of connection
- spiritual connection

a) Befriend the garden and spend time in the garden space (7 visits)

b) Write, draw, photograph about experiences during this time

c) Use guided reflection questions for journal entries

Community Garden

Student Quotes

"I had a really bad day today so I typically would listen to music in my room but I decided to go sit at the garden and do it. While sitting out there I noticed how most people seemed to be moving fast and were moving urgently. Life is so fast pace that we forget to enjoy the little things"

"Incorporating a garden into the course changed the normal classroom cliché. Having to sit in a classroom for an hour and fifteen minutes gets boring quickly. Having met at the garden several times was a nice change of scenery and pace. Having all of my classes in the Nue building I would walk past the garden nearly everyday and mentally document the progress"

"Everyone in my group is excited about working together and seeing what the outcome of the garden will be. I hope that everyone has a good time working together and trying to work together as a class to grow something. It will be interesting to see how all of the plants grow and how everyone will do their best to try and make sure the every groups plants have the best opportunity to grow. Hopefully everything in the garden grows and prospers and we might even be able to cook with the food that we have grown towards the end of the semester."

"I am one of the planters in my group; I enjoyed this part because I could work with the other planters in my group and work to relocate our vegetables into the gardening area. I appreciated how we divided the work between members of our group. The group I am in has the back of the garden bed we planted parsley and broccoli. The planners ensured the vegetables and herbs we planted were being grown in the correct season. I hope to see the garden flourish with valuable vegetables. If our garden successfully grows, it will represent more than just food. Our garden will represent a community and prove how our class was able to work together to develop food correctly"

"I went to the garden this morning before going to the cafe. The weather is nice. It's not too hot and it's not too chilly. There's a nice cool breeze coming through the campus. Lately I have been stressed out a little with school and sports but this morning sitting at the garden helped me destress and relax a little as I meditated. ...There were some clouds in the sky but not enough to keep the sun from being shown, and the dew in the grass made for a nice fresh feeling. This was a nice way to start my day."

"The sound of the birds chirping happily also makes me happy. I am grateful for the little sprouts growing meaning we will soon have something to harvest"

When Mrs. Wright told us about sitting in the garden and closing our eyes I honestly didn't know what to think or even feel. Until I closed my eyes and embraced my surroundings I truly understood. Without sight, your other senses arise and I could hear more nature surrounding me, the wind just felt a little crisper. This began to make me think how earlier in class we talked about how God loves the soil and that it is the earthly center and connector through which God gardens life into vibrant, beautiful, and delectable reality. It's crazy to think that we are growing life that could possibly help feed us.



Panelists

Faith Lyceum
October 20th @ 6pm
via a Zoom Panel

Food and Faith

Food is the great connector and yet we have such a complicated relationship with food. This panel will explore how religions across the globe help us navigate our relationships with food -- and vice versa. Come hear the stories of food and faith, and learn about this new General Education Course (REL 140) offered each semester

Buddhism Jainism Russian/Ukrainian Christian Judaism Islam

Wingate University has a Lyceum requirement for every graduate. The mission of the Lyceum Program is to assemble, educate and support students on the three pillars of Wingate University: Faith, Knowledge and Service by providing a platform for diverse and universal co-curricular events.

To achieve the goal of REL 140 to be a community engaged course, we hosted a Lyceum in October for our students and any other WU student who wanted to attend. It had over 300 student attendees (via Zoom) and we recorded it for the few from our classes who could not attend.

Great Advice from panelists

(from Student Discussions)

"be adventurous"

"...we need to appreciate that we have access to fresh fruit and vegetables. We take this for granted so much, there are people trying to make decisions on keeping their heat on or going to the grocery store"

"What goes out of your mouth is more important than what goes into it"

"try something more than once"

When: An evening halfway through the course (October)

Who: 7 panelists & 1 Moderator

- Mallory Challis, Rel 140 TA and Religion Major (Moderator)
- Catherine Wright, CCG Director and Instructor of REL 140
- Shea Watts, Instructor of REL 140, former fellow of CreatureKind
- Ginger Walle, Director of Heart for Monroe (local non-profit)
- Sallie Creech, Religion Instructor & Southern Cooking Aficionado
- Kateryna Decker, Instructional Technology and Design Consultant, Ukrainian and Russian Food Enthusiast
- Maddie Starr, International Relations and Religion Major at Elon, Research project in Israel
- James Hastings, History Instructor, World Traveler and former Chef

Student Interviews

Instructions for Assignment:

- Interview ONE person
- Write a breadcrumb (250 words) explaining what you learned
- Respond to a peer's discussion post (Breadcrumb)

WHOM TO INTERVIEW: You are to engage with one person that is part of food systems (Producers, Distributors, People who Prepare food, Consumers). No family members, friends or roommates.

WHAT TO ASK ABOUT:

You are to ask 2 questions in each area (Identity and Systems)

Identity

- a) What is your favorite memory that is food related?
- b) What do you do for a living? How important is food to who you are as a person and the work you do?
- c) How would you describe your relationship with food?

Systems

- a) What wisdom would you offer future generations of students at Wingate about food?
- b) Do you think Food and Faith is related? If so, how are they connected. If not, why not?
- c) What could people of faith do to address hunger or other food related justice issues in their communities?

Student Quotes

"I feel like one of the things that assignment did was have us step outside of our little comfort bubble and really interconnect with someone in our society. We got to meet someone new and get their thoughts on faith and food. It was really cool to see the similarities and differences we have with people and why we had them. One of the reasons could be how we grew up or what religion we followed. But even with not agreeing on everything there was still mutual respect for each other's beliefs and ideas."

"Food is something that should bring us together she says. She also believes both food and faith are something that should be shared. Lastly, I asked what could people of faith do to address hunger or other food-related justice issues in their communities. She said hosting little cookouts, giving back to the community as a form of philanthropy, random acts of kindness, and fasting (coming together as people with similar beliefs and focusing on other values of life, referencing God, and showing gratitude for the things we had, the things we have and will have."

"... I would like to dive deeper into my interview with a chef, Matt. I am a server at a restaurant so I am constantly surrounded by food and other service industry workers. We spoke about many different things within the job but also just life in general and his relationship with food. ... [A] huge topic we talked about in the interview was how food and cooking brings him and his family together. He spoke about his love for the creation of food and then getting to see people enjoy what he made. This is a direct connection to food hospitality and the sharing of food. While Matt is not a self-proclaimed religious person some of his values and morals do relate to many religions specifically with his views on food. In the Hospitality article they say "Hospitable motives include the pleasure of entertaining, a desire to please others or meet the needs of others, and allegiance to religious duties to be hospitable." Matt's connection to food is definitely related to hospitality as he wants to feed people and wants to please them by seeing them enjoy his food."

Service Project

With



HEART
for MONROE

"One benefit of participating in a community engaged course is that morally it makes you feel like you're benefiting and doing justice, even if it is in small acts."

Toward the end of the semester in Module 3, our classes explored faith responses to the challenges of food insecurity. One student asked if our classes could make food that serves a need in our local community rather than do the scheduled cooking contest. Thanks to the connections we have with Ginger Walle at Heart for Monroe (panelist for our Lyceum), our classes decided to make sandwiches for our local senior community members that H4M serves. After considering their preferences, cultures, and needs, they decided to make grilled cheese, cheese & lettuce, PB&J, and pimento cheese sandwiches.

Student Quotes

"One benefit of participating in a community engagement course is that the class encourages students to want to take part in community events whether it be helping with the farmers market or setting up bake sales to raise money for different nonprofits. It also gives students the opportunity to work with professionals and that way they have connections if they ever wanted to go into that field or do some volunteering."

"One benefit of participating in a community-engaged course was being able to make sandwiches for the community and participating in the garden because it allowed me to make time in my day and show support towards the community."

"Working with your community and just being involved with things like planting your own vegetables, shows you how important food is to us. Food is involved in our everyday lives and we don't take it as seriously as we should. But, being thankful for the food we have and the opportunities we have access to is just as important as what we are eating."

"I think a benefit of taking a community-engaged course is being able to learn and help things that real people need in the community and not just what Pi is or a chem equation that we will definitely not use after college. In particular, we cooked for the elderly and the lady who gave the sandwiches out told us of all the good we were doing. Overall I enjoyed this class and I am happy that I took it because I learned life lessons."



Group Presentations

Feasts, Faiths, & Festivals Topics Chosen by Students


Mardi Gras
Easter
Christmas
Lent
Bar & Bat Mitzvah
Cold Food Festival
Diwali
Day of the Dead
Kwanzaa
Marriage Traditions
Thanksgiving
New Years
Voodoo
Mormonism
Buddhism
Jainism

Student Quotes

"I had previously learned about day of the dead in some of my spanish courses however I did not have the deeper understanding that I gained when researching for this presentation. I did not know that Day of the dead was celebrated in other countries, I thought that it was strictly in Mexican culture. I knew about the ofrendas which are put up for lost loved ones, however I did not know that they changed for the child's day and the adult day. I thought the ofrenda had both objects and setup simultaneously. I also learned about the tequila bread and the celebration is for both the dead and the living to celebrate and enjoy together."

Foods

- King Cake symbolizes the the 3 Kings witness the birth of Christen prophet Jesus
- Jambalaya
- Beans
- Rice
- Gumbo which is a strong flavored meat or seafood stew that can be thicken with okra or filé
- Moon pies



Fasting and Feasting

In Buddhism, fasting is an initial stage of self-discipline to acquire self-control. By fasting and sacrificing a meal once a day or for any period, we can contribute our food to those who are starving or who do not have even a proper meal each day.

Eating habits:

- Vegetables
- Fruits
- Nuts
- Beans
- No animals products



Candied Pumpkin



Zacahuil



Tequila (Adults)



Pan de Muertos



Hot Chocolate (Kids)

Future Goals, Steps, Improvements...



Watts, Wright, and Workman

The course showed us the magic that happens when we open our minds and hearts, as well as our tables, to those around us—friends, colleagues, students, and strangers—and live into our commitments.

Our first semester teaching the course (Fall 2022) gave us fecund data for the future, which helpful to set goals, next steps, and make improvements:

- Developing the course into a service-learning course
- Continue to foster and nurture relationships with community partners (beyond surveys)
- Further consider how the course can be immersed in campus life at Wingate
- Deepen the relationship between the CCG and the curriculum
- Continue qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis (e.g., beginning of a longitudinal study at Wingate)

Revealing Our “Wild” Experiment

© July 29, 2022 Catherine Wright Series community engagement, pedagogy, service learning

A series of posts about a collaborative project at Wingate University, resulting in a first-year course called *Food and Faith: Health and Happiness Around the Many Tables of Our Lives*.

Donovan O. Schaefer's *Wild Experiment: Feeling Science and Secularism after Darwin* (2022) sets out to dismantle the binary between feeling and thinking. It uses an excerpt from Charles Darwin's 1863 letter to a botanist as an example: "for love of heaven, favour my madness & have some scraped off & sent me. I am like a gambler, & love a wild experiment."

Darwin was stirred and led by his excitement much like we have been. For Darwin and ourselves, feeling and emotion are ways of making knowledge and learning a more sensual experience. Everything we learn is thus saturated with feelings of our whole sentient being, our universal self. We are both contributors and participants in life's wild experimentation. Our series of blog posts displays how classrooms can transform when shaped by

the wisdom of the entangled bank, and we have indulged in a wild experiment rooted in the idea of our vocation as planetary citizens. This final post is a snapshot of our journey in course



Developing and teaching REL 140 Food and Faith was an experiment of sorts. It is the result of generosity between three friends and colleagues, all curious about how what we eat and with whom we eat can be a way of growing, learning, and fellowshiping.

Adjustments & Student Feedback

- Less choice for readings
- Loved open access & multimedia course materials
- More halal/kosher meals or food
- Make more cultural meals to coincide with text readings
- Continue service project
- Include Campus Pantry
- Host another Lyceum
- Loved garden journal
- More time in the garden
- Continue interviews
- Include more faiths in course content