



Melanie Ho

English

MELANIE HO'S WORK as a teaching assistant in the English Department has been guided by her experience as an undergraduate. Back then, "I always wished the classroom could be more collaborative and energetic," she says. Thus, as a teacher, she "wanted my students to see literary studies as a living and breathing conversation, not only by being exposed to current and past academic debates, but also by creating their own."

First, Melanie developed a debate assignment, in which students write a series of formal letters to a student partner, exploring opposing sides of an argument related to a novel. With that success under her belt, she began to adapt problem-based learning, an approach used in science, to the literature classroom. Working in small groups, students settle on a debatable question about their assigned novel. Then, each student writes an essay taking a position on that question and also responding to the essays of

other students in the group. The outcome is a casebook on that piece of literature.

Finally, she designed a seminar, "UCLA in the 1960s," in which students working together interviewed alumni and combed the archives—and the athletic museum—to develop a web site that provides a sketch of each year between 1960 and 1974. "Students were coming together to produce something that will be on the Internet for years to come," she says, "and that couldn't be produced except collaboratively in that 10-week period."

"I wanted my students to see literary studies as a living and breathing conversation, not only by being exposed to current and past academic debates, but also by creating their own."

Melanie understands that some may think she's "putting all the responsibility on the student," but as she sees it, she takes the considerable responsibility of "building a structure and setting up a classroom where the collaborative strategy can be productive." Outside of class, when she was chair of the Board of Directors of the ASUCLA, Melanie helped to develop a new program for the Student Union. People visit Ackerman "to buy books or get a hamburger," she says. "We wanted to find a way to think about the student union as a space for intellectual community." The result: a lunchtime roundtable on higher education and the Information Age, attended by faculty, students, and staff.

Thus, there isn't even a whiff of hyperbole when Christopher Mott says that Melanie "has contributed more to the enhancement of undergraduate education than any other person (faculty, TA, or undergraduate) in the twelve years that I have been TA coordinator in the English Department." Melanie "is able to help her students to grow from repositories of cultural knowledge to knowledge-makers and refiners." As one of her students put it, her assignment was so enjoyable, "You don't even realize you're working so hard."