This course grew out of my dissatisfactions as a teacher. After 10 years as a college professor, I had been teaching long enough for the initial panic and exhilaration to wear off, but not long enough to feel as if I really knew what I was doing. As a result, I started reorganizing my classes around student research and inquiry. I also became involved with instructional projects across campus, and learned what I could from the many excellent teachers I met and collaborated with. These experiences convinced me of two things: that there was too little support for teaching generally, and that experienced teachers were sometimes the most isolated, because they had survived the initial shake-out period, and were therefore left to fend for themselves, whatever their struggles or satisfactions in the classroom.

Consequently, I have organized this course in literature pedagogy as a collaboration, to offset the usual isolation of the classroom teacher, and as a practicum, to counter the abstractions that creep into almost all discussions of pedagogy. There will be a consistent emphasis on reflection, as the indispensable tool for diagnosing the sources of your teaching challenges and devising potential solutions. Peer discussions and observations, however, will help you recognize the challenges you share with others, and provide feedback and support as you work towards your own solutions. Some pedagogical theory and scholarship will inform what we do, but our starting-point will always be the concrete challenges you have encountered or might potentially encounter in the classroom. Above all, I am interested in seeing what you already know about teaching, and how you might improve your current practice, whether by self-reflection, scholarly inquiry, or peer discussion.

Required Texts:
Ken Bain, What the Best College Teachers Do (Harvard UP, 2004) +
[PDF selections made available via WordPress courseblog]

Overview of Course Topics:
Wks 1-2. Introduction to class, polling of class for class-generated topics, self-inventory essay (Blau, Intro and Ch 1) (Bain, Intro)
Wks 3-4. Fostering engaged reading and discussion in literary studies (Blau, Chs 2-4)
Wk 5. First class-generated topic discussion, TBA (Bain, Chs 2-5)
Wk 6-8. Writing Assignments workshop and revision (Blau, Chs 5-8)
Wk 9. Second class-generated topic discussion, TBA (Bain, Chs 6)
Wk 10-11. Feedback and grading workshop (Bain, Ch 7)
Wk 12. Third class-generated topic discussion, TBA
Wk 13. “Close reading” and literary studies? (Blau, Chs 9-10)
Wk 14. Fourth class-generated topic discussion, TBA (Bain, Epilogue)
Wk 15. Portfolio w/self-assessment essay due. Final reflections, next steps?
ASSIGNMENTS

Brief Assignments:
Report 1: Teaching and learning self-inventory (What kinds of experiences, writings, teachers led you to teaching? What were the most pivotal moments in your learning, or the biggest obstacles? (1-2 pp.) posted online.
Report 2. Mid-semester teaching resource: when teaching a particular text, author, genre, or concept, what are your favorite resources, either online or in print? Post a brief (4-6 item) annotated bibliography of your favorite resources for teaching this topic online (1-2 pp.), then present on class-generated topics weeks (5, 9, 12, 14)
Classroom/Presentation observations (using rubric, each member of observation pair writes 1 paragraph analysis, debriefs with partner) (exchange to be handed in to instructor by wk 14)

Formal Assignments:
Essay 1: “Before Teaching” Essay: (2-3 pp) on how you intend to teach a specific text in your own class (background contextualization, reading questions, in-class or group activities, writing assignments, etc.)
Essay 2: “After Teaching” Essay: (2-3 pp.) on how well your materials worked, what you might do as a result, etc. (before/after essays scheduled during semester with instructor, around student’s teaching of a specific literary text)

Group Assignment:
Group presentation: Students will form 3 person teams to present on student-generated topics, student-selected readings on one of the student topic weeks (5, 9, 12, 14).

Final Portfolio and Self-Assessment Essay:
Students will collect the semester’s work into a cumulative portfolio with an up-to-date Teaching CV and reflective self-assessment essay (3-5 pp.)

Who should take this course?
This course is open to all graduate students in the English program who are currently teaching, including UH TAs, high school teachers or community college instructors. Since this practicum and its final portfolio serve as the culmination of the newly created “Pedagogy” track for the MA, MAs will be given preference for enrollment.