In the spring of 2007, we co-taught Liberal Education 3010A: Orientalism. This was a seminar series course for senior students interested in exploring a significant topic and issue from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Typically these seminars are team taught and include presentations by guest scholars from a range of disciplines across campus. The topic for this class was based on Edward Said’s book *Orientalism* and how his observations and arguments were influential far beyond his specific study and disciplinary framework. This seminar group included about 15 students from a variety of disciplinary majors across the Faculty of Arts and Science.

The following is a conversation about our experience in the style of a duoethnography, reflecting on the course seven years later, considering why we felt it was successful and how it has influenced our subsequent teaching.

Kevin: I tell this story all the time to people. One of my favourite experiences teaching the class was reading the papers. We had two students who took the class because they thought that the title implied the class was going to be about the Orient, a kind of regional studies treatment of East Asia. This was partially confusion over English scholarly language and colloquial terminology. But this course was based on Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, which is about 18th- and 19th-century European academic misrepresentations of the Middle East, and an exploration of how Said’s ideas had been influential across disciplines.

Bruce: Yes, and we chose this topic (like *Progress* or *Genocide* or *Food*) because it inherently gets at the four main pillars of liberal education: multidisciplinary breadth, integrative thinking, authority, and team teaching.
our written comments. But in hindsight, her effect on the assignment—we didn’t really make ... arguing that there is some validity to cultural communication that we were supposed to be problematizing in the class.

B: I don’t recall exactly how we responded except that this particular student and her friend raised a number of concerns for us in teaching. I remember at times thinking, but in Archaeology, I still try to replicate this same kind of thing. And sometimes some of the very best students achieve a similar sort of level of engagement with the material and independent of approach and maturity with the way they deal with it. So it’s exactly what you want to see. So then what if I find problematic is how the students from semester to semester mature and develop to the level that in their third or fourth year they could do a seminar like this and become those seasoned, mature, engaged, thoughtful academics really sinking their teeth into the subject. And, so, looking back I wonder why this was so problematic in that way. I think it was in the design and some of it was in ... what else? Some of it was in the interest of the students who were involved.

B: Uh huh, because they really were excellent and the subject matter was of a certain type of student who was already engaged, who want to be engaged in this manner.

K: Yeah, I agree completely. We have such a change in the approach to teaching, to interacting with the data that they can see that there are these two different approaches that they should be familiar with and able to handle that sort of a thing. With teaching I prefer to lecture and you prefer Socratic methods and that’s very clear. When we’re team-teaching I think we both give in to the other in some ways. So I lean more toward the Socratic when you’re around. And I think you end up leaning a little more toward the lecture style when I’m there in the room. So that’s a very practical level but also the different engagements with the sources, the different kinds of questions—that helps to illustrate that polyvalency we were looking for.

B: Yeah, highlighting different passages in the text that seem relevant to us because of our research interests or other experiences.... Yeah, absolutely.

K: And there’s no clear voice that they have to try to model their reactions to because if they try to please one of us too much, it’s going to not please the other one. So it’s a sort of suggestion then they find that need to find their own voice.

B: And the other thing that was good in the Orientalisim course was the number of strong students who were quite comfortable with each other as well, understand breadth of disciplinary arguments, analyze the world around them with their own individual perspectives, be self-critical in the process of trying to make sense of it and with the subject matter, we’re also always asking “What do you think?”—many of them—to expect there to be one authoritative voice and they expect that authoritative voice to deliver an authoritative point of view which is “the” authoritative voice they have to learn and demonstrate that they know.

K: Right. You know, I had been teaching Arky 1000 before Lib Ed and now after my Lib Ed term I’m in Archaelogy full-time—teach Arky 1000 every fall—and I was radically changed by the structure of that course after my experiences teaching in Lib Ed and, I think it works better in a way for the first-year students in terms of getting at those goals.

B: Maybe that’s one of the key differences between a Lib Ed course and a disciplinary course: because our Lib Ed courses are full of students who are different majors they already come with a diversity of perspectives and a diversity of voices, whereas when you’re dealing with theory within your discipline that...