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Enhancing the Quality of Education with “Teaching Buried History” Pilot Project

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By Bianca Sa

HIST11900: *U.S. Hist: The History of Death and Mourning*, taught by Dr. Jeffrey Smith, is a pure reflection of Lindenwood's mission statement: *Real Experience. Real Success*. Throughout the course, students explore death and burials in the 19th century. Dr. Smith has developed a series of activities where students go to Oak Grove Cemetery in St. Charles, survey the location, collect data for their assignments, and do research on what catches their interest, from gravestones and decorative motifs to epitaphs, inscriptions, and so on.

Dr. Smith has always been interested in becoming part of the community in which he works and lives "in a positive way," and he finally found a way to make that happen through a pilot project that will use the research conducted by his students over the past two years to develop classroom materials for middle and high school teachers in the state of Missouri. Ultimately, the goal is for students “to understand a series of national ideas about American culture... through the prism of their own community.”

Being one of the recipients of the 2021 *President's Research, Innovation, and Development towards Excellence* Fund was what Dr. Smith needed to make his pilot project possible. Dr. Smith confidently says the "Teaching Buried History" project is "a way... to connect Lindenwood and the scholarship and research of its faculty and... students" to teachers and students in other places.

This upcoming summer, Smith will reunite with several teachers in the community and together they will create a series of classroom materials for students in English language arts, Social Studies, and History. To ensure that the material created by faculty is deliverable to students, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will play a critical role in analyzing if content "in fact meets their assessment objectives," Dr. Smith says. "This is a pilot project. We're going to create this and then next Fall we're going to test drive them in some classrooms, work out the bugs, and then we're going to start offering it to teachers in classrooms on a much larger scale" through the Missouri Council for the Social Studies Conference, Smith further explains.

It goes without saying that the project, with its potential to reach schools on a national scale, requires multiple individuals with several different skill sets. "We've got lots of cooks in the kitchen, I'll tell you that. We've got lots of people involved," says Dr. Smith. Faculty from several different departments at Lindenwood are contributing to making this project a success. The data students collect in Oak Grove Cemetery will be used for geographic information systems mapping courses at Lindenwood and in business data analytics classes.

The collaborative work by Dr. Smith, students, and other faculty is astounding, and there is no doubt that it will serve as a model to jumpstart other programs. Dr. Smith's idea shows that faculty and student research can be a means through which deep connections are made with the greater community and how the education system can be innovated with creativity.

Best of luck to the "Teaching Buried History" Project!