The Proceedings of the H-Net Teaching Conference
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Introduction

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

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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.

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.

Brenna Miller and Jesse Spohnholz also offer concrete examples of in-class pedagogy and practices through their organization History for the 21st Century. This is a collaborative, faculty-led, non-profit initiative which helps provide active learning exercises for world history courses.

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

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ABSTRACT

Instructors seek to create meaningful learning experiences for their students, and through student evaluations and self-reflection, teaching practices can be improved. While feedback from student evaluations at the end of a term can help to improve the experience, there are many proactive tactics instructors can use to create a positive and beneficial learning experience for students. The first step is to evaluate teaching practices and to create and revise courses as needed to reflect the constantly evolving challenges of teaching at a university. Given how content delivery is evolving, instructors need to reflect on how they can create a positive environment that provides structure and support for all students. This article discusses a few ways to improve teaching, including setting up clear expectations for communication and performance, providing clear directions and rubrics, engaging and communicating with students, building a safe community for learning, and providing substantive feedback. While the main goal is to increase student learning, another possible outcome of creating a safe and open space is a more positive end of the term evaluations.
Setting Positive Class Expectations through Shared Language, Civil Practices, and Clear Directions
Amy Carney and Kat Ringenbach

Best professor ever! Super enthusiastic!

Awful professor—the university should fire her.

I took this class to fulfill a gen ed requirement, but I really enjoyed it. I’m glad I took it.

This class was a complete waste of time. I loved history until I took this course.

We’ve all been there. The semester has just ended, and our student evaluations are now available. As the cursor hovers over the file, the question comes to mind: what have our students written this time? There will undoubtedly be plenty of positive comments—there always are—but there will be negative ones too. In fact, as highlighted above, the comments from two students in the same class can be directly opposite. Even though there will be more positive comments, it’s the negative ones that stick. They’re the comments we remember weeks, months, and even years later. Sometimes the negative comments are honest and fair critiques; the concerns raised by the students are legitimate and lead to beneficial changes in future classes. Other times the students’ words are seemingly nothing more than spiteful rants that serve no purpose other than to be hurtful.

Whether positive or negative, this feedback is valuable. It is a form of communication with our students, albeit limited because it is usually one-sided and comes at the end of the semester. These are not the only limitations of formal student evaluations. They have become a proxy for teaching quality and student learning.¹ They also tend to be biased based on gender, race, and/or ethnicity.² And, as psychologists Bob Uttl, Carmela A. White, and Daniela Wong Gonzalez point out, there is often the assumption, which lacks scientific evidence, that faculty who are rated more highly are those who have students who learn more in their classes.³ Acknowledging these limitations are important. At the same time, it is also important to review our students’ comments. It is equally important to ask ourselves: what is a productive approach to finding valuable feedback from student evaluations? And most important, once we have identified useful feedback, how can we best use the students’ responses to reflect on our teaching practices and to revise our courses?

The purpose of this article is to provide some preliminary answers to these questions. Pharmacological scientist William C. Lubawy recommends creating a list of best practices in teaching, including instructor characteristics and course management.⁴ With his recommendations in mind, we’d like to continue the conversation begun at the 2022 H-Net Teaching Conference in how to create clear and positive class expectations. We believe that a proactive approach to designing a class that addresses the needs and relevant feedback of students can create a positive connection with our students, improve our teaching practices, and allow us to maintain rigor, all of which will hopefully translate into future positive course


Course Requirements

I’m not a psych major, but I learned so many things in this class that will benefit me for the rest of my life.

I was a straight A student, but I’m not anymore thanks to this horrible instructor.

Syllabus/Course Policies

First impressions matter. A smile combined with a positive attitude and just a little bit of enthusiasm are certainly valuable qualities to help lay a solid foundation for the semester. They also provide a good approach to segue into the first task of every first day: reviewing the syllabus. It is important for students to understand our expectations before the course begins. We often have the temptation to create a multiple-page document that gets expanded every year. However, the longer the document, the less likely students will actually read it and remember everything in it. The syllabus also sets the tone for the semester. In a face-to-face environment, an instructor can go over the syllabus, immediately answer questions, and frequently remind students that they will review segments of the syllabus again throughout the semester. Yet an introduction to all of these segments—lectures, readings, papers, discussions, and other assignments—is a lot to take in on the first day (times multiple classes for both them and us). Our tone and body language in this initial interaction with each class can lessen any potential negativity and anxiety. These first moments together are crucial.

In an online environment, establishing this initial relationship is more difficult to do. Therefore, phrasing policies in a positive manner is especially important so that the syllabus does not become a "what not to do" document. For example, instead of saying, "Don’t write like you are texting friends," state, "Use professional and academic language in all your writing." It is easier to inform students what they need to do, instead of leaving them to try to figure out a replacement for what not to do. Whether online or in-person, instructors can have students sign a document acknowledging that they have read the syllabus and course policies; also, if points are assigned, it is much more likely that students will do so. Another method is to create a scavenger hunt quiz that can be taken multiple times so that students get familiar with the course requirements. This introduction to class expectations sets the stage for the semester; positive and direct information helps students connect to the class and to the instructor.

Engagement Standards

Engagement varies in face-to-face environments, blended classrooms, and fully online classes. Often class policies have criteria about the quantity of engagement or they focus on limiting multitasking. Instead of telling students not to multitask, we should explain how our brains are really dysfunctional when multitasking, which limits learning. This information takes the focus away from the instructor being dictatorial and puts it on learning and the responsibility of the learner. Students are also provided with important information on how learning can be enhanced by focusing on one task at a time.
The most crucial factor in engagement is the principle of respect, which sets up a positive learning environment as well as a connection to the instructor. Lack of civility often emerges when individuals are unwilling to set aside a unidimensional view of the world to experience other points of view and to consider other people’s experiences. Professors are expected to have meaningful conversations, while creating trust in a world that is divided, and must still worry about student evaluations. However, it is possible for faculty members to navigate difficult conversations with integrity and rigor. One way to create trust is to establish a civil discourse practice. Instructors can have a civility statement in the syllabus or elsewhere in the course material, or they can have the students collaborate and create one as a class (see appendix A for a sample civility statement). The statement could include such components as having intellectual humility, being aware of one’s own biases, being open to challenging personal beliefs, asking questions for clarification, approaching conversations with empathy and kindness, thinking independently, letting go of flawed learning, not snapping to judgment, and using reliable sources to seek different points of view. Encouraging civil discourse is also an important tool in allowing students who are not ordinarily “seen” in a class to make connections with fellow students as well as with faculty, which can help them feel included. In addition, encouraging civil discourse creates an environment where the expectation is for the instructor to be respected, which may help to avoid negative evaluations that are not constructive. The instructor should also be a role model in how to provide constructive feedback throughout conversations, allowing the instructor to demonstrate how to critique and comment in respectful ways. It also shows students that the instructor is respectful of them and should in turn be given the same level of respect.

What the Teacher Will Provide

When I was sick and needed an extension on an assignment, the professor was understanding. I really appreciated her concern for me.

The rules for this class are unreasonable. The professor is punitive for the littlest things.

The professor gave great feedback and was so supportive.

I did the assignment, but I could never get a good grade because she’s so picky about grammar. This is not an English class.

It is important for instructors to set expectations for what they will provide to students. For example, instructors should have a policy about office hours or a policy about when they will connect with students in an online class. Students should be aware of when instructors will respond to emails. By having this information listed in the syllabus and perhaps also on the home page of the course’s online platform, students are provided with realistic expectations of how they can connect with their instructor outside of class and when they may get a response from their instructor. In a world of instant gratification, students need to have clear communication about limits. Instructors need to be seen as human beings who have lives outside of teaching and who are not expected to be on call 24/7.
Another important component is to establish expectations for grading and assessment. This includes clear instructions for assignments, substantive feedback on submitted work, and reasonable policies about late submissions.

Clear Instructions

There are different philosophies on giving a lot of detail in instructions and rubrics. The key is to consider how learning can be supported. If we have a clear idea of what we want, why would we not share our expectations? By sharing these expectations, our focus is on supporting our students and guiding their learning in specific ways. Students need to know why an assignment is important and how it will enhance their learning. Assignment instructions can concisely convey this information.

Students highly appreciate having detailed instructions and rubrics. For example, the parameters for a paper should state the expected word count or page length as well as other formatting requirements. Submission requirements—paper copy, digital copy, or both—should be included. The instructions should also detail expectations for sources. Is the paper a short summation of an idea covered in a lecture? Is the student supposed to analyze an assigned reading? Or is this a research paper, and if so, what are the source requirements? Are online sources permissible, and if not, do the instructions clarify which library sources and databases are the best options based on the subject of the course? On a related note, in the assignment parameters and/or the in-class overview of them, students should be directed to useful resources at the university. Reference librarians are amazing resources. Inviting one to present an overview of library resources tailored to the assignment is a great use of a class period, especially in introductory general education courses. Librarians likewise have or can create guidelines to post on the course website that are course or even assignment specific. In addition to librarians, many universities have academic centers that employ writing tutors. Informing students about the value of proofing a complete rough draft of their paper with a tutor is a valuable use of space in the assignment instructions. Instructors should even consider, especially in introductory courses, requiring a tutor appointment as part of the assignment (see appendix B for a sample paper assignment).

If we are encouraging students to use critical thinking in our assignments, then it is important to provide them reasoning for those assignments. Such reasons could be linking assignments to course learning objectives or other reasons why each assignment is important. One outcome of providing this information is that students are less likely to describe assignments in student evaluations as “busy work.” Here is an example of an explanation about the importance of discussion boards from one of our classes:

The discussion boards are not busy work but are designed for you to critically evaluate and apply course content. It is a place for you to expand on what you have learned from reading the text, to applying the content, finding examples, expanding on the content, and much more. You are expected to use critical thinking skills. This is a place where you can learn from not only your instructor, but from your classmates as well.

Note that this message sets the tone for the discussion board and emphasizes how learning is important (see appendix C for a sample discussion board assignment).
**Helpful Feedback**

Part of demonstrating how learning is important comes on the other end of the assignment when graded work is returned. From the perspective of students, feedback should be more than a numeric grade or general comments, such as “good job.” Students want to understand why they earned a grade, and they want the feedback to be personalized. In addition, students—especially those who are early in their academic career—want feedback to be motivational. They want constructive and helpful feedback, information on what they did well, details to improve, alternative perspectives, and ways to apply feedback to future work. Quality feedback is a critical component in aiding students to meet the class learning expectations. Each piece of feedback provides a scaffolded approach to learning that teaches students to self-regulate and encourages them to be lifelong learners. High-quality feedback closes the gap between desired performance and current performance. Positive feedback builds on a student’s strengths that they can leverage in future assignments and classes, and it builds confidence. In addition, students do not want to be compared to others.

Feedback should be equitable, meaning that there should be feedback that meets the student’s learning level. In other words, students who are at a lower level should not be compared in a negative way to higher-level students, especially as students do not want to be compared to others. Balanced feedback is an important part of quality teaching. When we get into grading mode, we are often focused on how to help our students improve without giving them credit and positive comments about what they did well. Creating a positive sandwich of what was done well, followed by suggestions for improvement, and then finishing with a positive statement can generate positive feelings and connections to the instructor.

For some instructors, part of providing their students with honest, timely, and balanced feedback that enables them to work toward improvement is using a rubric. Rubrics and checklists are powerful assessment tools, especially for assignments that are subjective in nature. Instructors select the evaluative criteria and students are provided explicit guidelines on how to meet the course learning objectives or how to meet the requirements of the assignment. A detailed rubric provides levels of proficiency in meeting the objectives, which gives students objective information for a subjective assignment. Students may perceive a rubric as being fairer because every student is being judged on the same criteria. The rubric should be provided prior to the assignment being due to enhance student learning (see appendix D for a sample outline of final grades).

One concept when considering whether or not to use a rubric is backward design. Coined by curriculum designers Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, backward design refers to determining the learning goals first and then developing the assignments and rubrics before creating the course content. This approach means that the learning environment is based on end goals rather than the use of a textbook to design and drive learning. Instructors can determine what is most important for their students to learn and then can scaffold learning throughout the term. A rubric with detailed descriptors would be one element of this scaffold.

Finally, instructors can also teach students how to use rubrics in their own learning. One suggestion is to have students use rubrics as part of a self-review process. This method teaches

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students to look for specifics when assessing their own work. Another suggestion is for students to evaluate a peer’s paper using a rubric and then have a discussion about why they scored the paper in the manner they did.

**Late Policies**

There are different philosophies about accepting late work. Some instructors believe in a zero-tolerance policy. This approach, while often seen as training students to be responsible in future employment, can also hurt students who are already struggling with other life issues. Students may be turning in work late for a multitude of reasons, including anxiety, depression, underdeveloped executive functions, competing life functions, or a lack of resources. Recently there have been discussions that penalizing students for late work may be an equity issue. So what can instructors do? Some instructors recommend a “one late assignment policy,” where students can ask for an extension prior to the assignment being due with no penalties. Even without a specific policy, instructors should be open to allowing a student to submit an assignment late if the student has communicated with the instructor in a timely manner. In the first student comment at the beginning of this section, the flexibility of the instructor changed the entire learning experience for the student. Such flexibility represents an opportunity for us as instructors to show compassion to our students and to allow our students to recognize that we understand that emergencies happen and that they have lives outside of the learning environment.

English instructor Edward R. Montalvo tracked the reasons why his students were turning assignments in late. He believes that task completion is something that needs to be taught and modeled rather than penalized. The classroom is a place to practice regulating and being able to meet deadlines. In addition, he wrote that students come from many different environments with traumatic experiences, which can affect their cognitive development. Even a simple due date is a stressor that can affect how individuals regulate their emotions and cognitions. Using trauma-informed practices allows instructors to implement positive equity-based practices to support students. Trauma-informed teaching focuses on the integration of learning with the physical and emotional trauma that students may have that hurts their ability to engage in the learning process. Psychologists Janice Carello and Lisa D. Butler report that over two-thirds of college students have been exposed to some type of trauma. Recognizing that students may need help to cope with life experiences may not seem like the role of instructors, especially those who are not psychologists. Yet having a basic understanding of our students’ needs and their background aids in their learning process. Creating a classroom with trust and kindness may lead to students viewing the instructor in a more positive manner, which is a win-win because students learn and instructors have better evaluations in the long run.

**Student Learning Expectations**

The class was challenging. The professor kept pushing me to excel.

*The workload for this class is insane. This professor clearly doesn't understand that we have important classes and don't have time for all of her useless assignments.*
Businesses ask customers to complete satisfaction surveys about their perceptions of the service they received. Higher education does this by asking students about their experience in the classroom. However, there is a qualitative difference between businesses that provide products and service to customers and higher education. Students are not just receivers in a customer experience, but are also an integral part of their own learning experience. The amount of time and effort they put into the class drives the overall experience. Education reporter Anya Kamenetz writes, “And therein lies the paradox. Yes, students are paying, often handsomely, for their degree. But they’re not exactly customers, either. They’re participants in an experience—one that is meant to be challenging, even grueling.”

One of the biggest challenges instructors have is that students have unrealistic expectations about the role of the teacher. Students often forget that they themselves are a critical part of the learning process. They may believe that instructors did not teach them anything. Yet our role as teachers is not to pour information into our students’ heads. Learning can be messy and difficult at times, and it is important to set up an environment where our students know that they are the most important component of the learning environment. Learning centers on the student rather than the instructor. That does not mean, however, that the instructor is not an integral part of the learning community.

Scholars Peter Shea, Chun Sau Li, and Alexandra Pickett note that students learn best in an environment that is “learner-centered, knowledge-centered, assessment-centered, and community-centered.” In a learner-centered environment, instructors encourage students to take active roles in their own learning, aiding them to focus on their strengths, goals, interests, and passions. This encouragement is related to providing positive feedback. The instructor focuses on strengths to emphasize the development of knowledge, skills, and abilities that can be applied in the students’ academic learning and future employment. Learner-centered instruction asks students to focus on critical thinking, while examining and challenging their own thought processes. A social and cognitive community focuses on building learning environments that are safe and structured, where students can pursue and share knowledge. The instructor can model encouraging behavior, while also modeling strong critical thinking and being able to critique, and not criticize. For example, the instructor can identify areas of disagreement and ask students to respond; point out consensus; encourage, acknowledge, or reinforce student contributions; set a climate for learning; prompt students to respond; and assess the efficacy of the discussion. Shea, Li, and Pickett say that successful learning communities come from the collaborative work of instructors and students.

Although the article by mathematics educator Anna Sfard is twenty-five years old, the ideals of creating learning-community models, whether in physical classrooms or online, are still relevant today. Students should be encouraged to share ideas and perspectives they hold to be educationally worthwhile and interesting, even if they may be controversial or provocative. Students should actively confront what they do not know and strive to understand varying points of view. Shared educational goals, social support, collaboration, and trust create a quality learning environment. Note that there is an emphasis on “participation,” where students are not just empty vessels to be filled. Crucially, they contribute not just to their own learning, but to the learning of their classmates too. This perspective challenges egocentric and sociocentric thinking. The instructor needs to be highly interactive in the course to encourage social learning.
By creating a warm and inviting environment, students become connected to the course content, their classmates, and the instructor.

**Communication**

The professor really enjoys learning with us. It’s fun to try and stump her with questions, and when we do, she always looks up the answers for us.

*The first time a student asks a stupid question, the professor should say that’s a stupid question and tell the class that she will not answer stupid questions.*

There are multiple avenues of communication for an instructor in a classroom. Between saying “hello” when first walking into the room and wishing the students a good day at the end of class, a significant amount of formal and informal communication transpires. Most is verbal—lectures, questions, discussions—but body language is crucial too. This communication is then supplemented by one-on-one conversations before and after class, during office hours and appointments, in Zoom meetings, and through email. The dynamics of an asynchronous online class are different, but establishing solid lines of communication with students are no less important. Educator Anthony G. Picciano says that there are many ways to be present in an online class, including telepresence. Educator Rob Kelly suggests that students need to know the professor is a breathing human being. Telepresence refers to using technology to help students to feel connected, and there are many ways instructors can connect to students. They can send emails, create announcements and messages, use Slack or some other messaging program, text students, and volunteer to have phone or Zoom meetings with students. It is important to note that these methods of communication are also helpful outside of face-to-face class meetings.

Kelly also addresses what online students want from their instructors. These include a quick response time, instructor presence, reminders, easy-to-access course design, and fun, interesting discussion threads. Kelly suggests sending out reminders when things are due. He also suggests forecasts, where students are reminded of work to be done in the next two weeks. This can be done in the announcement section of the class, which is then automatically emailed to students. These methods to create a teaching presence nurtures an environment where students teach and learn from each other. Again, these are also best practices in traditional education.

Educators Liam Rourke, Terry Anderson, D. Randy Garrison, and Walter Archer state that teaching includes three important components that involve the student: cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence. In their model, cognitive presence is the student’s interaction with content and social presence is interaction with other students. Teaching presence is the interaction with the instructor, which is an important part of communication. Many students complain that their online instructors barely engage in discussions and take too long to get back to them via email. In other words, students do not believe the instructors are involved cognitively or socially. Social and cognitive presence are also an integral part of a quality class, not just for students but for instructors as well. Students value what instructors bring to the classroom, no matter the modality. Student evaluations are an important way for instructors to understand what students value from their instructors and courses.

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Summary

Ultimately, we as instructors set the tone for our students’ learning. We must not only communicate our expectations, but also model them. We must constantly review our teaching practices and reflect on how we can be highly engaged instructors who create an environment for student learning and success. Students see our presence when we build a community of learners by interacting with them, communicating frequently and openly with them, providing them with clear and concise guidelines for the course, and giving them feedback that elevates and enables them to grow. While these practices are not a guarantee for better course evaluations, they do provide a more structured environment where students feel connected and seen.

As noted in the introduction, this article developed out of our presentation at the 2022 H-Net Teaching Conference. We hope that our brief reflections here on in-person and online teaching have added to this discussion. We now invite you—our readers—to continue this conversation on H-Teach. An ongoing, robust dialogue about best teaching practices—as well as how and where student evaluations have a place in those practices—would be beneficial to all of us as we navigate the complexities and constantly evolving challenges of trying to be good instructors who create meaningful learning experiences each term in every class.
Appendix A

Civility Statement

Civil discourse involves listening politely to others, remaining objective, behaving peacefully, being nonjudgmental, and being willing to compromise. Civility and critical thinking are closely linked in academic settings. As critical thinkers, we need to be aware of our own egocentric and sociocentric biases in order to be open to learning about other perspectives.

Civil behavior includes showing respect toward other people, causing others to feel valued, and contributing to mutual respect, effective communication, and team collaboration.

Lack of civility often emerges when individuals are unwilling to set aside a unidimensional view of the world to look at other points of view and consider other people's experiences. As a critical thinker who engages in civil behavior, we must embrace the following:

1. Have humility and do not assume we know everything about everyone.
2. Be aware of our own biases as we listen to others, with the goal of being open-minded and nonjudgmental.
3. Be willing to challenge our own beliefs and persevere when it is difficult to change our worldviews.
4. Be willing to ask questions for clarification when we do not understand another’s point of view and listen respectfully to the responses.
5. Approach any situation with kindness and empathy and realize we may not truly understand what another person has experienced.
6. Be willing to think independently and let go of prior learning that may be flawed to gain more understanding.
7. Use reliable sources to seek out views different from our own.

The University of Massachusetts Global includes an entire spectrum of skin colors, ethnic groups, beliefs, languages, and cultures. In an educational organization, people hold varying views, and we believe that diversity is an inherent strength. Compromise and diversity are a hallmark of a university that engages in civil discourse and critical thinking.
Appendix B

Early Modern Europe Paper

(This assignment is provided to students in the syllabus)

There were many events that shaped the development of early modern European history. With this notion as a premise, you are required to write a paper that answers all of the following questions: What is the defining moment in the history of early modern Europe? What are at least three events that inspired (and/or resulted from) this defining moment? Who are at least two significant figures that contributed to (and/or benefited from) this moment? What is the overall significance of this defining moment?

When choosing a topic, there are three key points to keep in mind:

1. For the purposes of this paper, early modern Europe is defined as 1500–1815. Your defining moment must come from this time frame. However, your supporting events and significant figures may come from before or after this time frame.

2. You must be specific when choosing a defining moment; for example, the French Revolution is too broad to choose as the moment, but the Storming of the Bastille is an acceptable choice.

3. As this is a European history course, the primary focus of your paper must be a kingdom or country in Europe. However, when choosing related events and significant figures, you do not have to limit yourself to Europe. If non-European events or people are relevant to supporting your thesis, you may include them in your paper. You also do not have to limit yourself to people, events, and ideas covered in class; in fact, I highly encourage you to find a topic that we have not covered in class.

Once you have chosen a topic, there are two components of this assignment to complete.

The first component is an outline and a bibliography.

The outline must describe the defining moment in 1–2 sentences as well as list the three events and two people.

The bibliography must have at least five separate sources. These must be printed sources from the library or academic periodicals found in the library’s scholarly databases (http://www.libraries.psu.edu/paul/erie.html). Online sources are not acceptable for this assignment. (Journal databases and digital books found on the PSU library website do not count as online sources. Also, it is highly advisable that you use academic articles and books and do not limit your research to encyclopedia articles.) In addition to these five sources, you may also use any document assigned in class as a supplemental source. You may choose to cite using either Chicago Style or MLA. Additional information on citation and grading and writing guidelines are available in Canvas in the module "Writing/Paper Guidelines." You can also find information about citation at Purdue OWL (https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html) as well as the Penn State libraries (https://guides.lib.psu.edu/CitationStyles).

A paper copy of the outline and bibliography is due at the start of class on Friday, February 24. You must also submit a digital copy to Turnitin (https://www.turnitin.com/) by 9:05 a.m. on Friday, February 24. Our
class id is ####### and the enrollment key is #######. After you have submitted your paper to Turnitin, you will receive a receipt; it is in your best interest to keep a copy of this receipt as it is proof of your digital submission. Also: please submit the assignment as one Word document.

The second component is the paper.

The paper must be between 6 and 8 pages long, answer all of the questions listed above, use at least five sources, be written in third person, be double spaced, be set in an appropriate font (Times New Roman 12), and have 1-inch margins. Please note: the six-page minimum means at least six full pages of text.

All quoted and paraphrased material must be cited, although quotes from your sources should be used sparingly. Any information taken from class notes can be considered common knowledge and does not need to be cited. Either Chicago style or MLA is acceptable. You must also include a bibliography with the paper.

As part of this assignment, you are required to make an appointment with a Writing Tutor in the Learning Resource Center (https://behrend.psu.edu/Academics/academic-services/lrc/tutoring) to review a complete rough draft and bibliography. This appointment must be completed no later than Friday, March 31. On the tutor log that you will fill out during your session, there is an option for you to "send my professor a copy of this form." You must select "yes" and write in my name as otherwise I will not have a record of your visit with the tutor. Please note: if you submit an incomplete draft to the tutor, if you do not remain with the tutor during the appointment, or if the appointment is past the deadline, then you will lose 10 points from the paper. If you fail to review a draft with a tutor, then you will lose 20 points from the paper.

A paper copy of the final draft of the paper is due at the start of class on Monday, April 3. You also need to submit a digital copy to Turnitin by 9:05 a.m. Just submit one Word document with both the paper and bibliography; you do not need to submit the outline again. Again, after you have submitted your paper to Turnitin, you will receive a receipt; it is in your best interest to keep a copy of this receipt as it is proof of your digital submission.

Your paper will primarily be graded on three criteria: one, the clarity and conciseness of your writing; two, the proper use of the sources in your paper; and three, the ability to answer the questions noted above.

If you have any questions about the assignment, the visit to the Learning Resource Center, the in-class submissions, or the online submissions, feel free to visit me during my office hours or send me an email before either part of the assignment is due. I am also happy to review your ideas and drafts during my office hours or by appointment.
Grading Guidelines

(This document is provided to students in the course’s online platform in a section with 5 other documents about writing, editing, and citation.)

Although there is no grading rubric for this class, these questions will give you a general idea of what I look for when I grade your paper. In particular, I focus on the quality of your research, your argument, and your writing (questions 6, 7, 8).

1. Was a hard copy of the paper submitted in class on time?
2. Was a digital copy of the paper submitted online on time?
3. Does the paper meet the appropriate page count and was it properly formatted?
4. Was a bibliography included and were all of the resources properly cited?
5. Were all paraphrased and quoted references properly cited within the paper?
6. How well were the sources used to support the argument made in the paper?
7. What was the overall quality of the argument made in the paper?
8. What was the overall quality of the writing and grammar?
Appendix C

Discussion Rubric (2-Week Format)

Philosophy for the Discussion Thread:

The discussion board in your class is a critical learning assignment. It is the expectation that anything you write and create is your own work that has been created solely for the purpose of this class.

This is a place where you can learn from not only your instructor but your classmates as well. It is expected that you spend at least five hours a week in a learning environment (whether it is in a fully online class or a blended class). This does not include reading a textbook, taking quizzes, or doing assignments. Therefore, the discussion boards are a critical element for meeting the hour requirements, whether you are taking an online or a blended class.

The discussion boards are not busy work but are designed for you to critically evaluate and apply course content. It is a place for you to expand on what you have learned from reading the text, to applying the content, finding examples, expanding on the content, and much more. You are expected to use critical thinking skills. It is critical to note that you may not just copy blocks of information from a website, even if you do cite it. One of the purposes of the discussion board is to work on your writing skills. It is important that you paraphrase what you have read.

In the two-week format, you are required to engage in a discussion thread in both weeks. The initial post must be done in the first week. You cannot enter the discussion after the two-week time period has ended and get points. Essentially you would be entering an empty classroom because all your classmates have moved on to the next week.

Initial Post:

You are provided choices on the topics you have researched for the week and different ways to share the information as part of the assignment. When posting, put the name of the topic in your subject line. Attach your work to the post and then write a summary of a minimum of 200 words that tells your classmates what will be included in your attached document. You are expected to cite reputable sources, which may include readings in the course. Be sure to cite your sources in APA format. The initial post should be done by 11:59 p.m. on Saturday of the first week in which the discussion is assigned.

Responding to Your Classmates:

You are also required to respond to three of your classmates on topics that are different from the one you selected. Your responses should be a minimum of 200 words and you must cite sources in all your posts. Words such as “thank you for your post” or “this is interesting” and your reference list will not count toward the minimum words. All posts must be completed by 11:59 p.m. on Sunday of the second week. Note that responses to classmates who have posted...
on a similar topic will not count. The goal is for you to learn more about different topics, so be sure to select threads that are not the same as the topic in your initial post. Note that responses that meet minimum requirements may not receive all points; you must demonstrate critical thinking and must add something new to the conversation. Remember that the goal is to have an intellectual discourse. Therefore, a response in which you tell a colleague you like his or her idea without going into any detail is not acceptable. It is not enough to just ask questions, without building on the information. What were your thoughts when you thought of the question? If you have a question, you may want to share that you had a question and what you found when you did research to answer it yourself. It is always important to relate your responses back to the content of the course.

Here are some ideas in how you can respond to your classmates:

- Build on something your colleague posted.
- Explain why and how you see things differently. Cite research to support your view.
- Ask a probing or clarifying question that causes others to critically evaluate what was being said. Do not just ask for additional information. Explain why you are asking the question. What made you want to ask the question?
- Share an insight you had after reading your colleague’s posting.
- Offer another opinion and support it with research.
- Validate an idea with your own experience (not all your responses should be about your own experience).
- Expand on your colleague’s posting by adding new information.
- Ask for evidence that supports the posting or find other evidence to support or contradict an idea or theory.
- Play the devil’s advocate to someone’s post (but let them know you are doing so and use correct netiquette).

Use critical thinking standards to evaluate what your classmates have to say. It is important to note that this is an academic discussion, not a chat room. Remember to be respectful to your classmates. You do not have to agree, but you do need to be respectful and address the idea, not the person. For example, if I hate chocolate ice cream, I would state my reasons why I do not like it. I would not call my classmates names or discount their opinion about chocolate ice cream because I do not like it.

**Writing Style:**

The discussion board is an academic forum. It is expected that the writing meets academic standards. You should proofread all your posts. In addition, you should not write as if you are texting. For example, the word “I” should always be capitalized. The words “you are” should be
spelled out and “ur” should never be used. You are expected to cite your sources within the text of your post. It is not acceptable to just cut and paste blocks of information from a website. It is important to use your own words. If you plagiarize, you will automatically fail the discussion board for the week. You should not use more than one quotation in your post and it should be no more than 25 percent of your post. The goal is for you to paraphrase the work of other researchers.

**General Requirements:**

The discussion board is designed for you to have an intellectual conversation with your classmates. Therefore, to get the full benefit from the discussion, it is recommended that you engage multiples times each week and take the time to read each thread. If all of you were to wait until the last minute to engage in the discussion, you would not get the full benefit of learning from each other, having time to reflect on what others are saying, having time to do additional research, and so on. Although you are required to engage four times, you are welcome and encouraged to engage more. It is also a great idea for you to go back into your initial thread and answer any questions that your classmates or instructor have posed; this also contributes to your learning.

**Earning Points:**

Please refer to the rubric below. This will be followed when grading your discussion. Note that the discussion is not designed for you to get an automatic 100 percent if you have not shown in-depth responses that show at least some of the following critical thinking skills: clarity (clear and concise writing), accuracy (free from errors and distortions), precision (exact level of detail), depth (showing relationships to other things), breadth (showing more than one viewpoint), relevance (relating to the content learned), logic (no contradictions in your argument), and significance (what is important). Just counting words is not enough for you to earn the full value.

**Note that if you plagiarize, you will receive a zero on the discussion board. You will also be reported to the university for plagiarism.**

**Missing the Minimum Number of Responses:**

**Note that the rubric only applies if you have responded a minimum of four times. If you do not engage four times, your instructor may take off up to 20 points for not responding to classmates and up to 30 points for the initial post. This is the rubric that will be used to grade your responses:**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Outstanding</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Missing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial Post Summary</td>
<td>4.5–5.0 points</td>
<td>3.5–4.4 points</td>
<td>1.0–3.4 points</td>
<td>0 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial post clearly and concisely summarizes the topic that has been selected, as well as how the information is presented.</td>
<td>Initial post somewhat clearly and concisely summarizes the topic that has been selected, as well as how the information is presented.</td>
<td>Initial post summary lacks clarity about the topic that has been selected, as well as how the information is presented.</td>
<td></td>
<td>No summary has been provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The summary is 200 to 300 words in length.</td>
<td>The summary is 150 to 199 words in length.</td>
<td>The summary is 1 to 149 words in length.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are no grammatical/spelling errors.</td>
<td>There are a few grammatical/spelling errors.</td>
<td>Writing has multiple grammatical/spelling errors.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic Assignment</td>
<td>25–30 points</td>
<td>20–24 points</td>
<td>1–19 points</td>
<td>0 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meets all the criteria for the attachment to the initial post, including length, content, etc.</td>
<td>Meets most of the criteria for the attachment to the initial post, including length, content, etc.</td>
<td>Meets a portion of the criteria for the attachment to the initial post, including length, content, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td>No attachment on a topic has been provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic assignment is clearly and concisely presented, adding new information beyond content presented in the course.</td>
<td>Topic assignment is somewhat clearly and concisely presented, adding mostly new information beyond the content in the course.</td>
<td>Topic assignment lacks clarity and provides little new information beyond what is presented in the course.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic assignment is professionally presented or displayed.</td>
<td>Topic assignment is somewhat professionally presented or displayed.</td>
<td>Topic assignment needs improvement in how it is presented or displayed.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>4.5–5.0 points</td>
<td>3.5–4.4 points</td>
<td>1.0–3.4 points</td>
<td>0 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides a list of references in correct APA format. Sources provided are from reputable sources.</td>
<td>Provides a list of references in APA format but has a few errors. Sources provided are somewhat reputable.</td>
<td>Provides a list of references in APA format but has multiple errors and/or sources are not all reputable.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Does not provide a list of references used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Missing</td>
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<td>----------</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Quality of Responses</strong></td>
<td>14–15 points</td>
<td>12–13 points</td>
<td>1–11 points</td>
<td>0 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responds to other students in a highly articulate and meaningful way using critical thinking guidelines and expands on the information presented by peers.</td>
<td>Responds to others in a somewhat articulate and meaningful way and usually expands on information presented by peers. One or more of the responses lacks depth or critical thinking.</td>
<td>Does not respond to others in a well thought out way and does not expand on information presented by peers. Responses lack depth, are shallow, and/or show limited critical thinking.</td>
<td>Does not respond to any classmates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responds with a minimum of 200 words per reply.</td>
<td>Responds with 150–199 words per reply.</td>
<td>Responds with fewer than 150 words.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cites outside sources to support all responses.</td>
<td>Provides outside sources for at least 2 responses to classmates to support views.</td>
<td>Does not cite outside sources to support responses to peers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responds to posts that are not on the same topic as initial post.</td>
<td>Most responses are on different topic of initial post.</td>
<td>Most responses are not on different topic of initial post.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing Style</strong></td>
<td>4.5–5.0 points</td>
<td>3.5–4.4 points</td>
<td>2.5–3.4 points</td>
<td>0 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uses proper grammar and spelling 90–100% of the time. Writing is academic in nature.</td>
<td>Uses proper grammar and spelling 70–89% of the time. Writing is generally academic in nature, with an occasional error.</td>
<td>Uses proper grammar and spelling less than 70% of the time. Writing is non-academic in nature (i.e., writes with social media shortcuts).</td>
<td>Writing is not in own words and/or has responses where quotations make up over 50% of the posts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At least 90% of post is in own words.</td>
<td>At least 85% of post is in own words.</td>
<td>Less than 80% of post is in own words.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D

A: Excellent

Honor grade indicating excellent work. Earned as a result of a combination of most or all of the following as outlined by the instructor in the course syllabus and/or other course documents: superior examination scores, consistently accurate and prompt completion of all assignments, ability to deal resourcefully with abstract ideas, superior mastery of pertinent skills, demonstration of excellent critical thinking skills and analysis of course material on assignments and in class discussions, and excellent attendance.

B: Superior

Honor grade indicating superior, above average work. Earned as a result of a combination of some or all of the following as outlined by the instructor in the course syllabus and/or other course documents: high examination scores, accurate and prompt completion of all assignments, ability to deal well with abstract ideas, mastery of pertinent skills, demonstration of above average critical thinking skills and analysis of course material on assignments and in class discussions, and excellent attendance.

C: Average

Standard college grade indicating successful performance. Earned as a result of a combination of some or all of the following as outlined by the instructor in the course syllabus and/or other course documents: satisfactory examination scores, generally accurate and prompt completion of assignments, ability to deal with abstract ideas, fair mastery of pertinent skills, demonstration of average critical thinking skills and analysis of course material on assignments and in class discussions, and regular attendance.

D: Substandard but receiving credit

Substandard grade indicating the student has met only minimum requirements. Earned as a result of some or all of the following as outlined by the instructor in the course syllabus and/or other course documents: low examination scores; generally inaccurate, incomplete, late, and/or missing assignments; inadequate grasp of abstract ideas; barely acceptable mastery of pertinent skills; little demonstration of critical thinking skills or analysis of course material on assignments and in class discussions; and irregular attendance.

F: Failure

Non-passing grade indicating failure to meet minimum requirements. Earned as a result of some or all of the following as outlined by the instructor in the course syllabus and/or other course documents: non-passing examination scores; mostly inaccurate, incomplete, or late assignments; failure to cope with abstract ideas; inadequate mastery of pertinent skills; no demonstration of critical thinking skills or analysis of course material on assignments and in class discussions; and repeated absence from class.
AUTHOR BIO

Amy Carney is an associate professor of history at Pennsylvania State University, the Behrend College. She teaches classes on modern European history, including courses on both World Wars, Fascism and National Socialism, and the Holocaust. Her research, including her 2018 book *Marriage and Fatherhood in the Nazi SS*, focuses on family life in Nazi Germany.

Kat Ringenbach is a professor of psychology at University of Massachusetts Global, where she has taught for twenty-nine years, including traditional face-to-face, blended, and asynchronous online formats. She has presented on a variety of topics, including job performance, critical thinking, best teaching practices, student success, assessment, interdisciplinary approaches to teaching, work-life balance, interracial mentoring, substantive feedback, and quality teaching. She is one of the authors for UMass Global’s innovative Competency Based Education Program, focusing on multidisciplinary approaches to understanding the human experience and human behavior, as well as critical and creative thinking.

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HOW TO CITE


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Studying and Teaching Gender-Caste Histories in India: Problems, Possibilities, and Pleasures

Charu Gupta
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ABSTRACT

Amid a larger context of political and social changes in India, this article reflects on a personal-academic trajectory and the problems, possibilities, and pleasures of teaching and researching histories of gender and caste in modern India at the University of Delhi for more than three decades. As a feminist historian, the author first points to some of the limitations in her early years of teaching courses on gender, where she occluded caste as a category of analysis. However, an examination of the conjunctions between anti-caste thought and gender through a Dalit feminist pedagogical lens led to shifts in her curriculum and academic scholarship. The article goes on to discuss how preparing and teaching courses on gender-caste histories pose many challenges in terms of queries from the university administration, curriculum design, pedagogic practices, and student responses. Classroom spaces are highly politicized in India, with pronounced gender, caste, class, and linguistic identities that often overlap with each other, which has implications for teaching and research. Finally, the article deliberates on the creative possibilities of such courses and pedagogical strategies, as students critique the crafting of mainstream history writing, feel drawn to new theoretical tools and methodologies that rely on different archival registers, and question the erasure of caste as an analytic, in the process also making the classroom a more democratic space.
Studying and Teaching Gender-Caste Histories in India: Problems, Possibilities, and Pleasures
Charu Gupta

When I began studying as an undergraduate student of history in the early 1980s at Delhi University, India, teaching gender as one rubric in Indian history courses was considered more than enough, as most courses were political or economic-centric in nature. Slowly, however, just as Marxism had done earlier, feminism came to provide much of the critical theoretical paradigms for researching and teaching history, and some rich histories, particularly of modern India, came to be written, with a distinct feminist perspective.¹ Greatly influenced by them, and inspired by my teachers like Uma Chakravarti, Prem Chowdhry, and Sumit Sarkar, I was deeply attracted toward the broad themes of and courses centering on women in colonial India and gender in history. Taking these themes forward, when I later began my doctoral research, I became keen to examine the gendered nature of pre-partition religious tensions and thus explored the interface between Hindu nationalism, gender, and Hindi print-popular archive in the early twentieth century.²

However, there was a critical gap in the way I, along with many other feminist scholars, designed our courses and did our research. It mirrored some of the problems of the early women's movement in India, which, while critiquing Eurocentric paradigms of the international feminist movement, implicitly adopted the same lens within. Thus, while dealing with questions of patriarchy and oppression and positing social difference of religion as an enduring aspect of modern gendering, much of my research and teaching focused on and addressed representations of and by dominant-caste, middle-class women. There were also three main axes of gender-centric courses of modern India: first, social reforms and debates on sati, widow remarriage, and age of consent; second, women's participation in Gandhian movements; and finally, the gendered nature of partition.³ Some categories and identities that did make an appearance were peasant and working-class women. However, “caste” as an analytic category was occluded and remained uninterrogated. Gender history courses tacitly implied that Dalit women did not merit a separate study, since they were subsumed within the category of “women.”⁴ One reason for this perhaps was also that the concern of most social reform movements was largely about Hindu middle-class women rather than caste.⁵ There were of course other problems with the courses, as the category of “gender” was taught as meaning women and questions of queer politics or masculinities were ignored. Amid a background of larger political and social changes in India, this article reflects on my personal and academic trajectory of teaching and researching histories of caste and gender in modern India.

In the 1990s, some critical shifts occurred, which slowly came to affect teaching and research on caste. First, with the meteoric rise of Dalit politics and assertion of Dalit voices, particularly in north India, the discipline of history, while late in comparison to say sociology or anthropology, was forced to acknowledge the question of caste in a central way. Second, with the Mandal Commission, a new caste discourse emerged in the political-public arena.⁶ It also pushed caste as a key issue in higher education. Significantly, Delhi University, with its vast network of undergraduate colleges, where young people from the North poured in for higher studies, was the epicenter of the anti-Mandal protests. Slowly, thus, history courses were designed that not

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² When I later began my doctoral research, I became keen to examine the gendered nature of pre-partition religious tensions and thus explored the interface between Hindu nationalism, gender, and Hindi print-popular archive in the early twentieth century.
³ Some categories and identities that did make an appearance were peasant and working-class women. However, “caste” as an analytic category was occluded and remained uninterrogated.
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only incorporated caste but also made it their focal point.

However, here too there was a reverse, yet mirrored, problem. These courses invariably centered on major anti-caste movements and figures, public participation and politics, questions of education and employment, and Mahatma Gandhi–B. R. Ambedkar debates. They were, of course, rich and insightful in their own right, particularly in terms of providing perceptive regional histories of anti-caste movements, critical redemptive narratives of Bahujans and Dalits, and an Ambedkar-centered historiography. Just as Bengal had provided much of the early paradigms for studying gender in colonial India, perhaps because of the presence of stalwarts like Raja Rammohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar in the region, with the important figures of Jyotirao Phule and Ambedkar, Maharashtra, and to an extent Tamilnadu, rightly came to embody our theoretical exemplars of anti-caste histories. The pioneering works of Rosalind O’Hanlon and Gail Omvedt, among others, on Maharashtra and Ambedkar and M. S. S. Pandian and V. Geetha on E. V. Ramasamy (popularly revered as Periyar) and the non-Brahmin movements of Tamilnadu became integral to our teaching caste histories. Other incisive studies on anti-caste movements in other regions also appeared.

Yet most of these too missed the gender dimension, and histories of Bahujans and Dalits were predominantly taught as male-centric. Further, the courses focused on the political-public sphere and cataclysmic events, as opposed to the ordinary, the mundane, the intimate, and the anecdotal in everyday lived lives of Dalits, where women were much more ubiquitous. Equally, they often left unexamined dominant-caste privilege, designed as they were around Dalit protests and struggles. Caste was seen as a synonym for Dalit, as a burden and concern of Dalits alone, which did not impinge on the lives and histories of dominant castes. To put it crudely, it was as if gender history had to be taught from the rubric of women of middle class, upper caste, while caste had to be studied around Dalit male arenas. The allusion was that in colonial India, almost all women were upper caste, middle class, while virtually all subordinate castes and Dalits were male. In other words, while both “gender” and “caste” are forms of social difference and systems of exploitation that work in inextricable ways to reinforce patriarchy and perpetuate inequalities, they were typically addressed in most Indian history courses until the late 1990s in isolation from each other and treated as distinct categories. The intersections between them fell through the cracks and signposts of gender and Dalit historiographies.

Moreover, while caste was perceived as a uniquely Indian form of hierarchical stratification with religious-ritual sanction, to be treated empirically, gender was studied as a universal-conceptual category, central to the reproduction of patriarchies. While caste was provincialized, scholars of non-Western gender faced the opposite problem, of challenging the Euro-American dominance and the geo-historical universality imputed to gender. This may also explain why India’s official and diplomatic discourse has refused to consider caste discrimination as a global malaise. Critical caste studies does make a universal claim about caste as a theoretical tool. It also offers an analytic framework that brings caste to the realm of the political. The entanglement of caste, a ritualized bio-power, with gender (and race) opens new possibilities amid constant erasures.

The rise of Dalit Bahujan feminism, which made their oppressed identity an instrument of confrontation, not only underscored the conjunctions between caste and gender but also
They also appeared here as citizens and not necessarily as gendered beings.

Simultaneously, the intersections between anti-caste thought and gender became central in the work of some feminist historians, like Uma Chakravarti, Anupama Rao, Sharmila Rege, S. Anandhi, and V. Geetha, predominantly with a west and south India focus. Their works showed the stronghold of Brahmanical patriarchy and the ways caste radicals, be it Phule, Ambedkar, or Periyar, distinctly drew and challenged connections between sexual regulation and caste reproduction. For example, Chakravarti emphasized the intimate relationship between consolidation of Brahmanical patriarchy and traditional caste hierarchy during the Peshwai in eighteenth-century western India. Rao demonstrated the contradictory contours of sexuality, marriage, and family in anti-Brahmin politics of Maharashtra. Rege reclaimed some of Ambedkar’s writings, which imagined new caste-gender codes and trenchantly critiqued endogamy, as feminist classics. And Anandhi and Geetha unveiled the radical embrace of marriage as a partnership of two political comrades outside family and contraception as a means of sexual pleasure by Periyar and the Self-Respect Movement of Tamilnadu. Yet they also emphasized that since annihilation of caste, rather than sexual freedom per se, was the focus of male anti-caste reformers, there was instability in the otherwise radical connections they drew, as they often limited themselves to marriage and its protocols. Moreover, although caste radicals challenged caste ideology, “they were by no means immune to the extension of novel patriarchal practices into their own households.” Problems with social reforms, property relations, widows and remarriage laws, ingrained endogamy in practices of sati, enforced widowhood, and girl marriage came to be also highlighted from the perspective of caste.

As an auto-critique and self-reflexivity shaped by and drawing from such anti-caste, Dalit, and feminist writings, in the second phase of my research and teaching, I have attempted to employ a Dalit feminist pedagogical lens and have moved to teaching courses that explicate the gender of caste and interrogate the caste of gender. My courses question both the presumptive upper casteness of many gender studies courses and the conjectural maleness of most Dalit studies courses of modern Indian history by pointing out how differentials of caste and gender between women and men, and among the colonized women and men, were critical in structuring patterns of domination and subordination. They thus posit how social difference has been an enduring aspect of caste gendering and why constructs of caste were refurbished and recast in colonial India to justify hierarchies. Through regional case studies, writings of anti-caste ideologues, vernacular literature produced by dominant and subordinate castes, popular culture, visuals, and documents of colonizers and missionaries of the period, the courses underscore how a contentious associational discourse around caste and gender developed among colonizers, nationalists, revivalists, reformers, and Dalits and permeated into the social fabric in contradictory ways. They reflect not only that caste and gender are constitutive of
the social but also that caste is central to how gender is reproduced. Giving up chronology and linearity and, instead, juxtaposing a series of historical narratives, the courses endeavor to “unread” dominant inscriptions on gendered caste bodies, while highlighting the emancipatory possibilities through counter-voices and agencies. As a bolster, in 2012, five social sciences and humanities departments of my university for the first time organized a joint interdisciplinary course on caste for graduate-level research students, of which I was a part, which proved to be a unique experience. It emphasized the insights, advantages, and limitations of a particular methodology and disciplinary approaches to caste. I became more receptive to interdisciplinary and intersectional perspectives. The teaching of these courses has turned out to be a pedagogic turning point.

Alongside, I started researching for my monograph *The Gender of Caste*, which was published in 2016. In this work, I foreground “representations in print” as my critical tool, addressing print as a significant if ambivalent site for the reproduction, transformation, and contestation of caste and gender ideologies. Juxtaposing a series of historical narratives, I attempt to “unread” dominant inscriptions on gendered caste bodies while highlighting emancipatory possibilities through counter-voices and agencies. The book discusses representations of Dalit women as vamps, victims, and *viranganas* (heroic women) in a variety of print genres. Since the book is about the gender of caste, I also explore Dalit men as gendered subjects and address constructions of Dalit masculinities. Another chapter examines religious conversions by Dalit women to Christianity and Islam. The seemingly incongruous locations and subjects of the book are closely linked, revealing the entanglement and co-constitution of attempts to regulate Dalit bodies, the new socialities of caste, and the texts and acts of Dalit women’s (and men’s) self-expression, whereby representations of Dalits were both enabled and transformed.  

In the rest of the article, I wish to reflect on some responses from university administration, faculty, and students while preparing and teaching these courses, along with some takeaways for studying and research. The administrative responses to these courses have been varied. Initially, they considered them not serious enough but let them pass with some mild objections. At the same time, when the interdisciplinary course was being taught, they refused to make it a credit course, with students only earning a certificate on its completion, thus blunting their desire to take it. The early biases of some faculty colleagues were also apparent when they considered such courses as not hard-core history, as not dealing with major historical events, as addendums, as “soft” and “easy,” and as not serious or academic enough; some were skeptical about the readings prescribed, which according to one “lacked solid archival data.”

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17. S. Anandhi, "Women’s Question in the Dravidian Movement c. 1925–1948," *Social Scientist* 19, nos. 5–6 (May–June 1991): 24–41; and V. Geetha, “Periyar, Women and an Ethic of Citizenship,” in Rao, ed., *Gender and Caste*, 180–203. Periyar was the head of the Self-Respect Movement in Tamilnadu. It was an anti-caste, anti-Brahmanical movement, the aim of which was to encourage oppressed and backward castes to have self-respect and fight for equal human rights and dignity.

18. Rao, *Caste Question*, 53


20. Gupta, *Gender of Caste*.

21. Informal discussions among faculty colleagues and author in 2010 during course revisions and drafting.
Significantly, unlike say in Jawaharlal Nehru University or the University of Hyderabad, students from Delhi University's Political Science PG Syllabus Is RSS-motivated, The Leaflet, October 19, 2018, http://theleaflet.in/decision-to-remove-kancha-iliaahs-books-from-delhi-universitys-political-science-pg-syllabus-is-rss-motivated/; and Scroll Staff, “Delhi University Drops Dalit Writers, Mahasweta Devi’s Works from English Course,” Scroll.in, August 17, 2017, seen in universities as “politicizing the campus.”

In the wake of the devastating suicide of Rohith Vemula, a student of the University of Hyderabad, on January 17, 2016, which underlined how higher educational institutions can be hotbeds of caste-based discrimination and which sparked protests and outrage across Indian universities, courses on caste have come under increasing scrutiny.23 For example, in the post-2014 revisions of courses at Delhi University, unprecedented objections were raised, particularly by Hindu right-wing supporters, to courses dealing with caste, revealing the complex ways caste-based power flows.24 They attacked the courses for their alleged ceaseless opposition to nationalist ideology (read: dominant Hindutva perspective), their preponderance of leftist-Dalit perspective, and their critique of Brahmanical patriarchy, that is, how patriarchy is organized and perpetuated on the basis of caste. Each and every reading listed came under surveillance, and there were violent demands to, for example, remove the books of Kancha Ilaiah on the grounds that they were anti-Hindu and stories of some Dalit writers like Bama and of Mahasweta Devi from various syllabi, which was often endorsed by university officials.25 It was also suggested, following directives from the government, that the word “Dalit” be discontinued in academic discourse. However, as a writer said, “So the term ‘Dalit’ can’t be used but ‘Brahmin’ and 6000 other caste names can.”26 Significantly, the term “Dalit,” literally meaning the “crushed” or “broken,” has evolved over time and has acquired powerful political connotations and symbolic meanings, including self-respect, assertion, solidarity, radical movements, and opposition to caste oppression. While others humiliate, it is a word that empowers.27

While I have been rethinking and recrafting the syllabus, a simultaneous process that has been occurring in India is increasing politicization of the classroom space, with fault lines of gender, caste, class, and linguistic identities that often overlap with each other. With 50 percent reservations, many students are coming from Dalit and “Other Backward Classes” (OBCs), challenging the social homogeneity of classrooms and academic bodies. However, there is also an underbelly of divisions and distinctions, as there is a nexus of networks of exclusion that operate formally and informally.28 An extremely encouraging aspect of these courses has been that they have been a huge draw, attracting maximum students. To take an example, there were some forty courses on offer in modern Indian history over a year in 2018 at my university. Around 150 students had to pick any eight, and my course on caste and gender attracted 98, who listed it as their first choice.

At the same time, many students initially bring their own commonsensical notions and preconceptions, which clash with academically informed arguments in the classroom arena. For example, a few of the dominant-caste students began by positing that caste has been waning and has become redundant in everyday social life of Indians and that to talk of it is being not modern enough. It is thus important to underscore in one’s teaching how not talking of caste is also a sign of dominant-caste privilege. Over the years, I have also seen that while caste has been the central arena in presentations, assignments, and research topics of Dalit and Bahujan students, for those from dominant castes, it has remained a marginal subject. In reverse, when Dalit students express their desire to work on something else, they are often told to work on an issue or subject related to their own community.


of Delhi University can also write their assignments and dissertations in Hindi. Besides the overlaps with class, linguistic politics is intricately tied to caste, as there is usually an overlap between English-speaking and dominant-caste students and Hindi-speaking and oppressed-caste students. Those fluent in English are more self-confident and more likely to become class representatives, taking on the mantle of speaking for the whole class. A distinct hierarchy is observed over the years: dominant-caste man, dominant-caste woman, Dalit man, and Dalit woman, in that order. Hindi-speaking students, mostly OBC and Dalit, are at a disadvantage as there is much less material available in the medium; they often get lower grades; there is an absence of institutional efforts and mechanisms for them; and at times there is indifference, noncooperation, and active discouragement by some faculty members to supervise them. Language thus operates as a marker of power relations, subordination, and exclusion. Dalit women students, besides of course being among the most disadvantaged in relation to their access to higher education, have minimal access to networks that create social capital. One of my Dalit women students, who did her master of philosophy with me, said to me once, "Ma'am, I often feel inferior in class. I speak and write in Hindi. Even if I have to put forth an academic point in class, I feel hesitant, not just because of my language, but also because of my dress, my lifestyle, my economic status. I sit in one particular place in the class with another Dalit woman student, a space where I feel the most comfortable. While other students are collegial, there is an implicit, underlying distance maintained."

Yet, as Rege has pointed out, for the first time, "those for long considered ‘unteachable’ are talking/writing back. This makes it possible to throw back the gaze of the students who have long been ‘invisible’ and ‘nameless’ in the classrooms on to disciplinary and pedagogical practices." Equally, as courses of caste-gender have evolved over the years, students have felt drawn to new questions and arenas of research, which are critical to crafting history as a discipline. There are many pedagogic and academic takeaways here. First, as students critique dominant historiographical approaches to both caste and gender, they also identify how the intermeshing of the two opens up new theoretical tools and methodologies. Perhaps an important contribution of the course has been that it has helped students to rely on different archival registers. The archive becomes not just an object of dominant casteism but also a subject of caste power itself. Thus, expanding their archives, they have unveiled new ways of gleaning, reading, and interpreting sources. Focusing on silences and erasures, they have sought to read between the lines and against the grain and to recover and record omissions. Drawing their theoretical tools from a cross-referential Dalit feminist counter-archive, they thus rely on different techniques of dealing with sources that determine the deep structures of historiography itself.

Second, as the course develops, the distance between creative and discursive writing diminishes. In histories of gender and caste, print is a significant, if ambivalent, site for the reproduction, transformation, and contestation of caste and gender ideologies. Social practices and relations left their footprints on print and the literary, as the two drew from and fed into each other. Anti-caste ideologues and writers made strategic interventions in the field of print and knowledge. As part of a vernacular reading and writing public, Dalit castes spokespersons, through their associations, journals, and tracts, started making forceful claims to rights. Many of the students have thus gone on to creatively deploy vernacular imaginative texts for retelling histories from below. The vernacular, after all, has often been the dominant public language for discourses on caste and a critical methodology of the marginalized. At the same time, in terms of literary
and caste politics, the vernacular is a malleable concept, whose meanings are contingent on its contexts. A vernacular signifying practice can have critical problems, for while acting as a vehicle of dissent, it can simultaneously uphold dominant and normative values.\(^3\)

Third, instead of grand theories, students learn to pay attention to quotidian practices of regulation of caste and gender and everyday resistances. The rhythms of daily life and the anecdotal, both in terms of writings and events, can be critical to the writing of history from and of the margins. Histories of caste and gender do not just entail a study of leading anti-caste movements, prominent figures, or writings of first-generation Dalit intellectuals, which are of course important, but much more. The routine, transitory, and what have been perceived as non-consequential histories thus become important, as caste is woven in our everyday fabric. Methodologically, the focus on the everyday is critical from a gender perspective. Dalit women, while often not vital players in many of the public, political, and evident struggles of the period, were ubiquitous subalterns in the mundane world of work, home, and family; in daily interactions in social, public, and ritual spheres; and in the figuring of sexualities and patriarchies.

Fourth, ideas of intimacy and body histories become significant to get at the terribly material, embodied character of caste-gender dynamics, its representational density, and its divergent receptions in public life. Intimacy provides us with a new way to talk about caste, not only through identity categories, politics, and structural and institutional inequalities but also as an idea made material through the physical body. It allows us to see the subtle manner in which caste functions as body history and body language, the politics of which permeates the most intimate spaces of our lives. Gender, in any case, brings our attention to questions of intimacy and the body. Dalit women are made to inhabit a social place of extreme moral ambivalence, and their bodies are repeatedly brought into focus through questions of sex and sexual promiscuity. Fifth, against the erasure of caste as an analytic, there is a recoding of caste that decenters the bourgeois subject, on the one hand, and divorces caste from a singular, monolithic history, on the other. Finally, students refuse the bio-determinism of caste and neat equations of gender with women; of women with upper caste, middle class; of caste with Dalit; and of Dalit with men.

To conclude, both caste and gender oppression historically are unfinished stories of the present and thus have contemporary resonance. Courses that underscore the intersections between the two can help us alter habits of historical narration and develop a critical analysis that can transform our perspectives of South Asian history and our teaching of the past. Refusing the ontologies of Brahmanical order, such courses offer an ethical scaffolding and pedagogies of survival and resistance. Giving way to a different symphony of sources and voices, they underline the divergent meanings of regions and languages, while rupturing singular, linear histories. They seriously question ideas of neutrality, unbiases, and nonpartisan and objective truth in the teaching of history, without any sensitivity to questions of power. The intersections between gender and caste not only enrich each other’s histories but also can be a stepping stone to making education non- elitist in its orientation; to interrogating the normative, heterosexual, upper-caste, propertied, male perspective; and to reimagining a culture of pedagogy that is potentially democratic. Significantly, a study of caste also makes South Asia a central site of productive rereading, renewed energy, and affect-centered intellectualism.
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Confronting a Source of Contemporary Student Disengagement

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ABSTRACT

The author teaches undergraduate seminars on problems of justice arising historically from the freedom of expression clause of the US Constitution’s First Amendment. He began this instruction before the present fraught intellectual climate, with its ideological polarization and its claims, Left and Right, against the traditional arguments for tolerance for opinions different from one’s own. He has long favored confronting what Ken Bain, the author of What the Best College Teachers Do, has called “the big questions,” and in these seminars asks: is it possible for a democratic society to achieve simultaneously the desirable ends of justice and order? Recently he has taught students with strong responses to big questions. The campus is often characterized by vigorous expression of the progressive student consensus but quiescence on the part of the not inconsiderable number of conservative students and students less secure in their opinions. This seminar has maintained proactive conversations, with generally broad participation. In this article, he explains how, through structured discussions, simulations, and the study of judicial processes, historical lawsuits and court decisions have provided frameworks for classes that are explicitly less divisive and more productive of analytical thinking. The article concludes, however, with a discussion of an abiding problem within this generally successful model: the disengaged student whose opinions lie outside the abidingly liberal-progressive campus consensus and who seeks to avoid participation.
Confronting a Source of Contemporary Student Disengagement

David A. Gerber

Introduction

I want to address the organization and goals of an undergraduate-level seminar I have taught for many years. It features reading excerpts of historic US Supreme Court decisions, discussing these decisions, and having students plead the law suits that are the origin of the decisions in simulations of court hearings. I also want to discuss a nagging problem I have experienced regarding student engagement in this seminar, a problem I associate primarily with some young men in class. It is a problem that has grown more insistent in recent years, alongside the fraught, polarized public discourse in society and on campuses. I do not believe that this is necessarily a new issue, but rather the climate in which I am now teaching has sensitized me to greater awareness of it. Furthermore, preoccupied as I have been with identifying it, it is still a problem about which I have only tentative answers at this point.

By “engagement,” a term I’m going to be using, I do not mean “interest” or “involvement” or “participation.” Instead, I mean the obligation to go beyond having an opinion to having an intellectually and morally defensible process for reaching an opinion, and then, a further obligation, working with others involved in the same process toward moral and factual truths. Engagement of this sort requires something existential in students: it marshals not only intellect but also identity, experience, and personal psychological resources.

For that reason, in addressing the origin of my concerns, I’ll need to develop a more complicated demographic than the category “student,” because in addition to gender, I will address the social, cultural, and political backgrounds of my particular cohort of students. Eventually I will urge those interested in the sort of instruction I describe to embrace this complexity. I would add to that point that this demographic itself must be built on our understanding of the emotional and cognitive developmental course of adolescence.

I once believed that I had a formula in this seminar for addressing big questions that was successful, and with the encouragement of the editors of the American Historical Association’s magazine, Perspectives on History, in 2018 and 2019, I wrote enthusiastically about the model I was developing, from the perspective of both how it seemed to work to move students toward engagement and how it had served to reinvigorate my own work as a teacher. But on recent reflection, I am less certain about the former claim than I was four years ago. To be more specific about my doubts, I continue to find most of my students participating in the work of the seminar, but a significant minority seem reluctant to lend themselves to it. It’s that minority that has come to concern me.

So, consider these thoughts also, in part, as an inquiry into the problem of the alienated student and the students we don’t reach. Paradoxically, I am advancing simultaneously an instructional model that I continue to wish to pursue and a critique of my teaching that uses it. Since the model has been built on student participation, its problems may well be a matter of dealing in the classroom with viewpoint diversity among students, a persistent issue in a class like mine but also, apparently, in one form or another, on most campuses. A significant number of American
students complain about being “canceled,” because they do not feel inclined to join the liberal/progressive consensus that exists among undergraduates at most universities and colleges today. It seems self-evident that we need to examine our obligation to encourage these students to join our discussions and to provide space for them to present their views.

The Seminar and Its Big Questions

To return to my seminar: at the heart of the seminar is student participation, both, as usual in seminars, in group discussion and, beyond that, in simulations of Supreme Court hearings. The students in this seminar take the role of appellant, appellee, or the sitting justices of the court, who render a decision based on their vote. One of them plays the role of chief justice. The seminar has focused in alternate semesters on the religious liberty—religious establishment clause and the free expression clause of the First Amendment.

The Supreme Court decisions I have the students read are more or less historic cases, twenty or more years old. This is intentional: the point is to avoid the intense and polarizing, partisan controversies of the present moment and to have students focus on principles of justice and judicial practice as well the specific issues before the Court. This is hardly to say that the decisions chosen fail to relate to contemporary controversies, whether implicitly or more or less directly. Many of the issues, such as public-school prayer or public racist hate speech, are perennial, and their staying power links past and present. Older Court decisions also reflect on newer ones, because the Court’s usual concern for precedent in the pursuit of stabilizing constitutional doctrine and the law enables links between historical and contemporary decisions. Constitutional jurisprudence is built on precedent, and past decisions are the building blocks for contemporary decisions. Finally, the role of the Court in relation to the other branches of the federal government and to state and local governments abides as an issue no matter how old the decisions are that are reviewed. The centralization of power over daily life regarding freedom of expression and religious establishments and religious liberty that the Court has superintended in the last century in the name of protecting minorities and preventing government overreaching has worked its way into every sector of American life. Often this has taken place without the enthusiasm of local majorities, such as parents who want Christian prayer in their children’s public schools but have been blocked by strong Court decisions from achieving it. Local public opinion continues to be inflamed under such circumstances.

It is centering this seminar around abiding and difficult big questions, which ultimately in this case involve balancing social stability, minority and majority rights, and liberty (freedom from state interference), that Ken Bain, a longtime analyst of teaching practices in higher education, identifies as the key to successful instruction. In What the Best College Teachers Do, Bain argues that we best encourage student involvement and combat boredom, cynicism, and opportunistic grade mongering by dealing with “big questions.” The big questions also continue to engage instructors, not only as citizens and members of their own residential communities but also productively in their classrooms. Big questions can inspire lively and productive discussion, and ultimately their most important claim is the feeling we, as instructors, have in engaging them that, somehow, we are working toward creating foundations for living together in greater harmony. Long before I read Jonathan Zimmerman’s revealing historical analysis, pointedly titled
The Amateur Hour, of the paralysis that too often seems to befall classroom instruction in higher education, I had reached the conclusion that I needed to find a different path for my students’ sake as well as my own. I felt I was failing with the models for history teaching I had been following. Too often I found I was reduced to teaching facts and chronology in lecture courses and teaching critical reading skills in seminars. However necessary to students’ intellectual formation, decades of doing that pretty much deadened my energies as an instructor.

My Position as an Instructor

What are my own perspectives, philosophical grounding, and pedagogical goals as an instructor? We are, of course, not completely neutral parties in the classroom, and it is necessary to understand what we bring to the students, beyond our professional credentials and the authority that comes with our academic appointments. First, I endeavor to be a neutral party in partisan terms but aggressive with respect to values. This means, for example, that though, on specific public issues before the courts, I personally am a separationist regarding church-state relations and a qualified advocate of unlimited free expression (drawing a bright line at provoking violence, violent intimidation, and targeted racial, ethnic, religious, gender, and sexual vilification), I don’t let these positions routinely enter my classroom discourse. I post documents attesting generally to my positions on the issues before the Court and my own values at the start of the semester, but I try not to correct my students’ views based on my own position on these issues. If a student favors school prayer, for example, I do not contradict them because I do not favor it. I do throw questions their way, as I would throw questions to students against school prayer. This is just the sort of intuitive wisdom most of us bring to the classroom. It is founded on respect for disagreement and on the understanding ultimately that what might appear to be nagging, shaming, or condescending correction hardly makes for successful instruction or a conversation starter.

In my own case, the reasons are deeper still. I have traditionally liberal and libertarian foundations for my thinking about my goals in teaching. I do not have positivist aspirations (to implant correct ideas), nor do I have the desire to lay on culture and ideology. It’s embedding the processes of purposeful thinking, in part through exposure to a wide variety of opinions and ideas, that concern me as an instructor. That may be politics to some people’s minds, but it is not partisan politics that involves side-taking on hot button current issues. I want my students to become involved and find their own ways into thinking clearly, independently, and analytically in order to reach their own conclusions. What I attempt to do in the classroom is question relentlessly, put my own opinions out of the way, and work the seminar into a come-let-us-reason together mode at each meeting.

My basically Millian (John Stuart Mill) stance, which is a qualified endorsement of broad freedoms, even for malefactors, is not popular throughout academia today and is associated with privilege and insensitivity to those who believe themselves to suffer because of freedom of speech and expression of others. Many instructors at present are sensitive to buried insults, defamations, and microaggressions in our classroom discourse.

I do warn students at the start of each semester in a group letter sent to each of them via Blackboard that they are going to encounter disturbing ideas, rough language, and malign
individuals, all of which will trouble many of them, just as they trouble me. Overprotection, as opposed to sensitivity, however, is not a successful strategy for seeing adolescents into adulthood. I also do not believe that our students are as emotionally fragile as they are portrayed to be by those who want to curb campus speech freedoms. Their video games and popular movies are filled with lethal violence masked as entertainment, and most instructors do not hasten to urge censuring let alone banning these popular entertainments.

There is another axiom alongside my libertarian views on expression guiding my response to the seminar’s issues: laying on versions of what we deem to be politically right on some students does not have a lasting influence. It may, in fact, have the opposite influence on some of them. The more we insist that they think like us, as opposed to think for themselves, and that they accept adult authority at this stage of their emotional development, the more they will not only resist us but also may well veer to opposite conclusions in reaction.

This should be very troubling for us. The disaffected and reactive adolescent, who becomes isolated, becomes alienated, and ultimately seeks acceptance among those who specialize in influencing such minds can lead them to places, such as the racist and violence celebrating sites on the dark web, that are destructive for them and for society. It is comforting to think that it is only the uneducated adolescent who veers in that direction, as if somehow entering a college classroom insulates people from antisocial ideas. It is also not true, as the biographies of some recent mass shooters, who have been enrolled in college, can testify.5

Recent Concerns Emerging from Seminar Participation

In recent years as the polarization of politics and opinion has become acute and toxic, I have had a young male problem that I feel may be deeply rooted in our culture and politics. Our classrooms are not without an obligation to confront it. It may be rooted in race but not exclusively so. It is also rooted in religion, gender and sexuality, and nationalism. It is above all, I have come to suspect, looking at it broadly as it plays out in public discourse in and outside the university, a crisis of intellectual authority. Fairly or unfairly, established cultural elites in the mainstream media and in universities and colleges are distrusted, not so much for what most of us actually say but what we appear to represent: the imposition of ideas and standards of conduct through practices of shaming and expressions of contempt delivered in smart, smug analytical language. Of course, a majority of contemporary academics do not see themselves in such a light. It is for most of them not simply an unfair characterization but a false one. An example here and there of some professor who says something outrageously condescending to an undergraduate, who is just emerging from childhood, is hardly a common practice. But we need to be sensitive nonetheless to giving such signals, because the way we are perceived affects our effectiveness as teachers.

My own students have been very smart, as honors students, but it is smart in formal academic terms within their STEM disciplines. They are inexperienced in the contemporary world, and not only because they are adolescents in their first year at the university. Many come from small towns and small cities, rural areas, and suburbs of upstate New York, which are more or less religiously, racially, and ethnically homogeneous and deeply conservative. Except for its large

5. Patrick Wood Crusius, who was responsible for the mass shooting at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, in 2019, was a student at Collin College in McKinney, Texas, and Payton Gendron, who was responsible for a mass shooting at a supermarket in Buffalo, New York, in 2022, was a student at SUNY Broome Community College in Binghamton, New York, though his attendance was irregular. Both shooters were prompted by racial and ethnic hatred.
cities and most, but hardly all, of the New York City metropolitan area, New York is throughout a red state. Furthermore, most of my students are not from the socioeconomic elite. Many have working- and lower-middle-class origins and parents who are not uniformly college educated or white collar. Among them are families that struggle to maintain a middle-class standard of living and who bear some of the resentments that accompany insecurity and frustrated mobility. Honors students in our program may be elite in the educational opportunities they enjoy, but these students are certainly not elite or privileged in their origins.

They arrive on a campus that is spectacularly racially, ethnically, nationally, and sexually diverse in the manner of contemporary public higher educational institutions. Much of what they confront daily in their dorms, classrooms, and eating and study spaces on campus is a profound challenge to them. Many face this challenge successfully and expand their horizons and capacities to learn and grow through exposure to this diverse mini-world. There are, of course, students who in high school began to challenge the limitations of the cultural environment of their hometowns. For them, the campus is a long sought-after place of liberation.

But this emotional and cultural growth is uneven among students: in my experience, the most articulate and emotionally mature students in addressing the issues of freedom, order, and liberty in my seminar have been young women, whose maturity and poise often stand in marked contrast to the young men in class.6 A persistent minority of young men lag behind, whatever their intellectual abilities, and some of them seem resistant, though never approaching overtly hostile. It is in their body language and reluctance to speak, and then speaking tersely and unrevealingly when called upon. Their written work, as demonstrated in their notebooks of case summaries in which they are also supposed to record their personal opinions on Court decisions, tends toward the same unrevealing brevity. I attempt with mixed results to coax them to expand their thoughts especially on what they believe in these notebooks, which I examine during and at the end of the semester. These are honors students, too. They have a lot invested in getting a good grade and in gaining their instructors’ approval. Though I am a generous grader and largely insist only on evidence of involvement, especially class preparation evident in discussion and in this notebook I ask them to keep throughout the semester, as the basis for an A grade, concerns about grades never fade from their consciousness.

To what extent is it also that they do not feel free to say what they have on their minds and to resist the liberal/progressive consensus that exists on the campus and almost always in the classroom?7 When I speak of a liberal/progressive consensus on campus that seems intimidating for some students, especially these young men, I am not only talking about faculty, with its disciplinary and intellectual authority. Surveys reveal that students who complain about feeling intimidated in the classroom and on the campus where and when the “big issues” are discussed are actually likely to say they are more intimidated by their peers than by their professors.8

Of course, one can’t draw bright lines here because of the hardly implausible perception that instructors share the same values as this consensus among students. How an instructor reacts, no matter how subtly, to what is said by students in class discussions, does send messages. When an articulate eighteen-year-old speaks with inspiration, feeling, and knowledge and expresses your own opinion better perhaps than you might have been able to at that moment,

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6. The common impression that men are present in much greater numbers than women in STEM fields has been more accurate in the past than it may be at present and certainly in the future, at least in the program I have been teaching in. Persistent recent efforts by the University at Buffalo, I have been informed by Honors College staff and the university’s Office of Institutional Analysis, are being made to recruit young women into STEM fields. The last four years have seen dramatic increases in undergraduate women in the fields of environment and sustainability and public health, with a somewhat more modest increase in the field of medicine and biology. While the Honors College has made no specific efforts of its own to gather these women STEM students, this increase may be reflected in my own enrollments. From 2015 through 2020, ninety-seven males (76 percent) and thirty females (24 percent) enrolled in my seminar, but the figures changed markedly, to twenty-six males (59 percent) and eighteen females (41 percent), in toto, for 2020 and 2021. As it is, the Honors College itself has a majority female enrollment: 62 percent of its students are women. (Tim Matthews [Honors College, University at Buffalo], email message to author, January 12, 2023, and Michelle Sedor [Office of Institutional Analysis, University at Buffalo], email message to Tim Matthews, January 11, 2023.) Of course, one must be cautious in finding a direct relationship in these data to enrollment of males and females in individual courses. As we are all aware, in play in determining individual course enrollment are situational factors (day, time, and building location); subject matter; and expectations about the amount of required participation, reading, and writing. What the data do make clear is that the growing presence of women STEM students is overdetermined by institutional and programmatic policies and developments.

7. In its 2022–23 academic year
it is difficult to mask your approval. But it is clear that some students also have worries about social acceptance when they feel their views are outside the boundaries of what the most articulate and the most passionate among them contend.

As these complex tensions work themselves out from session to session and semester to semester, how do we come to make sense of them? Course evaluations done formally at the end of the semester might be one path to doing so. But there are problems with the course evaluation process from this perspective. The internet-based evaluation process is closely guarded against the interference of instructors, and there is usually one month to do the five-to-ten-minute evaluation. But the response to this voluntary activity is never 100 percent in spite of persistent university efforts, including at times randomly dispensing gift cards and prizes for participating. What I suspect is that the most alienated students are the ones who do not participate, though I am not in a position to determine who fails to fill out these evaluation forms and what their reasons may be. The response rate lingers usually around 50 to 75 percent in my course in spite of my persistent efforts—breaking my self-discipline about nagging—to encourage the students to do the course evaluation.

In general, in class discussions and in the course evaluation process, what we have here is, and is more than, the usual problem of soliciting student opinion and encouraging participation. To that extent, I believe it is a deeper cultural and psychological issue of the present moment that requires candor, thoughtfulness, and open discussion. The arguments in behalf of the importance of facilitating viewpoint diversity and the methods of evoking broad-scale classroom participation are well known enough not to need repetition here. What hinges on the success of that project is more than making our courses work. It is instead at the most general level making democracy work, for the practice of democracy depends on people of contrasting views being able to participate in a civil conversation, work toward some mutual understanding, and then embark on collective efforts to govern themselves. Until an alternative is found to democracy that has more to recommend it than the disastrous failures that played havoc with untold human lives in the twentieth century, liberal democracy seems the best we can do to work, however painfully and unevenly, toward justice and stability.

But that doesn’t help us much to know how to reach all of our students. It states instead why, under circumstances in courses like the one I have described, it is worth the effort. Beyond doubling down more deliberately and with greater sensitivity in the methods I already employ at present in the classroom, I have no practical solution to the problems I have identified. But I offer two questions by way of a start to become more effective in dealing with students who are alienated, not because they are bored or indifferent to being educated but instead because the cost of involvement seems at some level to compromise their values, identity, and social standing. Who are the students we teach, and what social and cultural elements go into making the collectivity that forms our classrooms? We need to begin at the most fundamental level of understanding the category of “student” and realizing the complex demographic that goes into the social selection of the student bodies we teach, especially at large public institutions like mine. On that basis, we may be able to start building a pedagogy that has classroom vitality, because it is truly inclusive.
AUTHOR BIO

David A. Gerber is professor emeritus of history at the University at Buffalo (SUNY) and a senior fellow in history and disability studies at the University at Buffalo. Within American history, his research and publications have been on race, immigration and ethnicity, disability, veterans of military conflict, and First Amendment law. With Bruce Dierenfield, he is the author of Disability Rights and Religious Liberty in Education: The Story behind Zobrest v. Catalina Foothills School District (2020), a CHOICE Outstanding Academic Title. Currently his research is on American general officers who were prisoners of war in the Asia-Pacific during World War II and the utility of the concept of "moral injury" for understanding their reactions to captivity. His articles on instructional practices and curriculum in higher education have appeared in The History Teacher, Teaching History, and the American Historical Association's Perspectives on History.

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ABSTRACT

How should “hard history” be confronted to understand the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II? This article shares a way of teaching this topic that not only confronts directly the real experiences of Japanese Americans in concentration camps but also humanizes the story. Encouraging students to learn the history experientially, the author uses two different sets of historical primary sources, offering both an “outsider” and “insider” perspective. First, the author explains that he focuses on the biographies and objectives of different photographers who took photos at Manzanar, highlighting how this context helps illuminate students’ perceptions and understanding of these photographs, revealing a larger story about the experience of Japanese Americans. Second, he describes how he incorporates the diary of Stanley Hayami, a Japanese American teenage interned at Heart Mountain who used his diary to retain agency within an oppressive system. Through an analysis of the diary with students, the author demonstrates how this diary captures the complexity of the Japanese American experience in American concentration camps.
Hard History: Teaching the Japanese American Experience in American Concentration Camps

Daniel P. Kotzin

Fresno Pacific University offers an entire online course titled Japanese Internment Camps: Pearl Harbor - Post Release. Consisting of six modules, in this "self-paced" online course, students have up to one year to complete the course requirements to receive three college credits. In a course such as this, we would expect that students will come away with a thorough understanding of what is a very difficult and complex subject matter. Most students, however, will not have the opportunity to learn about the internment of Japanese Americans in this fashion. In middle school and high school, although generally part of the curriculum in many states for required American history courses, teachers may spend at most a few days on the topic. Many may spend just one day. Some may not discuss it at all. At the collegiate level, the topic could be included in courses on twentieth-century America, American immigration history, the history of Asian Americans, and the history of World War II, to give just a few examples. Instructors may dedicate one class session, or a few class sessions, to the topic. But how can they address this important and complex topic in such a limited amount of time, especially when there is so much complexity, and so much rich material, that an entire course could focus on it?

This question becomes even more pertinent when considering scholar of religion Richard Hughes's editorial published in the Los Angeles Times in 2021. When teaching a college course for first-year students in an honors program, Hughes asked the students what they knew about the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. Their response shocked him. They knew nothing. Hughes uses this personal example for his argument, that part of the problem with the racial divisions in our country is that Americans do not know their own history. While no doubt there are many historical topics students learn in high school but do not remember learning, Hughes's article speaks to what it means if the history students learn does not have any long-term impact. Specifically, Hughes's argument reveals that although public schools across the country technically include the internment of Japanese Americans in their curriculum, even high-caliber students are arriving in college with little or no memory of learning about the subject and certainly lack an understanding of it that can inform them about decisions they will make as adults.

The internment of Japanese Americans during World War II is a historical subject that we may describe as “hard history” because it does not fit into any popular grand narrative of the United States becoming more democratic over time. Nor does it fit into stories about America during World War II that is popularly known as the "Greatest Generation." The term “hard history” was used in a 2018 report produced by the Southern Poverty Law Center about the teaching of American slavery in schools throughout the United States. Titled Teaching Hard History: American Slavery, the report highlighted how educators were avoiding the topic of slavery or minimizing it in classrooms because it is so difficult to talk about. Historian Hasan Kwame Jeffries, who chaired the Teaching Hard History Advisory Board, emphasized in the preface that while the “hard history” of slavery makes people “uncomfortable” because of the “implications it raises about the past as well as the present,” by not confronting this history, we as a society...
are minimizing the impact of slavery. Most profoundly, this has implications for public policy that ignores “racialized systems.” Central for Jeffries, and those behind the report, is that an understanding of slavery’s history helps us understand inequities that exist today.4

Hughes’s article suggests that slavery is not the only topic in US history not being taught in America’s schools: the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II is also “hard history” that American students are not learning by the time they graduate from high school. Acknowledging that this subject is complex and difficult to teach, and that teachers face time constrictions, what can high school teachers do to ensure that when students graduate from high school they understand the experience of Japanese Americans during World War II? What can college professors do when they teach about the internment of Japanese Americans, knowing the limitations in their students’ education that Hughes identifies?

With these questions in mind, I offer an approach to teaching the history of the Japanese internment during World War II that can be completed in one or two class sessions, addresses the complexity of the subject, and is designed to have a lasting impact on students. The pedagogy is in the form of an “active lecture,” one that is highly interactive with students.5 While what is presented here is intended for those with time constrictions, it can also provide the foundation for more in-depth lesson plans over multiple class sessions.

To begin with, in my courses, I have given my unit on the subject of the internment of Japanese Americans an intentionally provocative title: “The American Concentration Camps.” For many students, the term “concentration camps” is a reference to the Holocaust and is not something they associate with the United States. In this way, the title opens up a space to have a discussion about language: specifically, why we are using the term “American concentration camps” instead of “Japanese internment.” I explain to students that the term was used in a 1998 joint statement by the Japanese American National Museum and the American Jewish Committee. Both organizations agreed the term was appropriate because of their definition of a “concentration camp,” which I share with students: “a place where people are imprisoned not because of any crimes they have committed, but simply because of who they are.”6 I stress to students how important it is to understand why we will use the term “American concentration camps” in the course, that the word “American” is used because it happened here in America, and it happened to Americans. If we call the topic “Japanese internment camps,” then the assumption is that this experience happened to someone else, to a group who was not American.

Using the term “American concentration camps” also enables me to provide a framework for challenging students’ conceptions of the Japanese American experience during World War II. The work of Ken Bain, president of the Best Teachers Institute, has particularly influenced me in this regard. New frameworks, he demonstrates, enable teachers to “transform” students’ “conceptual understanding” of the topic they are learning about. Students learn when their own ideas on a subject are challenged and are simultaneously provided with a new model for understanding it.7 In my approach, the concept “American concentration camp” frames the lesson and is weaved in consistently throughout the lesson to reinforce the concept.

After making introductory remarks, my “active lecture” focuses on a series of primary sources
that include a cartoon, photographs of the camps and the people who lived in them, and the full texts of diary entries from a high school student who lived in one of the camps. These primary sources are meant to create a connection to the past for students, to help students imagine the experience Japanese Americans had living in concentration camps. Research has shown that engaging students with primary sources helps in the development of history cognition. These primary sources are also intended to create historical empathy. Visual images, especially those that illicit an emotional response, have also been shown to be effective in terms of learning and remembering historical material.

After explaining my use of "American concentration camps," I display Ansel Adams’s 1943 photograph "Baseball Game at Manzanar." I purposely display the photograph with no title and no attribution. My intention is to establish what may at first appear to be a visual contrast to the term "concentration camp." I ask students what they see as they examine the photograph. In the context of our discussion of the term "American concentration camps," most find the photograph quite jarring. They see men playing baseball. They are not sure what to make of it. I suggest to students that a photograph such as this could be seen as a snapshot into history—that it could be seen as "something whole, something that speaks for itself”—and could be seen as “presenting the truth” of a historical moment.”

But does it?” I ask. I prompt students to consider whether this particular photograph supports or contradicts the term "concentration camp." Students generally reply quite quickly that it contradicts the term. I explain that without any context, it is very easy to see how the photograph contradicts our use of the term "concentration camp." My goal is to show the importance of contextualizing primary sources; when we do so, we begin to do the work of historians and get a deeper understanding of history. And when we contextualize the photograph "Baseball Game at Manzanar," we will see it as actually supporting the concept "American concentration camp." This last point is crucial. My objectives are for students to understand the Japanese American experience in concentration camps and to learn the importance of contextualizing primary sources.

Figure 1: Ansel Adams, "Baseball Game, Manzanar Relocation Center, Calif." Courtesy of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Ansel Adams Manzanar War Relocation Center Photographs.
Students do need to have some background for the Japanese American experience prior to World War II. Prior to the first class session on the topic, students are expected to explore on their own the online digital source Densho (www.densho.org), which provides an excellent overview of the Japanese American experience prior to and during World War II. To ensure students understand the historical context, I review the push and pull factors that brought Japanese immigrants to the United States, the segregation they faced in cities like Seattle, and the legal barriers they experienced, particularly with the 1913 California Alien Land Act and the 1924 Immigration Act. Despite their challenges, many Japanese Americans were able to thrive in the United States.

It is essential to explain to students the distinction between the Japanese term Issei, which refers to Japanese immigrants, and Nissei, which refers to people of Japanese ancestry born in the United States. Since Nissei were born in the United States, because of the Fourteenth Amendment, they were US citizens at birth. In contrast, Issei could never become American citizens because of a 1790 immigration law that declared, to qualify for citizenship, immigrants had to be white. It was only after World War II that this law was changed. I emphasize to students that both Issei and Nissei were forced into American concentration camps, and thus American citizens (Nissei), as well as legal immigrants (Issei), were in camps.\footnote{In addition to the Densho website, for good introductory background information on Japanese Americans prior to World War II, see Roger Daniels, \textit{Prisoners without Trial: Japanese Americans in World War II} (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004).}

With this context in mind, to understand the dire consequences the attack on Pearl Harbor had on Japanese Americans, I display a cartoon titled "Waiting for the Signal from Home" that was published in the national magazine \textit{PM}, February 13, 1942. The cartoon includes a house full of TNT with a sign "Honorable Fifth Column" and a figure out front handing out TNT to a long line of men with caricature faces of people of Asian descent. After asking students to describe what they see, I ask them to convey what they think the message of the cartoon might be. Students begin to understand that the cartoonist made no distinction between the Issei and the Nissei, that all Japanese living in the United States were being portrayed as enemies. Then I ask students if they can identify the cartoonist. It takes some effort when projected onto a screen, but eventually they discover at the bottom the signature of Dr. Seuss. This provides an opportunity to discuss with students what it means that this iconic children’s author created a piece of anti-Japanese propaganda. I also discuss with students how the anti-Japanese attitude among many living in the western United States was a central reason that President Franklin D. Roosevelt decided in February 1942 to issue Executive Order 9066 that dictated that Japanese Americans be placed in concentration camps.

\footnote{12. Sam Wineburg has emphasized the importance of the skill of contextualizing primary sources and the challenges for students to learn. See Sam Wineburg, \textit{Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past} (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001).}

\footnote{13. In addition to the Densho website, for good introductory background information on Japanese Americans prior to World War II, see Roger Daniels, \textit{Prisoners without Trial: Japanese Americans in World War II} (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004).}
To help students understand what it was like to arrive at one of these camps, I present Sally Deng’s drawing that appeared with George Takei’s 2017 *New York Times* opinion piece titled “Internment: America’s Great Mistake.” In the drawing, the viewer sees only the backs of a family carrying suitcases, who face two guards with guns, three barracks, and mountains. The scene is bleak. I ask students to consider what the family might be thinking in that moment. My goal is to spark their historical imagination and move beyond the numbers I share with them: more than 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry were placed in camps. Through this drawing, and their own imagination, I want students to consider what it meant, what it felt like, for every family the moment they arrived.

I then pose two central questions to students: How did Japanese Americans experience concentration camps? How should we confront our “hard history” to understand the incarceration of Japanese Americans? These central questions, I explain, will serve as guiding questions for the remainder of our unit.

At this point, I display again Adams’s 1943 photograph “Baseball Game at Manzanar,” only this time I include the title and attribution. I give background information on Adams, explaining that he was a famous environmental photographer at the time who was personally distressed when he learned about Japanese Americans being placed in concentration camps. He requested permission to visit one of the camps, Manzanar, for the purpose of photographing the camp. His request was approved on the condition that he not take photographs of barbed wires or guard towers. The photos were exhibited in 1944 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and published that same year in a book titled *Born Free and Equal: The Story of Loyal Japanese Americans.* This context provides an opportunity to analyze the photograph from a different perspective. Students now examine the photograph again and are asked to explain how it fits into a narrative suggested by Adams’s book title. Adams’s purpose, as his book title indicates, was to
portray the Japanese at Manzanar as Americans and as strong people. What happens when we look at the photograph through the lens of Adams’s book title? The historical context, along with the photographer’s purpose, enables students to view the photograph differently. As we continue to discuss the photograph, students begin to see that Adams was trying to show that the people living in these concentration camps were “American.” These types of moments, I have found, light a fire for students, a fire that produces sustaining energy for the remainder of the class session.

I introduce students to another well-known photographer who took photographs at Manzanar, Dorothea Lange. She gained national attention during the Great Depression as a documentary photographer when she took photographs around California. Federal government agencies hired her to visually document struggling farmers and the unemployed with the goal of raising awareness to the plight of those hit hardest by the spiraling economy. During World War II, the War Relocation Authority assigned Lange to document life at Manzanar—even though she opposed the internment policy being operated by the US government. It is important to explain to students that Lange’s objectives were different from Adams; she wanted to capture the misery of the experience to create outrage. Unfortunately, the government refused to publish or exhibit her photos. It was not until 1972 that the California Historical Society exhibited Lange’s photographs of Manzanar. I display a photograph titled “A Japanese Woman in the Door of Her Living Quarters.” In the photograph, we see a Japanese woman, looking forlorn, standing in front a simple wooden structure with the door open, and broken wood panels under her feet. After asking students to describe what they see, I ask them to consider what this photograph reveals about life in concentration camps for Japanese Americans. We move from seeing the internees at Manzanar as “American” to examine the misery of the conditions they lived in. The goal here is to visually illustrate that while the photographs of Adams and Lange offer different perspectives of Manzanar, they complement each other to tell a larger story: Americans were forced by their government into miserable conditions.

Figure 3: Dorthea Lange, “A Japanese woman in the door of her living quarters in San Bruno, Calif.” Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
Finally, I offer students another perspective using photography when I introduce students to Toyo Miyatake, a Japanese American photographer who was interned at Manzanar. Miyatake was a professional photographer who had a studio in Little Tokyo in Los Angeles. Part of the pictorialist movement that focused on tonality and composition, he was an award-winning photographer before being forcibly relocated to Manzanar. Dedicated to his craft and determined to document the camp experience, Miyatake smuggled in a lens, film plate, and film. Once inside Manzanar, he asked a carpenter to build a box for him to hold the lens. Initially, he secretly took photographs, but over time he gained permission. Significantly, the permission was conditional; so as not to go against camp rules, a white person had to actually snap the photograph. Meanwhile, he befriended Adams when he visited Manzanar, and the two men later, in 1978, published a book of photographs titled *Two Views of Manzanar*. Miyatake’s photographs are extremely important because they offer an insider’s view of Manzanar, from an actual internee.

As a class, we focus closely on Miyatake’s photograph titled “Boys behind Barbed Wire.” The photograph is of Miyatake’s son and two of his son’s friends looking longingly from behind the barbed wire of the Manzanar camp. Students immediately notice that despite the rules that were given to Adams, the barbed wire sits directly in front of the boys, and a guard station looms ominously to the right of the boys, with beautiful snow-capped mountains behind them, conveying an interesting juxtaposition. The barbed wire and guard towers are indicators of a rebelliousness in Miyatake’s photographs. He is portraying children looking out, wanting to be somewhere else. The boys look sad, like the woman in Lange’s photograph, but they have hope for another world. But the barbed wire and the guard tower are symbolic and physical reminders that the three children are trapped in this concentration camp.

Figure 4: Toto Miyatake, “Boys Behind Barbed Wire,” 1944. Courtesy of Miyatake Family Studios.

By emphasizing the context of these three photographs, the background of the photographers and their objectives in taking these photos, my goal is for students to see these photographs not as pure snapshots of moments in time but instead as artistic presentations of Manzanar meant to provoke thoughts in the viewers about the experience of Japanese Americans in concentration camps. Viewed through these contexts, I ask students to write for a few minutes about how they would characterize the Japanese American experience during World War II based on these photographs. "Do the photographs support or contradict the term 'American concentration camp'?"

The discussion about what the three photographs evoke provides a space to transition to the second phase of the unit, where we focus on handouts of specific diary entries from Stanley Hayami, who was interned at Heart Mountain in Wyoming. Hayami was a high school student when his family was forcibly interned at Heart Mountain. Prior to internment, the family owned a nursery in Los Angeles and had integrated fairly well into American culture. Hayami was an aspiring artist, and his diary is laced with drawings of his life at Heart Mountain. To contextualize Hayami's diary, I explain that in the first half of the twentieth century many middle-class American boys and young men kept diaries, primarily for two reasons, as a form of self-discipline and as a method for reconciling societal demands with their individual needs.

For this part of the class session, I divide students into small groups and hand out two of Hayami's diary entries, one from December 8, 1942 (the day after the anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor), and the other a few days later on December 13, 1942, when Hayami recounts listening to the USC versus UCLA football game. In the December 8 entry, Hayami describes his experience feeling enormously uncomfortable at school on that fateful day. In contrast, in his December 13 entry, Hayami recounts listening with excitement on the radio as UCLA defeated USC. Included in this diary entry are drawings that depict his responses at different points to listening to the game on the radio. Students are prompted to consider what these two diary entries reveal about how Japanese Americans experienced concentration camps.

Today was a very exciting day. I had so much to do and it was hard to fit everything in. I felt very busy and I think I was doing a good job of keeping up with everything. The rest of the day was good, I had a lot of fun and I think I was doing a good job of keeping up with everything.

Figure 5: Hiyami’s diary entry from December 8, 1942. Courtesy of Japanese American National Museum (Gift from the Estate of Frank Naoichi and Asano Hayami, parents of Stanley Kunio Hayami, 95.226.1)

Today I worked on my homework. I had a lot of fun and I think I was doing a good job of keeping up with everything. I got home and had dinner, and then I took a walk.

Figure 6: Hiyami’s diary entry from December 12, 1942. Courtesy of Japanese American National Museum (Gift from the Estate of Frank Naoichi and Asano Hayami, parents of Stanley Kunio Hayami, 95.226.1)
The challenge, as students quickly discover, is that neither diary entry describes Hayami’s life in the camp. With some prodding, students realize that he used his diary to describe things outside the camp, his own memories, and a football game he was prevented from attending because of his internment. Some students interpret Hayami’s excitement about the football game as a demonstration that he was generally happy and just living a normal teenage life. Here it is important to affirm that, yes, his documented excitement demonstrates that he does want to live a regular life of a teenage boy. At the same time, it is important to challenge students to think hard about what Hayami is experiencing as he writes in his diary, “Where is he? Can he go to the game?”

Some students will still want to see Hayami as living a happy life as a teenage boy. And to some extent the entry about the football game supports that. But contextualizing the diary entry, in relation to both his December 8 entry and the location where he is writing the diary, can provoke an array of thoughts. At this point, I ask students to take a minute and try to reconcile the two entries in writing. “How is Stanley [Hayami] experiencing life at Heart Mountain, as he both remembers what he experienced when Pearl Harbor occurred, and a few days later listens with joy to the USC-UCLA football game?”

Students generally still struggle a bit to understand how Hayami is experiencing Heart Mountain, since the two diary entries do not speak to his actual experiences there. I remind students that in addition to making numerous diary entries, Hayami also used his diary to create drawings, drawings that provide further insight into how he experienced Heart Mountain. These drawings help situate students in Hayami’s place.

Over the period of the next several minutes, I display three of Hayami’s drawings, creating space for conversations about each one of them. The first drawing is divided into three sections. At the top is a ranch house and written above it is “My house, 1931–1942.” In the middle of the page is barrack housing with a small section divided off from the rest, with writing on the roof “P-2-B” and an arrow pointing to it with the statement “My house, 1942–43.” At the bottom of the page is a huge question mark and written above it is “My house 1943–.” After letting students examine the drawing for a minute or so, I ask them the same question I just asked: “How is Stanley [Hayami] experiencing life at Heart Mountain?” We talk about what he is conveying by drawing his family’s house and the barracks at Heart Mountain on the same sheet of paper; the juxtaposition is interesting. But I also ask students what they make of the question mark. The uncertainty Hayami is expressing becomes clear.
Figure 7: Hiyami’s drawings of his past, present, and uncertain future homes. Courtesy of Japanese American National Museum (Gift from the Estate of Frank Naoichi and Asano Hayami, parents of Stanley Kunio Hayami, 95.226.1)

Figure 8: A sketch from Hiyami’s diary, titled “Reminiscing.” Courtesy of Japanese American National Museum (Gift from the Estate of Frank Naoichi and Asano Hayami, parents of Stanley Kunio Hayami, 95.226.1)
The next drawing I show students is titled “Reminiscing,” and on the top half of the page is a ranch house surrounded by trees. In contrast, the bottom half of the page displays barracks in a barren landscape, with barbed wire in the foreground. The similarity with the previous drawing is immediately evident. I ask students to think why in his diary Hayami is repeating this theme of contrasting barracks with his family home. Then we discuss the title. I encourage students to think about what it means if his experience at Heart Mountain is about “reminiscing.”

Finally, the last drawing, labeled March 5, 1943, is titled “NIGHT – HEART MOUNTAIN- Wyo.” A row of barracks is drawn in the center, with a chimney sticking up from one of the barracks. A mountain and darkness loom in the background. The drawing is extremely evocative in how it casts a menacing atmosphere around the barracks. But the title also inevitably causes some students to make connections to Elie Wiesel’s famous memoir Night, originally published in 1956, about his experiences during the Holocaust. Here we come back to the terminology of calling “Heart Mountain” a “concentration camp.” “When we look at this drawing,” I ask students, “how is Stanley [Hayami] experiencing Heart Mountain?”

Alongside “NIGHT – HEART MOUNTAIN- Wyo,” I then display again Adams’s photograph “Baseball Game at Manzanar.” My intention here is to bring things full circle, to connect Hayami’s drawing to the photograph we started with. I want students to look at the photograph through the perspective of Hayami’s drawings. How do they see it differently? The key point here is for students to begin to come to understand how both Hayami’s drawing and Adams’s photograph depict historical truths: Hayami’s drawing depicts the real experience of living in an American concentration camp and Adams’s photograph presents an outsider’s depiction of Americans living inside concentration camps.

![Figure 9: A drawing of Heart Mountain from Hayami’s diary. Courtesy of Japanese American National Museum (Gift from the Estate of Frank Naoichi and Asano Hayami, parents of Stanley Kunio Hayami, 95.226.1)](image)

While most of our class discussion centers on understanding how the primary sources shared in class help us understand Japanese American experiences in concentration camps, I conclude by returning to the other central question: how should we confront our “hard history” to understand the incarceration of Japanese Americans? I use my question as a prompt for students to write a
longer reflection about what they learned from all the primary sources we examined, within the framework of the term “American concentration camps.” This reflection assignment provides an opportunity for students to demonstrate their understanding of how racism shapes policy and the effects those policies have on the lives of Americans. Students can identify easily with Hayami, as a high school student, an aspiring artist, and a sports fan. In so many ways, he was a “typical” teenager. What they are asked to do in their final reflection is confront the “hard history” that Hayami was forced to experience. And while American concentration camps were built eighty years ago, students also have the opportunity to consider how the experiences Japanese Americans had during World War II reverberate today in terms of the continued racism Asian Americans at large are experiencing.
When Students Rewrite History: A Twistory Project for Schools, Museums, and Archives

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KEYWORDS
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ABSTRACT

Twistory (twitter + history) projects encourage creativity and critical thinking by allowing students to research topics they are interested in and turning them into digital timelines. This article describes a twistory project that was created as a collaborative project between a Swiss public secondary school, a museum, and an archive. The project tries to make history come alive for students by turning them into historians, allowing them to research museum objects or archival documents and writing historical narratives about them. Their findings are uploaded in chronological order onto social media with corresponding blogs on the school’s website, resulting in a digital timeline that consists of historical narratives of museum objects and archival records written by students. The article explains how the project works; how the collaboration between the school, museum, and archive developed; and how each institution benefits from such a project. Twistory projects are exciting new ways for museums to engage with students and participate in digitized culture. They also turn students into storytellers and history detectives. They learn how museums and archives work and how to deal with primary sources, do research, write academic papers, and present their work to a public audience. Furthermore, students realize that “history” is not a definitive story that has already been written but that there is an infinite number of fascinating “histories”—depending on the sources considered and the questions asked.
When Students Rewrite History: A Twistory Project for Schools, Museums, and Archives
Ariane Knüsel

Introduction

In 2020, I created a twistory project for Kantonsschule Baden in Switzerland, a public secondary school for sixteen-to-twenty-year-old students who have graduated from (mandatory) high school and plan to attend university. The twistory project is a collaborative project between a school, a museum, and an archive that tries to make history come alive for students by getting them actively involved in research and letting them create historical narratives posted on social media. In the project, students aged sixteen to eighteen write local history by analyzing sources that they choose from more than 1,300 museum objects and archival records. From instructions on how to fight cholera, documents about a scrapped golf course project, and debates about the necessity of a daycare, to a plug, a shot glass, a spray-painted locker from a youth club, and a crocheted bikini, students can choose sources as they please and explore what they tell us about society and life in the city of Baden. At the moment, the project is taught only at Kantonsschule Baden by history, geography, and economics teachers as part of the project work syllabus, but we are planning on sharing the project with other schools in the next few years.

Digital transformation has affected society and teaching in numerous ways. Studies tout the pedagogical benefits of social media in the classroom, and students use cellphones, laptops, or tablets during their lessons. Social media skills are sometimes part of syllabi, and social media is used to create historical narratives, or, as public relations expert Cayce Myers and communication specialist James F. Hamilton put it, social media has become its own historical genre. There is a huge variety of history projects that involve social media. They are often referred to as “twistory” projects (a combination of “Twitter” and “history”). Using Twitter, TikTok, Instagram, or Facebook, these interactive projects can be classified as public history projects that aim to generate public interest in certain historical topics. In the twistory project on the history of Baden, the main goal is not to get as much public attention (or Instagram followers) as possible but to have students learn how to work with sources and write papers.

In my project groups of students choose a museum object and/or an archival record and write papers about their sources (e.g., how was the source probably used by people in Baden, and what does it tell us about that particular time in Baden?). Students then condense their papers into Instagram posts (see figure 1), which are published in chronological order. Pictures of the sources and corresponding blog texts (see figure 2) are uploaded onto the school’s website where they create a virtual timeline on the history of Baden written by students. Students also present the objects/records they analyzed and their findings to the public at a museum event. Finally, each year, one group gets to publish a revised version of their paper in the local history magazine, Badener Neujahrsblätter. From the 2022 twistory run, the editors selected the paper of two students who analyzed sources from the Baden Municipal Archive on cholera epidemics in the late nineteenth century.


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Figure 1: Example of an Instagram post about a beer bottle from a local brewery from 1923 (kantibaden, Instagram, June 24, 2022, https://www.instagram.com/p/CfMW9GSNAWj/?hl=de).

Figure 2: Example of a blog about a velocipede from 1864 ("Fahrrad (1864)," Twistory-Projekt der Kantonsschule Baden (blog), https://www.kanti-baden.ch/twistory/).
The following pages first present the project’s learning objectives before discussing its value as a collaborative project with a local museum and archive. I argue that projects like ours offer a unique opportunity for museums and archives to engage with schools and the public. By now, the project has been running for two years. The final parts of this text describe some of the challenges we have encountered and our solutions to those issues. I also suggest possible adaptations for similar collaborative projects in other countries like the United States.

Learning Objectives

The project’s first learning objective is to awaken students’ interest in history and encourage them to be creative; history should come alive for them. The project’s current database contains over 1,300 digitized objects and documents on Baden’s history from the fifteenth to the twenty-first century, with a focus on tourism/spas, industrialization, everyday life, and gender. Allowing students to select their own sources increases motivation, creativity, and interest in the sources, but it also poses a huge challenge for some students who feel overwhelmed by the options. To assist them, there is a list of museum objects with the respective inventory number, description, date, information about the owner (if available), appearance, and keywords for each object. Students also have access to a folder with picture files of all objects. For the archival records, there is a list with the archival signature, dossier title, document title, date, author(s), text type, information on the content, and keywords. Students receive the keyword list separately so they can filter the sources according to keywords. Groups can also choose additional museum
objects and/or archival records.

Once they have chosen a primary source, students formulate research questions that involve Baden and their source. Allowing them to choose their paper’s focus often results in creative perspectives. For example, one group selected a bed pan dating back to the first half of the twentieth century and researched how bed pans were used to treat Spanish flu patients in Baden. Another group chose a gas mask from 1989 and wrote their paper on how the Chernobyl reactor disaster affected the people of Baden in terms of fears and anxieties, health, and agricultural consequences, which led to a demand for gas masks.

The project’s second learning objective is for students to learn how to work like historians. They should be able to deal with literature correctly (i.e., finding literature, deciding whether or not it is trustworthy/based on proper scholarship, reading literature and taking notes, and using and formatting footnotes and bibliographical entries) and to learn how to write papers (i.e., formulating a thesis question, structuring the paper, and using proper style and argumentation to help the reader along). At the moment, the project is taught by history, geography, and economics teachers at our school as part of the project work syllabus. Since not all teachers have the same training and background, I have developed PowerPoint presentations with and without commentary, a detailed bibliography of relevant literature (so they can check if students include the most important publications), and also guidelines and checklists for the students.

The project’s third learning objective is for students to handle museum objects and archival records properly. Students are coached on how museums and archives work (How do archives differ from museums? Which sources are stored, where, and how? Who has access to the collections?). They also learn how to work with museum objects and archival records (How should archival records and museum objects be handled? What information can museum objects/archival records provide? How representative are such sources? How can such sources be recontextualized? How should primary sources and literature be used in a paper?).

The project’s fourth learning objective is for students to understand that “history” is not a definitive story that has already been written but that there is an infinite number of fascinating “stories” and “histories”—depending on the sources we consider and the questions we ask. Since the students (re)write “history,” they are more likely to understand that a textbook does not tell “the whole story” on a topic. The potential of twistory projects for the perception of history as a narrative construct has already been highlighted in a study by professor of didactics of history Hannes Burkhardt. In our twistory project, many of our “twistorians” become detectives who discover exciting—and sometimes surprising—information about the past.

Collaborating with a Museum and an Archive

The Swiss city of Baden has a population of only about twenty thousand, but it has a rich history due to its hot springs, which were popular with Roman legions. In the Middle Ages, Baden was a thriving market city, and from 1426 to 1712, it functioned as the seat of the Swiss Confederacy’s federal diet. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, industrialization and tourism transformed the city yet again. This history is reflected in the collections of the Historical Museum Baden and the Baden Municipal Archive. The museum, housing over twelve thousand inventoried
objects, specializes in collecting everyday objects as well as artifacts from Baden’s industrial history. About one-third of these have already been digitally indexed. The archive, in turn, has one thousand linear meters of records and seven hundred thousand digital objects, of which thirty thousand image files are online.11

While I created the twistory project for Kantonsschule Baden, the museum and archive profit from the project as well. Museums have to adapt to digitalization if they want to remain relevant.12 The COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, has forced museums to engage with students in different ways.13 Digitization is an essential part in such a transformation. Education specialist Sara Clarke-Vivier, instructional technologist Raven Bishop, and anthropologist Julie Markin point out that “foregoing digitization represents missed opportunities to create access to the museum’s tangible and intangible collections, and may also mean missed educational-outreach opportunities.”14 Our twistory project allows the museum to access and participate in the increasingly digitized historical culture and the production of digital historical narratives. Moreover, the mentioning of museum objects in our school’s Instagram account and on the school’s home page extends the museum’s reach and access to online communities. People who read these texts and see the images may be encouraged to engage directly with the museum online or even visit it in person.

Ethnologist Hans Peter Hahn has described museums as products of modernity that are actively involved in temporal change and are themselves subject to constant change. According to Hahn, museums can become laboratories for the production of new knowledge and innovative perspectives.15 Twistory projects like ours offer museums an opportunity to turn into or become part of such a digital laboratory. In our case, Heidi Pechlaner Gut, who is in charge of the museum’s education and outreach, gives workshops to our students in which she familiarizes them with the museum and its collection; some of the issues surrounding exhibitions; and research, analysis, and interpretation of museum objects. Groups who end up working with museum objects can also contact her to discuss research questions. In addition, the museum’s collection staff suggest certain objects for the project that have a sparse or missing provenance. So far, students have analyzed two of these objects: a hand grenade from the First World War and a gas mask from 1989.

Museums have increasingly felt the need to participate in collaborative or cooperative projects.16 Such collaborations can benefit museums. Local history texts about museum objects written by students bring part of the museum’s collection into the public discourse and encourage the public to engage with it in a new way. Students also present their findings to the public at the museum alongside the original objects and scans of the archival records they have analyzed (see figure 4). Newspapers and radio programs have informed the public about the twistory project’s collaborative nature as well.

Collaborative projects can also extend the limited representational function of museum collections. After all, museums have a tendency to impose a specific perspective on historical narratives. As museum educator Nathaniel Prottas has asked: “Does the museum make certain voices unable to be heard within the western, colonially founded, ableist structure of the institution?”17 Our twistory project has an almost anarchistic approach to the interpretive authority of museums and history books because students can look at museum objects from
different perspectives, some of which may clash with that of the museum. For example, many museum collections do not represent marginalized groups, such as queer subcultures. But LGBTQ+ issues are often interesting for high school students. Our project allows them to use museum objects to explore queer issues even though the museum has previously interpreted them in a heteronormative way.

Such an approach might not be acceptable for all museums. While museums can keep control of the ensuing discourse in a cooperative project, our collaborative project has forced the Historical Museum Baden to abandon its monopoly on the interpretative frame of its objects. Students are allowed to analyze objects and records from whatever perspective they like, even if they choose a perspective that is not desired by the museum. The museum’s staff may not agree with all of the students’ interpretations of museum objects (to be fair, I do not agree with all of them either), but they have never tried to interfere with the students’ narratives or limit the scope of the students’ research and have instead expressly encouraged the students to be as creative as possible.

Nevertheless, collaborative projects should be organized in a way that the respective institutions’ interests in the project, the goals they would like to reach with the project, the extent of their influence on the project, and their available resources are clearly defined. This was also the case in our project. The Historical Museum Baden and the Baden Municipal Archive had some requirements: for example, head archivist Andreas Steigmeier requested that students sign a declaration about not sharing photographs of records and not identifying people in records produced within the past fifty years. The museum and the school have also signed a collaborative agreement that contains information on each party’s contribution to the project, the costs of the museum’s assistance (workshops, event for the public, etc.), the school’s intellectual ownership of the project, and the time frame for when the museum is allowed to begin similar collaborations with other schools.

Figure 4: Twistory project event at the Historical Museum Baden in 2022 (photo credit: Historical Museum Baden).


Education specialists Alan S. Marcus and Jennifer S. Kowitt point out that “teaching history with museums is often hampered by a lack of transparency.” As a result, students fail to understand how museums construct historical narratives. Marcus and Kowitt call on museums to provide “footnotes” for exhibitions, that is, information about the processes that affect exhibitions.19

Our twistory project takes a similar approach, but instead of simply providing footnotes for exhibitions, students are provided with footnotes for the museum’s collection as well. Not only has Pechlaner Gut tailored workshops specifically to the needs of the project, she was also given permission by the museum director, Carol Nater Cartier, to take students to some of the storage facilities. This allows her to explain to students some of the planning and strategizing that goes into the museum’s exhibitions (which objects are selected and why, how they are presented, what narrative(s) they are supposed to represent) and the methods the museum uses to collect and store items.

(Potential) Stumbling Blocks

As with every new project, various aspects did not go as planned. The following paragraphs, therefore, highlight some issues we encountered. For example, some student research and blog entries were of rather mixed quality and not quite ready for publication (to put it nicely). As the project is largely based on self-organized learning, we decided for this year’s twistory cycle that all groups have to update us weekly on their work, and we set two dates on which all groups have to hand in a report that includes a discussion of the status of their work, a research question, current state of research, and a (provisional) table of contents (last year we only had one of these deadlines). Another option is a mandatory revision of the blog texts, but this would make the project take longer (at the moment it takes one semester).

Museum studies specialist Helena Robinson has drawn attention to the different ways that archives, museums, and libraries represent and generate historical memory.20 In our project, students work with sources from these three institutions; they have to engage with their respective narratives. Students are provided with information and guidelines on how to deal with literature (e.g., how to find publications in a library, how to take notes, and how to refer to literature in a paper). We also use a point system that allocates double points to books, single points to newspaper and magazine articles (including online publications), and no points to regular websites (including Wikipedia) and videos. Each student has to include secondary sources worth at least five points in their final paper; publications only count once per group. After teaching the project for one year, however, we realized that some groups had still not read enough about the historical context even though they had reached the required points. As a result, we added the requirement that each student has to find at least two secondary sources (e.g., newspaper articles, websites, or books) per week and list them in a research protocol, and they have to take notes about at least one publication per week. This process has had a positive effect on the literature consulted by the groups in terms of both numbers and topics covered by literature.

The twistory project’s database includes digitized pictures of over one thousand documents from the Baden Municipal Archive. While the twistory project is a good example of how archives can participate in the production of public history, it was not easy to incorporate the archive in the classes.21 Recent years have seen an increasing number of museums converge their facilities with archives.22 This is also the case in Baden, where the archive’s holdings are in the Historical
Museum Baden. However, the archive’s reading room consists of only one small room, making it impossible to hold a workshop there or allow students to visit the archive’s holdings. While archival research should not be treated as a sacralized process, analyzing and interpreting archival sources are still among the core skills historians should master. Knowledge about how archival records should be dealt with is almost nonexistent among students. I made a PowerPoint presentation that allows the teachers involved in this project to take students on something like a virtual tour through the archive. It explains archival visits step by step and describes how archives function and how proper archival research is done. Moreover, whenever students request additional archival records, I check their requests and discuss their visit to the archive with them. So far, several groups have visited the archive, and they have all found useful information in records they consulted.

One question that always comes up with projects is funding. While the Historical Museum Baden was from the onset open to the idea of a collaborative twistory project with Kantonsschule Baden, its resources are limited. For example, the collection and education staff could allocate little time to the project. I consulted with Heidi Pechlaner Gut numerous times during the planning and writing of the teaching material to ensure that the material on museum objects was correct. However, due to the museum’s limited resources, I planned the entire project and created all the teaching material myself. The museum is only actively involved in three phases of the project: a workshop is held in which students are told how museums work, exhibitions are planned, and collections are stored (classes pay the regular student workshop rate for these workshops); students can contact Pechlaner Gut to discuss specific research questions about museum objects; and at the end of each project run, students present their findings to the public at a museum event where they are partnered with the original objects they researched (the school has to pay for museum staff if it wants a small buffet with refreshments and snacks, but the event itself is funded by the museum) (see figures 5 and 6).

Figure 5: Flyer for Kantonsschule Baden’s twistory project event at the Historical Museum Baden, June 8, 2022 (front page).
An endeavor like the twistory project cannot be designed and carried out without funding and a lot of time invested in it. I received four weeks of paid leave to carry out research in the archive and the museum, but I spent countless unpaid weekends and evenings on the project afterward. Selecting, viewing, photographing, and cataloging archival records were time consuming. Even though the museum has a digitized collection, objects still had to be selected and cataloged, which took several days. I also had to communicate with the museum and archive; create teaching materials (PowerPoint presentations, guidelines, checklists, lesson plans for teachers, and so on); train other teachers so they can teach the project; format the Instagram posts, images, and blog texts; run the website; and reach out to the local media. Obviously, this was a bit much for one person. There also constant work, like expanding the database, updating teaching material, and uploading texts and pictures onto the website. I have reduced my workload a bit this year by giving students the task of formatting their Instagram posts and their blog texts (including pictures). This will certainly not work smoothly but it should still help.

Adaptations and Applications

The Kantonsschule Baden’s twistory project will continue for several more years. For the next few years, five to ten courses per school year are expected to participate in the project (one course has approximately twenty-two students). As a result, the number of texts on museum objects and archival records on the school’s twistory website that make up the project’s digital timeline on Baden’s history will become increasingly dense. Theoretically, it is possible for groups to analyze the same object twice or more, as long as they are using it to analyze different aspects. However, I am also planning on expanding the database. Depending on the topic, students could...
be encouraged to use oral history interviews whenever possible but that depends on the topic. In some courses this year, students have to use at least one museum object or archival record, but they are also allowed to add family photographs or memorabilia and other trinkets from private possessions.

In its original form, the Kantonsschule Baden’s twistory project allows students to research any part of Baden’s history. However, teachers can limit the sources students can work with to a particular topic. For example, 2023 marks the centennial of the Badenfahrt, a hugely popular festival in Baden that takes place every ten years. Since Kantonsschule Baden will be participating, we are teaching this year’s twistory project in two courses with a focus on past Badenfahrt festivals. The students’ findings will be uploaded onto social media and the school’s website. In addition, we will be presenting the students’ research at the Badenfahrt.

There are also countless possibilities for expanding the project or changing the products students have to create. For example, instead of academic papers, Instagram posts, and a blog text, students could create podcasts, vlogs, histograms, TikTok videos, posters, or infographics. Many of these are much easier to produce than a (proper) paper and would also reduce the time needed for the project.

Versions of our project would work well for collaborative projects in various countries. While some museums already have part of their collections digitized, rural museums in particular benefit from the digitization required for the project. Maybe schools could become involved in the digitization process or the local community could provide funding. Some countries might have charities or government programs that finance museum digitization projects for such collaborations with schools.

Finally, not every school has the luxury of being close to a museum and/or an archive. Thankfully, most countries have numerous museums that have digitized a considerable part of their collections and have made them accessible to the public. Students could, therefore, work with such a collection. Instead of a local focus, such a twistory project could focus on a particular topic (e.g., the First World War and American society, women in Victorian Britain, the civil rights movement, the Puritans, sports and society, revolutions, or Cold War propaganda).

The Kantonsschule Baden’s twistory project has been designed so that it can be taught by different teachers at the school for several years. It would be wonderful to see similar projects in other countries. Maybe one day there will even be a global twistory project to which students across continents contribute texts and images.
AUTHOR BIO

Ariane Knüsel loves teaching. She has been teaching history, interdisciplinary research projects, and academic writing at Swiss secondary schools and universities for the past fifteen years. Since 2018, she has been co-head of Kantonsschule Baden’s history department. She has MAs from the University of Zurich and Birkbeck College (University of London), a PhD from the University of Zurich, and a Habilitation from the University of Fribourg. Her publications deal with cultural history topics, including teaching with editorial cartoons, Western relations with China, and Swiss history. She is currently teaching at Kantonsschule Baden and the University of Bern.

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The Power of Play: Game Pedagogy and Engaged Learning

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ABSTRACT

It is challenging to balance content delivery while also inspiring student engagement. This article discusses how instructors in secondary and higher education settings can equip students with content knowledge, improve critical reading and communications skills, and help them engage with one another by using story cubes and role-playing games. It also addresses the academic benefits of game pedagogies in liberal arts classrooms.
The Power of Play: Game Pedagogy and Engaged Learning
Susan Epting and Amanda Hodges

Whether in the K–12 setting or higher education, discourses of crisis have been on the rise for years. Students are overwhelmed and underprepared; the lines between “learner” and “consumer” continue to blur; and fewer people (be they politicians, administrators, parents, or students) understand the legacy and potential of the liberal arts. And, of course, changes in an evolving economy mean that employers are looking for graduates who demonstrate an increasingly rare set of skills: people who can quickly recognize and respond to patterns of data, write and speak with self-assured clarity, develop connections with colleagues and clients, problem solve, and so on.1

Students have internalized much of this pressure. While the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated many troubling patterns, many of us have lamented the decreasing pools of prior knowledge students bring with them to our campuses, the plummeting attention spans that make analysis of nuanced texts a struggle, and even the eerie quiet of a classroom when students would rather spend time on their phones than have conversations with the people beside them.2 Simultaneously, anxiety and depression have increased exponentially among students.3

All these variables present faculty with a dilemma: How can we equip students with content knowledge, improve critical reading and communication skills, and help them engage with one another without feeling overwhelmed? For that matter, how do we interrupt the discourses of crisis so that students can rediscover the rewards of curiosity? For educators passionate about our disciplines, what approaches can we incorporate to promote meaningful engagement rather than a fixation on grades or, worse, utter apathy?

Those of us who have dedicated our professional lives to learning and sharing knowledge can find unengaged learners both baffling and exhausting. Simultaneously, there is an intuitive and well-founded resistance to the kind of slick, superficial "edutainment" practices that valorize style over substance and promote the idea that school should always be fun. While authentic learning brings all sorts of rewards, we all know that grappling with complex readings, plunging into radically different worldviews, and seeking out patterns and connections can be both difficult and frustrating until the epiphanies dawn.

In other words, the initial cynicism of our colleagues when they hear the term “game pedagogy” is understandable. Many of us may recall long ago schooldays when games were used as incentives for good behavior or for finishing our studies, so it can sound counterintuitive to incorporate game pedagogy into our classes when many of our students are missing assignments, ill-prepared, or struggling to connect. At the same time, students need the understandings and skills the liberal arts can provide more than ever.

Our personal teaching experiences span a variety of educational settings. One of us is an English professor at a small Lutheran college in South Carolina with a liberal arts tradition and a growing number of professional degree programs. The other entered a secondary teaching environment in the rural South after completing a PhD in history at the University of Pennsylvania and being a
professor for several years at a small liberal arts college. In each of these settings we have faced challenges that are microcosms for many of the tensions within education more generally. At the liberal arts college, 50 percent of students are Pell Grant eligible, 30 percent are people of color, 40 percent are first-generation college students, and over 50 percent are student-athletes. The institution prides itself on allowing students access to greater security and social mobility. The secondary school is an all-magnet public high school focusing on career pathways with at least 60 percent of students taking Advancement Placement (AP) exams and the vast majority attending two- or four-year institutions after graduation. In both educational settings, most students view college as preparation for the workplace or for future career goals, as a route to achieve a final goal and not a destination in and of itself. It is challenging to imagine students in either learning environment saying they plan to go to college or are currently attending college to learn; rather, the perceived value of the postsecondary experience is determined by what and where they believe it can get them, not the knowledge, attributes, and dispositions they attain. The skills they perceive to be applicable to their future careers are where the value is placed, not in philosophical or intangible concepts. In short, students fall short making connections between gaining knowledge (knowing) and gaining skills (doing); one cannot be done without the other.

Teaching students how to think like a historian means embracing the counterintuitive, taking a hiatus from the quest for nuance and complexity, and thinking about the instruction of history more like teaching a foreign language. As instructors, we start with the basics and with constant reminders to be patient; fluency in anything takes time and effort, but it also means that we have to sell the idea that historical thinking involves a set of skills that are transferable in ways that will help students reach their goals. The work of the historian is an internal process that cannot be observed by the outsider looking in. This is a major challenge. How could historical thinking be made visible to all students in a way that is interesting, accessible, and equitable? How could students with widely varying content literacy skills and basically no disciplinary literacy skills or historical background knowledge ever experience and appreciate what an academic historian does?

Over several years and in many settings, we have been able to use Rory's Story Cubes to effectively introduce the discipline of history to students. Through interpreting images and crafting a narrative from the cubes, students are able to experience encountering “facts” that are recognizable and familiar as well as the ways that familiarity or expertise affects the narratives they create. Rory's Story Cubes are six-sided dice with each side displaying an image similar to an emoji, stick figure, or clip art. They come in packs of nine cubes with such themes as films, myths and fables, and voyages. We keep the theme of the set hidden from students. It is part of their challenge to determine what the dice have in common and to give their dice set a theme.

To begin, we, as instructors, select a single cube and ask several students what they see. Generally, there will be some consensus on the image, but not all will agree. This naturally leads into a discussion about why we interpret the image differently. We all see the same image on the same die, yet we provide a variety of interpretations of what we see. This opening activity raises big, essential questions about history as a discipline. Namely, how can we look at the same fact or source and interpret it differently? What significance or level of importance do we impart to that image? Students are asked to consider what informed their interpretations. Some will
mention that they “know” what the image is; their “knowing” is always rooted in prior knowledge, something they have seen before, and familiarity with the theme of a particular dice set. Their “knowing” is unobservable. This provokes a conversation about how historians operate within a broader context of their own understanding of a subject, how expert conclusions differ from those of a novice or beginner, and what it means for a historian to “know” something.

In the next step, we distribute sets of story cubes to small groups of students. It is advantageous to have as many different themed sets as possible. To keep the sets unidentifiable, at least upon initial glance, we distribute the sets in dice trays so the original packaging gives no clues as to the themes of the sets. Students approach the sets without context, although some students determine the context relatively quickly. Students roll all nine cubes and create a narrative based on the images or “facts” displayed on the dice. For students who are able to determine the theme of the dice sets, they find their task of interpreting and creating a narrative to be much easier. This can open up dialogue on the role of expertise, which can lead to all sorts of discussions concerning the nature of information, knowing, and understanding. Students grasp that their interpretation of the cubes largely depends on their own experiences and prior knowledge, which helps them not just to know but to also understand that while the study of history as an academic discipline may be a solitary pursuit, reaching consensus regarding what we know and understand about the past benefits from a diverse body of informed participants. Interpretation is an individual pursuit; knowing is a collective one. As the students work with the dice, we frequently switch sets between groups. It is highly beneficial for students to experience interpreting the sets as experts, easily able to interpret the images versus not having a clue as to what the images symbolize. This gives more students opportunities to be experts and to experience for themselves how their minds operate when interpreting data from the standpoint of familiarity versus the challenges of making meaning out of the totally foreign. It is not unusual for students to believe that facts speak for themselves, but as they can see from interpreting the story cubes, the explanation must be explicit. How meaning is derived from our data cannot go unsaid; the dice need the narrator, the historian, to explain their significance.

The story cubes work well as an introductory activity to history and historical thinking, but as student learning evolves, historically based role-playing games, such as Reacting to the Past, can help students focus on applying rather than just analyzing primary sources, developing a more nuanced understanding of the material, and, just maybe, finding it relevant. Incorporating The Threshold of Democracy: Athens in 403 B.C.E. game book from Reacting to the Past series has allowed students to add to their cultural capital in numerous ways. According to social studies standards, students do not learn about the classical world; instead, history effectively begins in 1400. As they enter college, many are unfamiliar with how classical mythology, drama, and philosophy have shaped many facets of Western art and culture or how the trade routes, politics, and empires of the ancient world continue to cast long shadows. Likewise, many of these students are unsure they belong in higher education or are anxious to not appear ignorant or to offend peers or faculty; this can stifle discussion. Their eyes widen each fall as they realize we will be taking on names like Aeschylus, Euripides, Pericles, Plato, and Marcus Aurelius: that list can seem the worst of all worlds, intimidating and distant.

But from the first day when small groups craft stories with randomly assigned story cubes, we discuss the roles of narrative, context, and perspective both in scholarship and our day-to-day
lives. In a midterm reflection, one student put it this way: “When we first met Clytemnestra in The Oresteia, I just thought she was bitter and took out her frustration with Agamemnon on the innocent Cassandra. I wanted her to pay for killing them. But when I thought about when we read about how Athenian women didn’t have real legal rights and we talked about how nobody else would call Agamemnon out on killing their daughter, I realized this wasn’t about her. It’s about what happens when the rules don’t apply to powerful people. And we still deal with that injustice, and we still label women who call it out.”

After practicing these kinds of connections between the ancient world and modernity in the first months of the semester, students take on the roles of Crito, Thrasybulus, and other citizens (or noncitizens) in ancient Athens in a week-long role-playing game set at the close of the Peloponnesian War. Each student receives a character packet with biographical background, personal and political objectives, and a detailed timeline for speeches, and there are core primary texts to shape the speeches and discussions to come. Because the game is divided into sessions that address individual topics, like expanding citizenship to slaves or immigrants or determining whether jurors and assemblymen should be compensated for their service, specific primary sources align with each topic.

With writers like Plato, Herodotus, and Thucydides, students find themselves wading through rich, nuanced texts. Within their groups or factions, students annotate these readings and consider how to use or challenge them as they prepare for each session. In preparing for the Trial of Socrates, one student reflected, “Whenever I was getting lost in Plato’s Apology, I reminded myself that my character was one of Socrates’s prosecutors, so I started looking for specific things I could use to accuse him of leading youth astray, and that helped me focus on why his methods made folks mad, especially after his students had caused so much trouble.” In this way, the game allows students to recognize the importance of context, to draw from specific texts to shore up their characters’ speeches, to think through ways their assigned figures define “justice” or the “common good” (even and especially when those definitions challenge their personal beliefs), to voice opinions—even contentious ones—with greater confidence, and to seek out areas of potential compromise.

The academic benefits of using games to find meanings in these texts would be enough to argue for their wider integration, but they are also invaluable tools that help students develop soft skills. The same class that musters a rote discussion after reading some myths can dazzle when those myths are the basis of a round of Superfight: The Mythology Deck as students fuse content, creativity, and connection. The role-playing game in particular pushes students to speak up, to think on their feet, and to remain true to their character’s aims and agendas. For a generation that values consensus and eschews polarization, this might sound like a tough sell, but for years, our students have leaned into the experience. As part of an activity autopsy, students write thank-you notes to the characters they portrayed. One student wrote, “My favorite thing I should thank you for is my new ability to call people out without backpedaling. Often in classes I hesitate to share my perspective because I’m afraid of being called nerdy, stupid, or useless. But you never backed down, and you inspired me to rock it!” Students who might have doubted whether or not they belonged in a college classroom (or even if it would do them any good) suddenly see themselves as capable of applying abstract concepts, of thinking contextually, and of assuming
positions of leadership.

Put simply, content-related games foster both learning and confidence, and those students carry those boons into other facets of their academic and personal lives. These implications matter because by the time students reach middle school, they have determined if they “like” or “hate” history without any notion that memorizing the past is not the same as studying it. Games allow students to approach nuanced content from a variety of perspectives and to gain a sense of agency with the material. Since students have almost no concept that academic historians engage in anything beyond caricatured antiquarianism, this approach encourages students to develop their own questions and insights. This type of inquiry contributes to students seeing the relevance of the historical discipline, historical thinking skills, and the need for attention to detail and context to the present and to the problem-solving abilities that can be useful, arguably essential, in their daily lives.

These observations are nothing new and the National Council of Social Studies Education and state standards for the instruction of history have adopted historical thinking skills as part of the curriculum; unfortunately, there is not much to help public school teachers with little training in the particulars of the historical discipline to wrap their own minds around how history is actually done, let alone how to teach students to do it. Even academic historians have a difficult time explaining their habits of mind and thought, approaches so long ingrained that they are innate, in ways that help students understand the basics of the discipline. Of course, it is no secret that social studies teachers in the K–12 environment are not typically the recipients of extensive disciplinary training in their subjects.

No matter the level or age of the students, games create relatively low-stake points of entry to a discipline that may otherwise seem staid, closed, and known. Students are able to appreciate that individuals in the past had the agency to navigate and that historical developments were not fixed in their courses or outcomes. This results in students beginning to recognize their own abilities and impacts as individuals who make decisions within our larger democratic society. As for instructors with the aim of encouraging authentic inquiry and exploration, we must be comfortable and committed to providing opportunities for students to “play” with the past and accept the fumbles and foibles that go along with it. While the endgame may not produce a perfect product, the experience provides a deeper appreciation of context, how the past is explored, excavated, and explicitly constructed.
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Collaboratively Reforming General Education History Teaching and Learning: A Roadmap for the Twenty-First Century

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the most challenging history courses taught at institutions of higher education in the United States: introductory world history courses, required of undergraduates as part of comprehensive liberal arts degrees. It summarizes conclusions made by recent scholars of teaching and learning and identifies significant gaps between their recommendations and the realities facing faculty assigned to teach these classes. The authors present a vision for a collaborative faculty-led project that aims to ameliorate some of these challenges by centering student engagement and meaning making in their learning experiences. The article also offers evidence drawn from student feedback on educational materials used in the authors’ own introductory world history courses, which reveals that student ownership of learning increased when they could see themselves reflected in the topics they studied and when they had opportunities to better understand and recognize the views and experiences of other people related to those same topics.
Collaboratively Reforming General Education History Teaching and Learning: A Roadmap for the Twenty-First Century
Brenna Miller and Jesse Spohnholz

A fundamental goal of college general education history courses is to help students see themselves within a longer story of the human past and develop skills in information literacy, historical thinking, and communication that they can use throughout their lives. And yet many of us have had the experience of finding that some students may feel disconnected from the material, disengaged with their assignments, and left wondering if history has any relevance to them at all. In recent years, scholars have provided a variety of pedagogical strategies to help educators facing such skepticism, including encouraging student ownership of learning, diversifying the content of courses, and providing opportunities for students to connect with and make meaning of their studies for themselves. However, limited faculty bandwidth and institutional structures often pose obstacles to effectively adopting these reforms. There are a lot of high-minded vision statements we could offer. But practically speaking, how can we build a model of history education that meaningfully supports faculty to engage students in general education history courses? In this article, we offer our thoughts on how, as a teaching community, we can work together on this question, rather than leaving each of us to figure it out for ourselves. We lay out a vision for a collaborative faculty-led project, called History for the 21st Century, that seeks to build a community of practice to support one another and create teaching materials that draw on students’ interests to increase engagement and leverage that engagement to help students see how essential studying the past will be for building our future.

The Challenges of Teaching General Education History

As research has shown, among the most powerful ways we can support student learning at the introductory college level is by facilitating student ownership of it. Students with a strong sense of ownership of their learning have higher motivation to achieve goals, a stronger belief in their ability to succeed, an increased ability to reflect on the effectiveness of their learning strategies, and a willingness to persist in the face of obstacles.¹ The educational researcher Kristall J. Graham-Day and her research team at The Ohio State University have offered four useful practices proven to increase ownership of learning: be clear about expectations, have mechanisms for students to track progress, provide opportunities for students to give and get feedback, and meet with students one on one.² These are useful tips for any educator at any level, and the first three, at least, can also be used in large classes without significant burdens.

However, those of us teaching general education history classes face some additional challenges: first, history is among the least popular subjects among students coming out of high school, even as many are required to take such courses in college.³ If we know that students feel connected, engaged, and meaningfully involved in their own learning when they are studying topics that reflect their own interests, passions, and identities, how might we be able to tap into students’ own senses of self and allow them to use that to drive their studies in ways that can help get them invested in learning history?

The most important part of this process, in our view, is not for us to explain to students that...

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history is critical to them to better understand their interests, passions, and identities but for them to *discover it for themselves*. Once they do so, they can begin to appreciate how they can use knowledge of the past to guide them to make wiser, more ethical, and more realistic decisions. Over the last twenty-five years, there has been a seismic shift in higher education toward student-centered learning and efforts to facilitate student ownership and agency through the expansion of tutoring and learning centers, as well as the adoption of more explicit student learning outcomes by colleges and universities, departments, and individual faculty. Most faculty will have seen, in some form, the kinds of transparent instruction design advocated by scholars of teaching and learning in higher education like Mary-Ann Winkelmes, which have been shown to greatly improve educational outcomes across diverse student populations. An emphasis on clear communication, including on syllabi, assignments, and rubrics, helps demystify what it takes to succeed and can facilitate student self-evaluation. These initiatives help reduce obstacles to engagement and clarify paths that enable students to pursue future growth.

Likewise, many faculty and departments have begun to place greater focus on transferable skills that students can apply to a variety of contexts throughout their lives, rather than strictly content-based knowledge, which often does not get retained in the long term. As a result, there have been recent efforts pushing against the coverage model of introductory courses, or what some educators have called “uncoverage.” Popular frameworks like Bloom’s taxonomy put acquiring knowledge as the first building block to learning, with higher level skills like analysis and evaluation being saved for later in the learning process. In college, this content-first approach is typically accomplished through lecture and textbook-based transfers of largely factual information from professor to student in broad survey courses. "Uncoverage," by contrast, suggests upending this standard approach with focused, deep dives into select content. This method of teaching history accepts the impossibility of covering everything and aims instead to provide examples of historical thinking alongside opportunities to practice it. Unless students can reapply what they learn, they are likely to forget it. To address this, "uncoverage" emphasizes routine exercises that help to develop key skills and create habits of historical thought. In a useful contribution to this discussion, historians Joel M. Sipress and David J. Voelker suggest that an effective means to stress depth of historical thinking above preserving breadth of coverage is backward design. By first defining what students should know or take away from their history course and what skills they should be able to demonstrate upon its conclusion, instructors design their class around sets of learning experiences that move students toward that goal. In today’s digital age, core skills in research, critical thinking, source analysis, and information literacy require history educators both to think beyond their classrooms and the familiar “textbook and test” model and to rethink their learning goals and the design of their courses.

To be sure, many instructors and departments, as well as university offices that provide instructional support services, are familiar with the new demands of higher education and have advocated for these transformations. We, and we’re sure many readers, have either adopted or attempted to adopt at least some of these measures into our classrooms. But, as Samuel Wineburg, an educational and cognitive psychologist who specializes in historical learning, observed in 2018, “Despite today’s hype over flipped classrooms and blended instruction, history class, it seems, hasn’t changed that much.” At Washington State University, we have worked


with a talented team of faculty who share a sincere commitment to active learning and student-centered education at the introductory level. We and many of our colleagues have worked to design lessons that offer only short lectures (fifteen minutes), followed by inquiry-based activities in small groups. We have seen colleagues positively transform their classrooms using these methods. Still, our personal experience is that the coverage and content trap is our greatest challenge. We have experienced our lectures ballooning from fifteen to forty minutes or have had to abandon class activities in the face of time constraints. We know that we are not alone in falling into such a habit of teaching. With so many decades of scholarship, and so much enthusiasm for change, why does it prove so hard to reform our classes?

In our view, the persistence of the “content dump” in introductory history courses and the inertia to reform stem from faculty centeredness and the myriad structural factors that reinforce it. For both faculty and students, the durability of the “survey” course model and reliance on textbooks both create and reinforce the assumption that the first step of learning is the broad transfer of knowledge, delivered by experts. The temptation for faculty (who often fear that students will never encounter history again) is to cover as much as one can, or at least the “greatest hits” (often simplified), in class. However, this leaves students with the impression that the textbook and the professor are the alpha and omega of what they learn. Meanwhile, in upper-division courses we challenge history majors to practice advanced exercises in historical thinking that we as historians know are important for cultivating critically thinking, engaged, and independently minded citizens, and through this they often find that the simplified version of events they learned in their intro courses were imprecise or even inaccurate.

Many history faculty are familiar with the challenges of teaching general education history courses. At some point, most faculty we know have been in the position of wanting to transform students’ lives but, facing the realities of limited bandwidth and resources, are left scrambling to put together lesson plans. But we do not all face these challenges equally. Under the present model, it is little surprise that faculty with a choice sometimes avoid large introductory classes, so that they can teach courses with eager history majors on specialized topics more closely related to their areas of research. One by-product of this response, however, is that departments sometimes shift the challenges of teaching introductory courses onto faculty with fewer resources or training to deal with the challenges of teaching these classes. Further, our culture of treating our classrooms as “our space,” autonomous from colleagues in our departments, to say nothing of educators around our region, our country, or beyond, tends to leave individual instructors solely responsible for the teaching and learning that goes on in their classes. Of course, individual instructors are the most important agents in shaping the quality of learning that takes place in their classrooms. But the stress on individual autonomy in our classrooms is sometimes framed in terms of our specific areas of content expertise and academic freedom, even if few of us have significant training in how people actually learn. It also can leave faculty alone to solve the challenges of teaching general education courses. There are, of course, many institutional initiatives aimed to support faculty facing such challenges. Yet these challenges are rarely discipline specific, often do not reach the faculty who need them most, or are limited by insufficient resources.

In short, general education history courses face a dual challenge that makes them especially daunting: sometimes skeptical or uninterested students, combined with faculty with insufficient

7. Sam Wineburg, Why Learn History (When It’s Already on Your Phone) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 83.
12. Nunn, College Belonging, 35.

resources, training, or time who often are teaching well outside their area of research expertise. The challenges to curricular reform are not rooted in a lack of options for new instructional models, the availability of evidence-based scholarship, or instructors’ will or desire to best serve students. Rather, the central challenge to teaching these history courses stems from structural conditions shaping teaching and learning in such classes. Thus, we need to build better structural conditions for ourselves. With this in mind, the question becomes: how can we help one another adjust our courses in ways that help students connect their interests, passions, and identities to their general education history classes?

**A Roadmap for Solutions in the Twenty-First Century**

This question has inspired us and a group of faculty members with a shared vision to establish History for the 21st Century (or H/21, as we sometimes shorten it), a collaborative, faculty-led nonprofit initiative associated with the World History Association that aims to share student-centered, inquiry-driven, and active learning teaching resources—for free—with students and faculty across institutions. By creating collaborative relationships that are based on the real, lived experience of diverse kinds of faculty (and the support networks and professional development resources they have) and that center students based on who they really are (not who we wish they were), we hope to provide and continuously develop usable, adoptable, and adaptable teaching resources for introductory history courses.

We have devised a set of five principles guiding our collaboration. First, we promote learning that is **inquiry driven**. We want students to own their learning, to ask questions, to engage in the process of finding answers, and to self-consciously reflect on how that learning has improved their understanding of the world they inhabit. We promote learning centered on questions that inspire curiosity and invite students to take agency in their education. Second, we are working to support learning that is **student centered**. To spark inspiration, we design lessons to reach out to students not by starting with asking them to think more like us but by considering where they are starting from and where they are headed. Third, we aim to facilitate classroom cultures that are inspiring and intellectually energetic using **active learning**. While learning does sometimes require explanations, in general, we promote a flipped classroom using lessons created through backward design. Students prepare for class on their own and come together to practice skills that facilitate deeper understanding and analysis. Fourth, we aim to make course materials **free for students**. We think of it as lowering barriers but also as opening doors and inviting students into the world of historical thinking, no matter their financial consideration or the kinds of institutional support for learning that their college or university provides. And finally, we aim to make teaching materials **open to all faculty**, too. In this sense, we hope to promote cultures of collaboration among faculty that begin with the premise that we all share a commitment to helping one another, regardless of rank or faculty position.

H/21’s first round of materials, Modules Ready to Educate (MREs), includes readings produced by experts on the topic, primary sources for engaging in class activities, slide decks for in-class presentations, and instructor guides and suggestions for activities and assignments. Leveraging the interests and expertise of faculty, our process starts with a historian writing a set of lesson plans, often from creative or successful lessons they have already used in their classes. Each
lesson includes readings, primary sources, activities, and instructor guides that are peer reviewed by both content experts and experienced educators with training in the scholarship of teaching and learning.

After the peer review process, lessons are then shared with faculty in a variety of classroom settings to be tested. The testing process helps ensure that all H/21 lessons are appropriate for general education courses and involves soliciting feedback from students, to help us understand what they found most engaging and inspiring, as well as whether they found any materials confusing, tedious, or otherwise unengaging. Once the editing process is complete, MREs are made available for both instructors and students alike on our website at www.history21.com. The first MREs have been published, and many more are being written, tested, and designed.

In fall 2022, we tested a series of H/21 modules in our classrooms at Washington State University. For context, the Pullman campus of Washington State University currently has about sixteen thousand undergraduate students, 78 percent from in-state, 29 percent non-white, and 35 percent first-generation college students. Brenna Miller taught multiple 75- or 50-student sections (with and without a teaching assistant, respectively), while Jesse Spohnholz taught one 260-student class (with four teaching assistants). For each, they taught five H/21 MREs, two that were the same and three that were different. In what follows, we will describe two that proved particularly effective at leveraging student ownership of learning and to which students self-reported the strongest connections.

The first of these, “Hunting, Wilderness, and Imperialism,” by Erica Mukherjee, aims to help students explore the dynamics of imperialism through case studies of elite hunting and early conservation efforts in nineteenth-century East Africa, North America, and India. The module begins by asking students to define their own understanding of “wilderness.” The exercise provides an opportunity for them to establish a personal connection to the topic and the module and to begin to appreciate that ideas about the meanings of nature and the wilderness are diverse and historically constructed. From there, the module provides an opportunity to learn about nineteenth-century imperialism by exploring the social dynamics at play in three case studies associated with hunting and wilderness. Students first interrogate Rudyard Kipling's poem “The White Man's Burden” (1899) to define masculine imperial mentalities. They then examine these dynamics in practice in British East Africa using imperial official J. H. Patterson’s account of hunting the “Man Eaters of Tsavo”—a pair of lions that preyed on railroad workers. Students examine how Patterson portrayed himself but also learn the skill of reading against the grain to better understand the experiences of African and Indian colonial subjects. For North America and British India, students examine parallel dynamics, as well as elite white imperialists’ definitions of what counts as wilderness and their beliefs in appreciating and preserving it. For North America, students examine excerpts of George Catlin's Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of North American Indians (1841), illustrating his views about buffalo hunting by colonial white people and the Sioux alongside his articulations of a sublime nature, which informed his proposal to establish national parks. Students thus work to uncover the imperialist mentalities that undergirded early conservation movements and the establishment of national parks, the removal of peoples from those landscapes, and the development of ideas about some of the hunting practices with which some of them are familiar. At the end of the module, students use these “deep dives” into history to reflect in writing on the relationships between imperialism,
hunting, and early conservation, as well as the durability of these historical trends today.

After finishing the lesson, we conducted a survey of 312 students, asking them what they found engaging, inspiring, or thought provoking, or (conversely) confusing, boring, or tedious. Student survey responses to this lesson were nearly universally positive, which is why we are highlighting these lessons. Students found the most meaning when lessons expressly connected to how they understand their families, values, and beliefs. For instance, of the 38 percent of those who connected with this teaching module more than the other four they studied that semester, more than half indicated that it was because they felt a familial or personal connection to the topic (usually family connections to hunting, camping, or hiking). One wrote, “I learned the most from [the] Hunting module because I am an avid outdoorsman in hunting/fishing so this interested me the most and I learned more about history even if in areas other than the US.” Another explained, “I originally come from India, so I could relate to several stories I heard back in my village about bravery and fights with animals.” When students found a personal connection to the material, it opened an interest in the broader global and historical picture of hunting practices and facilitated engagement with history and learning. Even among students who did not see the module as their “favorite,” they also expressed personal connections to hunting or outdoor recreation, as well as interests in the politics of conservation and hunting and/or their pursuit of careers involving the environment (49 of 312). “Due to my increased interest level in the topic, I learned the most from [this module]... I have been surrounded by people who hunt for sport for a large amount of my life.... I have never been so interested in a history class in my life than during this module.” As these quotes illustrate, students reported engagement because the lessons explicitly connected to their sense of self.

However, students were most engaged not just because this lesson plan told them about themselves or reinforced their existing beliefs but also because they learned about people who were different from themselves, causing them to change their former beliefs. Many expressed interest in learning about global Indigenous hunting practices or ways of hunting they were unfamiliar with (41 of the 312). Many others (55) felt engaged by the narrative structures of specific primary sources—and often also expressed enthusiasm for learning to critique those narrative structures by practicing reading against the grain. Many students expressed that they were more interested in learning the history of nineteenth-century imperialism because it helped them change their views about wilderness and nature: “In my mind,” one wrote, “I have always viewed nature with sanctity and something special—this module allowed me to see the different way in which the nature I see today has evolved.” Thus, we found that the most engaging history lessons both connected to students’ preexisting sense of self and helped them change some element of that sense of self.

Encouraging students to connect with broad themes and ideas and to make meaning of history for themselves was also crucial to the efficacy of a second module we tested in our classrooms: “Refugees in the Early Modern Atlantic World,” by Spohnholz. In this case, students examine the early modern Atlantic world not through standard narratives of colonial expansion but rather through an examination of the push and pull factors that drove the movement of refugees in Europe, West Africa, and the Americas between the 1670s and the 1720s. To help students establish a personal connection to the lesson, they begin by considering what resources they would need to escape to a new place in the present day. They engage in a discussion about
how their preexisting skills, connections, understandings of the world, and resources would fundamentally shape the opportunities and constraints of their flights. They then compare the experiences of Huguenot refugees from France and Jewish refugees from Spain, both fleeing to the Dutch Republic. They learn that such well-educated refugees were able to self-consciously craft narratives of their hardships. While the Dutch look like generous hosts in the first lesson, in the second lesson students learn that some were also heavily involved in the transatlantic slave trade, which had politically and socially destabilizing effects on the Gold Coast and the Bight of Benin. As new regional powers such as the Akwamu, Asante, and Dahomey rose, many Akan-speaking people fled war, violence, and enslavement as refugees. Here, students address the challenges of limited sources and again practice reading against the grain by looking at slavers’ accounts to determine how they can be used to identify the push/pull factors that shaped refugees’ flight, apart from the narratives the slave traders provided. The final lesson considers refugees in the Americas, including maroons and Indigenous peoples, whose experiences parallel those of the Akan-speaking West Africans from the previous lesson. Students also consider Huguenots who moved to the Americas, who presented themselves as refugees from Europe, though this move was driven by pull factors, like offers of free land, more than push factors, and they often enslaved others, even hiring hunters to track down refugees from slavery. Students end the module by considering how refugees tell their stories and how this informs historical memories of them to help us consider why we think of some people as “refugees” but not others.

After we were done, we asked 229 students about their experiences learning with this lesson. To explain why this module was their favorite, 67 percent of students identified a familial connection with these lessons and 27 percent identified a personal connection to migration. One wrote, “I feel that these lessons helped me understand my own family’s experience more, as both my grandfather and father came to this country as refugees.” Another explained, “I learned more about my Jewish heritage in this lesson, which was very thought provoking for me.” Even for students who did not self-identify a family or personal connection with the content, 13 percent reported appreciating connections to the politics of refugees and migration in the world today. A total of 23 percent noted that the lesson cultivated senses of personal sympathy or empathy with refugees: “I liked this lesson because I felt like I was able to put myself into their shoes and see from their perspective.” “My favorite part,” another wrote, “was the specific struggles and factors that made the refugees want to leave in order to find a better life.”

As with the “Hunting, Wilderness, and Imperialism” module, students reported feeling engaged not only because the lessons connected to their sense of self but also because they encouraged them to see beyond their sense of self. Among the 229 responses, 17 percent self-reported enjoying learning about the diversity of refugees, as well as seeing history from a different perspective than they had experienced before: “Typically when teaching a lesson you focus on only one or two super famous/well-known people who a lot of the time I’ve heard a bit about already.... In this unit there were so many people we read and talked about who I had never heard of, which was more intriguing because the information was all new. I also liked how these refugee stories connected to the US and shows why and how the US is so diverse today.” Here, too, what engaged students the most was both a connection to self and a self-consciousness about moving beyond themselves.
For both teaching modules, students also self-reported that their interest in the topic facilitated engagement with skill development. They really enjoyed the process of learning to read sources critically. “I liked that the focus was on analyzing primary sources,” one student wrote. “It was very engaging to think about how the future’s interpretation of the past can be influenced by how we write about it in the present, and digging for the truth in a passage of biases feels like a puzzle that paints a picture of the lives we’re reading about.” “One thing I liked about this unit is researching the people who published and translated the primary sources and determining why they did it. I found that really interesting and it helped me further my understanding on how sources are passed on throughout history.” Students also found these skills of source analysis applicable to their future studies: “I learned from this lesson how to look deeper into the motive behind the source and what could be missing… I hadn’t really considered that before this lesson, but I will for future references and research.” Students reported most engagement when they could see how they could use the skills they were learning to better understand the world around them.

We stress that these surveys do not offer direct proof of an unequivocally effective teaching technique. While the responses to these two lessons were nearly entirely positive, some did identify that they thought there was too much reading, among other things. But we do contend that such surveys help us understand how our students make meaning from world history, as well as offer practice places for them to make more of that meaning for themselves. This is important because students who gain a genuine sense of ownership of their learning demonstrate greater intellectual and personal resilience and a greater commitment to lifelong education. In thinking through questions about how to engage students in history courses many of them enter resentful of being forced to take, we can benefit from asking them about themselves and leveraging what we learn to help them start thinking about the deep and diverse history of our world rather than starting by debating among ourselves questions that lure us back to the content trap.

Of course, we don’t just listen to students, who are often not expert judges of their own learning. We also collaborate to share information about student learning based on faculty experiences using a specific lesson plan, guiding discussions and other activities, and grading assignments. In the case of these modules and others, testing lessons in real classroom environments allowed us to collaborate, looking for what works for students and soliciting feedback from colleagues, and identifying where we are or are not meeting learning objectives. During the revision process of these modules, we have simplified aspects of the lessons and readings, improved assignment prompts, and incorporated unexpected student responses and insights into teacher guides. In addition to seeing students connect to and own more of their learning, the “community of practice” we engaged in during testing and revision provided us with opportunities to meet with colleagues to discuss how things were going, plan teaching strategies, and brainstorm new ideas. The ability to work collaboratively with peers lifted our senses of individual responsibility and made experimentation easier, success feel more shared, and struggles feel less personal. The modules (even in “beta phase”) provided sound pedagogical lessons that targeted key skills in historical thinking and analysis, while also alleviating much of the mental stress of having to “figure it out” under pressure as the term unfolded. It also freed up time to focus on core skills and engage with students about topics that are relevant to them.
Going forward, it is clear to us that the "communities of practice" we engaged in during the testing of our first modules helped us share our ideas and continue to improve our teaching tool kits—and we invite others to join us. We see these modules as living documents that communities of engaged educators can help continue to improve by providing their colleagues and us with feedback, revisions, adaptations, and suggestions for even greater efficacy over many years into the future. The materials H/21 produces are available for download on our website at www.history21.com and free to adopt as either complete two-week lessons or individual select content (specific readings, sources, or exercises) independent of the rest of the module. Faculty wanting to alter, improve, or experiment are also welcome to modify our editable versions as they like. Our goal is to continue to use evidence about faculty and student experiences to adjust not only the lessons we are producing now but also the range, scope, and format of future materials we might produce to help one another in the future. We also hope that you become part of this broader "community of practice" by sharing your insights and support with us and fellow educators.
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