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Office of University Communications

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Collective Contributions Featured in Online Academic Textbook “The American Yawp”

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – When Gardner-Webb University Assistant Professor of History Dr. Joseph Moore taught his first Colonial and Revolutionary America class at Gardner-Webb University, he had no difficulty engaging students in lively discussions full of energy and excitement. However, he discovered profound differences during the second offering of the course.

“Everything just fell flat,” he shared. “The time slot was different, the student make-up was different, even I felt different. Discussions went nowhere; paper topics seemed unenthused. We careened toward monotony. What’s a history professor to do when he can’t get people excited about the American Revolution?”

The answer came in the form of an unconventional opportunity. Moore was aware that a new online textbook called “The American Yawp” was in need of contributors. He immediately understood the benefits of a free online scholarly textbook for cash-strapped students. That’s when a new idea began to form, which he pitched to the book’s project manager, Benjamin Wright.

“I offered that my students—under guidance—would do in-depth research on aspects of the Loyalists in the American Revolution,” Moore explained. “Each would contribute, after which I would corral their work into 500 words. The two-fold benefit being that my students would be immediately engaged in the content of the course and at the same time, assist *The American Yawp* in its journey toward completion.”

Dubbing themselves the “Gardner-Webb Loyalist Project,” the group devoured texts and information on anything and everything Loyalist. “A class blog became our nexus point to assign readings and post our notes,” Moore said. “Assignments were made by area of interest. Divisions of labor and reading notes were posted online throughout the process, and I operated as a first among equals.”

Moore noted a significant increase in enthusiasm for the course, and students reported they enjoyed seeing their professor take on the role of peer-writer. “Suddenly, *they* were the experts on things I had not read,” he shared. “This empowered students and kept them engaged with minimal effort from me. Also, the task helped them become extremely appreciative of judicious word choice. Five-hundred words suddenly seemed *so short!*”

The group debated inclusion or exclusion of material. They discussed concepts such as whether they should cut ideological history in order to make room for social history; how much social history was too much; and how to appropriately account for space and time. “I observed, debated, fought, occasionally lost, and was generally ecstatic about it all,” Moore recounted.

“I’m sure some will critique our final product, and of course, the editors will have the final say, but I’m quite proud of this group of young scholars and their collaboration,” he offered. “May it—or a version of it—live on in the free textbooks of future generations.”

To view the “Gardner-Webb Loyalist Project” contribution, [click here](#). For more information on this writing project, email Dr. Joseph Moore at jmoore26@gardner-webb.edu or visit his [blog post](#) on this topic.

Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University blends a liberal arts core curriculum with more than 55 major and minor professional programs of study, a comprehensive academic experience that flows from our Christian commitment to intellectual freedom, service and leadership.