



Lucy Morrison

Salisbury University, Salisbury, MD

Nineteenth Century Collections Online (NCCO) Improves Engagement in Literature Class

Dr. Morrison teaches a 300 level course at Salisbury University in Salisbury, MD, called Literature of a Decade. “It is a course that any Literature instructor can teach, and I was teaching it from a British Romantic perspective. I wanted students to use more than a text in isolation,” said Dr. Morrison. One of her primary goals is to have the literary, social, and historical background on a topic. She used *Nineteenth Century Collections Online (NCCO)* in class, and students were required to use it in writing a research paper. Each of them had to do an oral presentation and write-up on the months of their birthdays and the year that was assigned to them by Dr. Morrison. “For example,” Dr. Morrison elaborated “the King losing his head – how was that reported in January 1793? What was the media saying? What was of interest to the students that happened during their birthday month?”

Dr. Morrison first found out that NCCO existed from the Nineteenth Century Studies Association Conference where she spoke with a Gale sales representative who was demoing the product. She signed up for a free trial. “It seemed to me such a huge resource.”

Dr. Morrison knows that there was almost nonexistent awareness of library resources like NCCO prior to her using it in class. “Our general education requirement is that students have to take a required literature course, but many of them are reluctant. In my class, I encouraged students to use NCCO and to explore.” Dr. Morrison also spent a lot of office hour time helping students in their discovery of NCCO. Although she didn’t get a librarian to help demonstrate it this semester, she said she would plan for one in the future.

THE RESULTS

Dr. Morrison saw excellent results in the classroom. Although the students weren’t terribly familiar with navigating library databases, they learned excellent research skills throughout the semester by using NCCO. “The oral presentations were exemplary”, said Dr. Morrison. “One student had September 1793 and found an immense amount of information and was so thrilled that the database rounded out her knowledge. I was really pleased that some non-English major students were excited with the class as a result of NCCO. They actually got sidetracked into different areas that fascinated them. I wanted them to be engaged enough to be exploratory, and they were!”

CHALLENGES

- Dr. Morrison wanted students to have literary, social, and historical context to make world events seem more relatable.
- Students are required to take a literature course but find the demands of so much writing and reading taxing. They look for literature classes that allow them to engage and explore their own interests.

SOLUTIONS

- Nineteenth Century Collections Online (NCCO)

RESULTS

- **Higher engagement:** Classroom discussions were lively and exploratory.
- **Excellent comprehension:** Interest and understanding of the subject matter improved immensely, evident in high-quality classroom oral presentations.
- **Improved research skills:** Students learned excellent research skills as a function of having to navigate the NCCO database.

“I can’t see how instructors wouldn’t use this in the classroom. Given that students are so computer literate these days, it just makes sense to use this as a great tool to better engage students.”

Lucy Morrison
Salisbury University

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The following is student Asha Azariah-Kribbs’ successful experience using NCCO in Dr. Morrison’s classroom:

“Last Fall term in a course on British literature of the 1790s, we were all asked as students to research a particular month of that decade. After discovering particular trends in fashion, philosophy, or other points of culture, Dr. Lucy Morrison required the class to share their findings in a formal presentation. I was most intrigued by England’s perspective toward France in December 1793, during the War of the First Coalition, the militaristic measures taken by England against the French threat, and indeed other social concerns in England at that time. Already a challenge, this project would have been incredibly difficult if not for the access we were allowed to the NCCO database. I was amazed by how easy it is to search for a particular topic in so specific a time frame as a single month, but the search engine for the database is simple to use and impressively efficient, even in examining texts that are more than several hundred years old. I also appreciate the ability to either look at a specific story in a newspaper, excluding the rest of the page from view and so narrowing the point of concentration based on a given keyword, or to examine the paper as a comprehensive whole. Using the NCCO database was a wonderful and illuminating experience; user-friendly and educational, I certainly recommend it to anyone seeking contemporaneous knowledge of a subject. It was invaluable to me for my research project.”

NEXT STEPS

“I would certainly use NCCO again,” says Morrison. “I would spend more time in the class and work within the database, as well as spending more time showing them my expectations and having even more hands-on learning opportunities.”

“I think many of my colleagues in the liberal arts and social sciences on campus (we all huddle together) would find it extremely useful. There is a class that teaches the methods of historical research. This resource would be perfect for that.”

The most ambitious scholarly digitization and publication program ever undertaken, *Nineteenth Century Collections Online (NCCO)* is invaluable to research and teaching in one of the most studied historical periods. Rare primary sources, curated by an international team of experts, provide never-before-possible access to important works sourced from leading libraries worldwide. Users will find millions of full-text, fully searchable pages that enhance historical scholarship and provide an intriguing window into a bygone era.

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