

Scott O'Neil  
Teaching Statement

I was a high school teacher before I was a literary scholar, and I consider teaching to be an immensely important part of my life and my professional identity. Over the last twelve years, I have taught high school students in both rural and urban environments, first generation college students, international students including classes specifically for English Language Learners, working professionals, and prep school standouts. I have taught those students at small private schools, research oriented schools, public institutions, and digitally, including several classes that took place entirely online. Through that variety of experiences, I am now prepared to teach a wide array of courses including introductory surveys of early English literature, composition, and seminars on topics including Shakespeare, Renaissance and/or medieval drama, Arthurian romance, film, theory, and more. My contribution as a teacher is based on the core educational philosophy that has guided my career; a philosophy that views intelligence as situational, and understands that every person has the capacity to be the most--or the least--intelligent person in the room, depending on the room.

My pedagogical contribution to an English department is one based on my interest in giving students the performative tools to see literary texts in different and engaging ways. I've been developing this performance-centered pedagogical approach for nearly a decade, as a result of my ongoing working relationship with the education wing of the Folger Shakespeare Library. I utilize performance-based pedagogy as often as possible in order to help the students create ownership of the texts while having fun at the same time. For example, in "Dispelling the Dark Ages," a course I designed in the summer of 2016, students were tasked with taking the same scene from *Doctor Faustus* and cutting it for performance. While the cuts are easy at first, the discussions among students get almost contentious when the final cuts need to be made, as students defend their favorite lines in the scene. By means of a performance-based activity, students end up doing a thorough close reading without even realizing that that's what they are doing.

In my composition classroom, I try to find ways to open up literature and writing to my students by way of things that they already know and understand. My work with the Writing, Speaking, and Argument Program at Rochester reflects this philosophy. I have designed courses across a range of interests, including performance, adaptation, family titles, comic books, and notions of villainy. My writing courses start from these seemingly simple concepts and then go about defamiliarizing those familiar concepts. For example, in my "Excavating the Family Tree" class, we looked at examples of how the idea of motherhood is invoked in contemporary music--specifically Danzig's "Mother" and the Pretenders's "I'm a Mother"-- opening conversations about gender, feminism, and misogyny. I do similar activities involving commercials, films in several genres, video games, art, and a variety of literature types in the hopes that at some point in the semester, every student will be able to be the expert in the room.