

## **Rotating discussion leadership gives students an opportunity to flourish**

*Tim McCarthy describes how the responsibility for “provoking” discussion gives everyone an opportunity to shine*

### **Featured faculty: Timothy Patrick McCarthy**

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*Class:* HIST-LIT 90L: Stories of Slavery and Freedom (Fall 2016), 16 undergraduate students

TIM MCCARTHY, LECTURER: Different students have different capacities in terms of being willing to step into a space where they lead a class. It's amazing to me -- even at a place like Harvard, where you would think the students are you know have a certain threshold of confidence, especially intellectually -- just how many of them are insecure and how this kind of a thing causes an enormous amount of anxiety, which is another reason why I do it. There are students every term who really find their voice doing the provocation. It's their first time where they're kind of center stage and where they have an opportunity to lead. And the provocation just gives them an opportunity to flourish. And then once they do that, their confidence coming out of that is is much greater.

TYNAN JACKSON, HARVARD COLLEGE STUDENT: Sometimes it is intimidating when you have brilliant seniors giving amazing comments. So for me being a sophomore, I would kind of wait until maybe 30 minutes into the seminar, 40 minutes in, to really just give my meaningful, impactful comment because I knew I had it, I had it in me.

CLAIRE BENOIT, HARVARD COLLEGE STUDENT: I tend to talk a lot, probably too much, and so, if there is a certain idea I have about the readings that week, I will get it -- I will manage to say it out loud, at some point in the two-hour window. And not everybody does that. So I really liked provocations by people who have a certain way of reading texts that didn't really get to be shared in other weeks.

MCCARTHY: I always tell the provokers that they should be the most informed people in the class on that day. They should be as familiar with the text -- more familiar with the texts than anybody. They should have wrestled with them, and read them, and reread them, and taken notes, and thought about them, and so forth. And that's almost always the case. It's almost always -- it's very, very rare for someone who's up to provoke who mails it in, in part because they have to meet with me, and in part because they're part of a team. And so they're accountable to one another; that's another reason why I pair them together.

TYNAN: There was a senior in the class who I very much respected from the black community. And then she was the person that I got to work with for my provocation. And so, you know, having that role model in the class really, really motivated me to be like her and to really, you know, give my meaningful comment that she, like she was always known for in the class.

OLIVIA CASTOR, HARVARD COLLEGE STUDENT: He was like, “I heard a lot about you. I heard you're brilliant. And I was like super nervous to say anything in the beginning of class, especially, like, after you had made a comment.” And we ended up signing up to do a provocation together, and they said that they had intentionally signed up to provoke with me, because they were someone I -- you know, they had admired my work. Or like the comments that I made in previous classes, or other spaces, and they wanted to learn from me. And at the other end of the course, the student was talking all the time! And felt extremely comfortable and was making a lot of like really substantive and and important comments

in class. I think just, you know, the interactions that you had with your peers and the professor, and the nature of the class conversation really created a space where students actually were growing.