

# Teaching Academy: Truly Innovative Teaching Award Application

## SECTION ONE: CONTACT INFORMATION

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## SECTION TWO: INNOVATION AND APPLICATION

**Pedagogical Philosophy for NMSU as a Living Laboratory:** Since humans both mark and are marked by our living environments, including our communication environments, my pedagogy is designed to develop an adaptive conversation based on responsive ethical approaches to learning through the complex ecology of words.

I call this approach “Living Laboratory Research” with the recognition that the phrase has multiple meanings. Living research is more than problem-based-learning in that solutions are not necessarily the goal; connections and understanding relations and diverse agencies are the celebrated process. The best research leaves multiple open questions that act to invite reflection and inspire additional research. Living laboratory research means the places we live, work, play, and learn, offer complexly connected topics for compositional and rhetorical expression. NMSU becomes a Living Laboratory where students engage research enthusiastically.

Compositions are not necessarily human centered, but do materially emerge from living contexts where humans contribute. Agency shifts in living laboratory research, so refocusing on expressions that harmonize cooperative agency is most productive when aligned with curiosity. Participating brings a sense of mysterious joy back into the research and writing processes.

**Classroom Implementation:** Students in my classrooms are asked to reflect deeply on their relationships with words and writing, including research(ed) papers. I use tools to help students, including close readings, class discussions, self-assessment, peer review, and a modified précis to develop credible resources for research. The modified précis forms the basis for research logs students use in their research. Précis helps students focus on thesis or purpose statements and their related supports, including quotes, evidence, and observed effects. I separate the class into research groups of 4-5 students for situated research.

1. Student research themes are chosen using the model: “NMSU as a Living Laboratory.”
  - a. Students meet with student organizations on campus at least three times during the semester. As an example, Fall 2016 students in ENGL111 & ENGL 211 attended the OASIS (Organization of Aggie Students Inspiring Sustainability) meetings.
2. Experts from the university and from the community become involved with student projects in the roles of mentors, coaches, and informational resources.
  - a. I schedule experts to speak to my classes once general topics for research are formed. Example: Jack Kirby, Assistant Director, Environmental Health &

Safety; Facilities and Services at NMSU and David Cristiani, Landscape Architect, Planner/Designer, Doña Ana County; Community Development: Advance Planning mentored students in both of my classes, meeting with them on site, and keeping in touch with them about specific site design challenges. Guest speakers included Joni Newcomer from the Sustainability Office, Dr. Joe Gladstone from Public Health Sciences, Dr. David Boje from Management, and Dr. Diane Walker, Educational specialist from ENMU.

- b. Students interview experts on their own individual projects.
3. Library lib guides are built around NMSU documents: Example NMSU Master Plan, NMSU Bike Plan 2002, etc.
4. End-of-semester symposium style presentations were scheduled. Students built group websites for presenting their research. Each student designed one page of the group website.

Since much of the latter part of the semester is spent working on field notes, researching topics, and website design, students from both my ENGL111 and ENGL211 classes were able to meet several times and brainstorm their projects with one another. Last semester students designed a symposium where they could attend each other's presentations.

### **SECTION THREE: THE INNOVATION'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE TEACHING ACADEMY**

In the last 14 years at NMSU I have come to see the Teaching Academy as a place to hone my skills as an educator, a place to gain important insights, and a welcoming space where inspirational ideas about teaching are showcased and honored. Since 2007 I have taken 106 hours of training at NMSU's Teaching Academy. While every seminar I have taken has influenced my teaching and pedagogical approach, there are three that stand out as most influential. The first was moderated by Dario Silva, and focused on group behaviors and ethics; I do not remember the title. The second and third were both part of the Quantum Storytelling Conference, led by David Boje and Grace Ann Rosile, with internationally known speakers like Gregory Cajete, Leroy Little Bear, Amethyst Beverly First Rider, and Don Pepion. *Quantum, Indigenous, and Living Stories*, and *Quantum Storytelling for Ethics Education*, both had significant influence in shaping my doctoral research and my current pedagogy. Each event focused on relations and lived experience resulting in open questions, rather than static solutions. Quantum physics, string theory and indigenous science were just a few of the topics that inspired me to research ancient rhetorical premises based on feminist materialist quantum physics, microbiology, and tone in my own dissertation. Participant driven relationships require engagement with all things living. Ethical engagement and learning starts with deepening situated relations. This includes relations to words and their compositional and rhetorical effects in research design.

### **SECTION FOUR: EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS ON STUDENT LEARNING**

Operationalizing *NMSU as a Living Laboratory for Research* has benefitted my students in engagement and their overall grades. My ENGL111 student grades were in the A-C range, with only one student falling below that range. ENGL211: Rhetoric of Sustainability student grades were all within the A-C range. Additionally, only one student dropped from each class. Perhaps the best measure of student learning is from self-assessments. See reflections below.

**ENGL 111 Reflections:** *\*In the process of writing this “documented argument”, not only did I learn how to apply my knowledge of rhetoric, writing, and critical thinking but also how to invent an argument by asking questions and looking for answers. In other words, I learned the process of doing research.*

*\*I believe my fear of not being able to connect to my audience was helped, if not eradicated as I was taught how to write for my audience.*

*\*My ENGL111 class gained knowledge to research. This opportunity opened my eyes to new experiences around campus. There were major contributors that helped us with our research, from professors at NMSU to the campus Police.*

*\*My strength writing this paper is the first-hand experience talking to individuals like Dr. Carol Campbell and Dr. David Boje, who were able to give me boat loads of information to help me construct my website.*

*\*One thing I can see helping students in future classes is connecting with students outside of class. During this project, I feel as though there were times meeting with other students was necessary and beneficial.*

*\*I will further my education in writing and continue to develop my relationship with writing ... by continuing to do research.*

**ENGL211Reflections:** *\*My group is researching recharge stations, which involves electric cars...learning about this subject means I was learning about our future and just a fraction of the problems we will face in the years to come.*

*\*Overall, I had very little confidence in my writing abilities. This class helped me get over that and as a result I have been able to improve my writing in so many ways. Thank you Dr. McCulloh, because your wonderful comments helped boost my writing confidence.*

*\*In this class, I did not only learn about sustainability, but also about the ecology of the word. I’ve always felt something about words and how they resonate in certain ways. It was an amazing day to actually hear what I felt being spoken out loud.*

*\*Dr. McCulloh, thank you for believing in my writing... you have taught me to think outside of the box and that my opinion is meaningful and powerful.*

*\*I have learned how much fun writing can be, and much more about writing than I could have imagined. I also learned valuable skills such as précis, which I will continue to use in future classes.*

*\*The concepts of the class have helped me to expand as a thinker, writer, and researcher. I can definitely say that this class will stay with me at a cellular level, if not deeper.*

**Audience Response:** Audience response is also a reflection of successful implementation of Living Laboratory Research innovations.

*To: The Teaching Academy*

*Re: Nomination of Gerri McCulloh for Truly Innovative Teaching Award*

*I am happy to nominate Gerri Elise McCulloh for the Truly Innovative Teaching Award. I base my nomination on my personal observation of the results of her students at the end of Fall 2016. Her results were nothing short of remarkable. These presentations would have warranted grades of A from juniors and seniors, and thus, were all the more impressive coming from Gerri’s freshmen and sophomores. The presentations I saw from one entire class, were evidence of innovative teaching in the form of creating a “living laboratory” in the classroom in the following four ways:*

*First, there was clear evidence of research on the part of the student presenters.*

*Having taught the “Viewing the Wider World” courses, I know how difficult it is to get students to conduct archival research. These presentations were well-researched and well-documented. It was the real-world engagement, with potential real-world outcomes, associated with each topic that allowed Dr. McCulloh to motivate this level of student research.*

*Second, each student presented a portion of their group’s report orally. Students were well-prepared, and used audio-visual aids in their presentations. Students also used questions to elicit audience involvement, and they answered audience questions in a very professional manner. Again, I was impressed by this level of poise and professionalism among freshmen and sophomores. Further, I attribute much of this “polish” to the students’ dedication to “real” projects (as discussed in the fourth point below).*

*Third, Dr. McCulloh’s pride in her students’ work was apparent to all, in the way she set up the room, publicized the event, provided refreshments, and orchestrated the sessions. She conducted the event as if her students were nationally-recognized scholars in their fields. They, in turn, rose to the occasion with outstandingly professional behavior.*

*Fourth, it was clear that for nearly all of the students, their chosen topics meant more to them than “just a class assignment.” They were passionate and committed to their topics. This was evident from the way they answered audience questions, demonstrating a breadth and depth of research and understanding of their topics that went far beyond the presented materials. This, I think, is the “secret ingredient” of the “living laboratory” pedagogy, which Gerri demonstrated so beautifully.*

*Grace Ann Rosile, Ph.D.*

*Professor of Management*

*[575-532-1693](tel:575-532-1693) or [575-646-5684](tel:575-646-5684) [garosile@nmsu.edu](mailto:garosile@nmsu.edu)*

**STUDENT RECOMMENDATIONS:** Each student recommendation was sent via email. I would be happy to forward them to the Teaching Academy.

Dear NMSU Teaching Academy,

This letter is regarding Dr. Gerri McCulloh as a nominee for the Truly Innovative Teaching Award. I was a student of professor McCulloh in the fall semester 2016 for her ENGL211: Rhetoric of Sustainability course as an incoming freshman here at New Mexico State University. It made me really content to know professor McCulloh is nominated for this award and there are various reasons why.

The Rhetoric of Sustainability course was a class that I had zero knowledge about before attending it. The first day of the course I immediately felt welcome and enthusiastic due to the positive energy and enthusiasm that professor McCulloh gave off like rays of sunshine. I had no clue what sustainability was or if it was as important as I learned later on, but she made me eager to learn. Not only was sustainability something new she taught, but so were different methods of writing and research. I already had a passion for writing yet was introduced to writing passionately about research and of course, the importance of sustainability and the world. I became more and more involved in the topic of the course, even up to volunteering around campus and keeping up with news about sustainability and practicing my writing.

Yet, this isn’t something I would be so intrigued about if it weren’t for the dedication, emotion, enthusiasm, and energy that professor McCulloh gave to us, her students, and her job. To her, it didn’t seem just like any job, it was a way of enlightening about the world and about

learning. She gave her all everyday for her students and still does, not only as a teacher but as a fellow writer. I remember the passion she has for writing, and that we will never stop learning about it. As a past student of hers, I can say with all honesty that I have never had a professor who believes so much in her students and encourages them. In the beginning of the course she said we were all going to be part of each other's lives and will learn from each other. Words that are still in my head and she is still someone part of my life as well as my education.

I am honored to have been a student of Dr. McCulloh and glad I took the course she taught. It's memorable learning that I have gotten from the most qualified, honest and passionate professor I have met.

Sincerely,  
 Nadia Montoya  
 Email-turtle14@nmsu.edu  
 ENGL211: Rhetoric of Sustainability

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To: NMSU Teaching Academy  
 From: Michael T. Quintela  
 Date: February 25, 2017  
 Subject: Truly Innovative Teaching Award  
 RE: Dr. Gerri Elise McCulloh --ENGL 211 Rhetoric of Sustainability

I am a returning student, after approximately 20 years away from the classroom. I worked at a nuclear waste disposal facility near Carlsbad, NM for nearly 18 years as I raised and supported my son that lives there. Last year, I decided to relocate to Las Cruces to pursue the completion of my degree and possibly graduate school to realize my lifelong dream of being a counselor or working with teenagers. I would often daydream about returning to school, and I would imagine a professor that impacted not only my thinking about a certain subject, but impacted my life as a whole. As luck would have it, I would take Dr. McCulloh's ENGL211 - Rhetoric of Sustainability - class my first semester back. This class was everything I had imagined and much more.

Dr. McCulloh's enthusiasm and energy was palpable from the first day of class. I could literally feel the positive energy radiating from her as she spoke about the books we would read, the guest lecturers we would have, and the websites that we would create for our final projects. Her enthusiasm and energy is contagious, and it creates an excitement and curiosity that is most beneficial in the classroom. I remember my dad asking me how my classes were going. I told him about a book I was reading on microbial organisms, and how they react and relate to each other in their own micro-societies. I also mentioned that I was creating and designing a website on outdoor water conservation for a class project. My dad retired as the high school principal in Carlsbad (we only had one high school in Carlsbad) after almost 40 years in secondary education. He says, "I didn't know you were taking a microbiology course or a computer science course?" I told him it was all for my English class. It hadn't even occurred to me that I was learning about microbiology and web design in my ENGL211 class.

Dr. McCulloh's class was an eye-opening experience for me. I learned so much about rhetoric and semantics, climate change and sustainability, how words relate to people, and how our relationships with people affect our lives forever. Dr. McCulloh has compassion and she truly *cares* about her students. She *cares* about them as people and wants them to succeed. This is the most endearing characteristic that a teacher can have, and I am forever grateful to her and honored to be one of her students. I think her ENGL211 - Rhetoric of

Sustainability class should be required for all students. We truly need more professors like Dr. McCulloh here at NMSU.

Best,  
*Michael T. Quintela*  
[Quince15@nmsu.edu](mailto:Quince15@nmsu.edu)

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February 26, 2017

To Committee for Truly Innovative Teaching Award:

This letter is to recommend Dr. Gerri McCulloh to you for recognition of her innovative teaching at New Mexico State University. I have had the absolute pleasure of learning from Dr. McCulloh in two classes: English 111 for Engineering Cohorts, and English 218: Technical and Scientific Communication.

Dr. McCulloh is one of the best teachers a student can ask for- she is passionate and knowledgeable in what she teaches to her students, and prioritizes student learning above all else. While most professors today teach from the book, Dr. McCulloh has made sure to take the extra step and make learning more a more immersive experience, by allowing students such as myself to practice on what is relevant to our field of study.

Although the idea seemed extreme at first, Dr. McCulloh's "NMSU as a LIVING Laboratory for Research" project started coming together as the semester went on. Through this project my classmates and I were able to identify problems in and around New Mexico State, research and come up with solutions to those problems, and present the information to our audience at NMSU. Being allowed to learn about and use our practice in engineering allowed us to get a good idea of what our careers would be like before having to have a diploma, and without even having to leave the university. Without knowing it, Dr. McCulloh had taught us that everything we needed was right in front of us, and that the only real limitation of our abilities was the level of our desires.

After just a semester, Dr. McCulloh expanded our writing abilities and triggered a curiosity to learn what more our fields had to offer. She inspired all her students to realize we did not have to adhere to the stereotypes and standards of having to be an upperclassman to do high-level thinking and be productive at the university.

Dr. McCulloh earned my respect, appreciation, and my highest recommendation. Her work ethic and professionalism are beyond that of an average teacher, and her passion has the potential to touch the lives of anyone that might have to pleasure of learning from her.

If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me at (505) 967-6334 or

[marizpe@nmsu.edu](mailto:marizpe@nmsu.edu)

Sincerely,

Mauricio Arizpe Aerospace & Mechanical Engineering Major New Mexico State University