

Introduction

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The COVID-19 pandemic shut down colleges and universities worldwide. In an instant, faculty were all forced to cope with a new normal that included online teaching, distressed students, sick students, and a deepening mental health crisis. And that doesn't include the problems that faculty were personally facing: experiencing burnout, encountering mental health crises of their own, being overworked, facing a lack of support, and falling ill. If there is one silver lining to all of this, it is that teaching has started to be taken more seriously by more scholars than at any point in our professional careers. With all this in mind, H-Net's vice president of teaching and learning, Leigh Ann Wilson, and the H-Teach network decided to provide a space where scholars could come together and discuss new and exciting ways to improve teaching and learning.

Providing a space for sharing information and knowledge is nothing new for H-Net. In the past, we have focused on helping scholars make connections for conferences, finding resources in faraway archives, answering queries about obscure materials, and putting together comprehensive bibliographies. We are also the publisher of one of the largest databases of academic book reviews in the world! With the inaugural H-Net teaching conference, titled "Uncharted Territories: Teaching History, Humanities, and Social Sciences in Innovative Ways" and hosted online in 2022, we are now joining this much-needed discussion on improving teaching. Many, if not most, doctoral programs do not offer a comprehensive or formal education in the art of teaching. Instead, many doctoral students are forced to learn by practice on the job with their students as the test subjects for their successes and failures. This means a lot of



failing while on the job. This is not a proactive way to learn to teach nor fair to undergraduate students. Those students are one of the primary reasons colleges and universities exist. Unfortunately, teaching often gets less attention than it should because many academics look at our job through the lens of the rat race that is the tenure cycle, which often boils down to one thing: publications.

The new reality of a post-COVID world has forced faculty to rethink our jobs. Teaching is popping up as a more important issue to be regarded more seriously. This is partially because of pandemic-era changes, which were forced upon all of us. But it is also the result of student demands and changes in their priorities. This is forcing more people to think about teaching modality, pedagogy, and the ways we teach. In some cases, this means more online teaching, which requires very different skills than face-to-face instruction. In other cases, faculty are back in the classroom but notice that their students are behaving and learning in markedly different ways than before the pandemic. Faculty are also pushing back against unreasonable professional demands and work encroaching on personal life in unacceptable ways. Oh, and now we are dealing with the rise of artificial intelligence writing essays for students! Society is changing, and teaching needs to change as well to remain meaningful to our profession and to our students.

In this atmosphere, more than three hundred participants joined our first online teaching conference, which featured more than twenty panelists. There were robust conversations and interactions while we talked about how best to think about teaching. Together, we were able to rethink what teaching means in the twenty-first century. In this edited volume, we have collected six exciting articles, which draw on various presentations from the conference.

Amy Carney and Kat Ringenbach share their experiences in the classroom, focusing on how to create a positive learning environment for all, especially through improved and increased communication, clarity, and mutual respect. This is an article that any teacher who wants to give serious thought to their approach in the classroom must read.

Charu Gupta offers scholars her story about teaching complicated and controversial topics in India. It is academic, pedagogical, and personal in nature and asks the question: how do you teach a sensitive topic, such as caste, in modern-day India? Gupta walks the reader through her journey, which has evolved over the years. Her work will help scholars learn to take the personal into the classroom to make the most of our limited time with our students.

David A. Gerber's article continues this journey of examining how professors can confront controversial topics in the classroom. As with Gupta's article, Gerber offers an academic, pedagogical, and personal narrative. How do you shape classroom conversations about "the big questions" in an environment that is noticeably hostile to diverse viewpoints? This is a question that is becoming increasingly important on campuses worldwide as humanity deals with increasingly dictatorial and non-conciliatory political and cultural climates.

Daniel P. Kotzin also offers teachers ideas for how to tackle the difficult subject of the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. This important subject is, as Kotzin notes, not

always talked about by US society, but it is crucial for students to learn about. He offers suggestions for an “active lecture” about the topic, which includes much visual evidence and class discussions. Though the specifics of his lesson are about the internment of Japanese Americans, his pedagogy can easily be applied to numerous other teaching topics.

Offering a different teaching lesson, Ariane Knüsel explains her Twistory (Twitter + history) project. The article gives teachers and scholars a close-up look at a project that students will find interesting and creative and that teachers will recognize as academically challenging. This project, which Knüsel walks us through from conception to completion, is a fun and unique take on teaching students how to think critically and creatively about history in the public sphere.

Finally, Susan Epting and Amanda Hodges offer great examples of improving student learning and engagement through gameplay. Epting and Hodges offer two examples of gameplay that they have used: Rory’s Story Cubes and *The Threshold of Democracy: Athens in 403 B.C.E.* game book, the latter of which is by the Reacting to the Past consortium. In both cases, student engagement rises as does active learning. With gameplay, Epting and Hodges find that classroom learning starts to have a greater impact on student learning.

Taken together, the *Proceedings of the H-Net Teaching Conference* provide teachers and educators with some innovative ideas about how to teach in the changing classroom environment. We are no longer stuck in the before-times when all teaching felt automated and stale. Many scholars are thinking more deeply and more seriously about how to teach. The times are changing, and H-Net will continue to be a part of this important conversation.

AUTHOR BIO

Seth Offenbach is an associate professor in the History Department at Bronx Community College, which is part of the City University of New York. He is the author of *The Conservative Movement and the Vietnam War: The Other Side of Vietnam* (2019). He has presented about teaching at more than eight conferences, including at the annual conferences of the Organization of American History and American Historical Association. He is a past president of H-Net and book review editor of the H-Diplo network.

Niels Eichhorn holds a PhD in history from the University of Arkansas. He currently resides in Hobbs, New Mexico. He has published *Liberty and Slavery: European Separatists, Southern Secession, and the American Civil War* (2019), *Atlantic History in the Nineteenth Century: Migration, Trade, Conflict, and Ideas* (2019), and *The Civil War Battles of Macon* (2021). He is finishing up with Duncan Campbell a new book manuscript, "The Civil War in the Age of Nationalism," and is working on another project about the Civil War battles of Savannah, which is under contract with the University of Georgia Press.

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