Abstract
I applied for an received funding in order to begin work on an article tentatively title “Popular Humor in the Ethnic Studies Classroom.” This article is about my use of popular humor when I teach courses such as “Black Literature in American,” “Introduction to Ethnic Studies” and “Race, Gender, and Class” in the Ethnic Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. The basis of this work is that students in Ethnic Studies classes often have a difficult time grasping many of the more abstract concepts that are the building blocks of Ethnic Studies as a discipline. These concepts include the idea of systemic or institutional inequality, the concept of race as a social construction, and the concept of double consciousness. I argue that popular humorists such as Dave Chappelle, Margaret Cho, Chris Rock, and Louis C.K. often use their humor to explore these very same topics in a language that is both frank and accessible. In this article, I elucidate the specific ways in which I place the work of popular humorists in conversation with more traditional readings from Ethnic Studies. I will also explain the writing assignments and class discussions that such practices generate, and share the positive reactions of UW-Platteville students to this pedagogical approach.

Generally speaking, most students at UW-Platteville have had little exposure to the concepts put forth in Ethnic Studies courses, and many of the students, having grown up in fairly homogenous communities, have also had little or no experience interacting with members of ethnic communities other than their own. For these and other reasons, students here often react with surprise, confusion, and occasional hostility to many of the core ideas in Ethnic Studies classes. In my own experience teaching Ethnic Studies at UW-Platteville, I have found that the use of popular humor as a supplement to more traditional reading assignments often has a positive effect in students’ comprehension of and reaction to the course material. In my article, I delineate the numerous pedagogical advantages to using these and other humorists in the Ethnic Studies classroom. First, these humorists use a language that is both frank and accessible, thus making it easier for students to grasp abstract concepts. Second, the comic mode of discourse serves as a sort of discursive “icebreaker” and relieves many of the tensions that may arise from discussions of sensitive topics such as race and ethnicity. Third, humorists speak from a position of power and resilience and thus provide an important counterpoint to the frameworks of trauma and oppression that are typically central in Ethnic Studies classes. Finally, the use of popular humor demonstrates the relevance of the course material outside of the classroom.

Budget:
I requested and received $4000 for salary.

Results:
The results of my SAIF Grant were fairly successful. I managed to write a draft of the article, and I plan to send it out soon. I hope to place the article in a nationally recognized teaching journal (probably Pedagogy), and I have been doing a lot of research into pedagogical practices and theory. This work is fascinating—and it will likely serve as the basis for future research projects—but my immersion into an academic discipline with which I had previously been
unfamiliar has slowed my work down quite a bit. By the beginning of Summer 2015, however, I hope to have the article placed.

**Benefits to the University**
As part of its strategic action plan, UW-Platteville is committed to diversity and multicultural education, and my project will contribute to campus-wide discussions about the impact of race and ethnicity in our culture. Furthermore, this project also contributes to campus-wide discussions about High Impact Learning. This article will help other educators in the field of Ethnic Studies to find new and innovative ways of teaching this important but often under-appreciated subject. In addition, the publication of this article would bring recognition to the University and serve as an outward signal of UW-Platteville’s commitment to diversity. Finally, the research I am doing in pedagogical theory is impacting my own teaching practices, which in turn benefits the students that I teach every semester.