Critical Conversations

Teaching and Creating Community in Difficult Times
Proceedings of the H-Net Teaching Conference
Edited by Niels Eichhorn and Caroline Waldron

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About the Cover Image

The image featured on the cover of this volume of the Proceedings of the H-Net Teaching Conference shows a racially diverse group of a couple dozen men and women. The slogans on the signs that participants are holding reflect issues ranging from anti-racism (“Fight police brutality”) and relief for unemployment (“We demand work [f?]or wages). We chose this image because many of the contributions in this volume address similar topics on social justice as well as the need and complexity of bringing them to the forefront of curriculum.

Per the Library of Congress (LOC) identifier information, the photo was taken for the National Photo Company which “supplied photographs of current news events in Washington, D.C., as a daily service to its subscribers.”¹ The LOC dates the photo between 1909 and 1923. However, the presence of the hammer and sickle on one poster suggests the meeting most likely took place after the Russian Revolution (1917).²

About the Volume Editors

Dr. Niels Eichhorn is H-Net’s Vice-President of Research and Publications as well as Editor in Chief at H-CivWar. He is the author of Liberty and Slavery: European Separatists, Southern Secession, and the American Civil War; The Civil War Battles of Macon; and The Civil War in the Age of Nationalism.


¹ “About the National Photo Company Collection,” Library of Congress, accessed May 21, 2024.
² You can find out more about the photo and access it through the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.
AUTHOR BIO

Emily Joan Elliott has been the Associate Director of Research and Publications for H-Net since 2022. In that role, she directs H-Net Reviews and acts as the production manager for the Journal of Festive Studies and the Proceedings of the H-Net Teaching Conference.

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HOW TO CITE


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Attempts to undermine faculty autonomy are not new. In 2023, faculty at all levels around the United States experienced unprecedented attacks on faculty rights and working conditions. These attacks emanated from legislatures, boards of trustees, and administrators who moved to adopt restrictive corporate models of education as well as impose their political agenda. Institutions, claiming some sort of exigency, laid off faculty members; they restructured programs and ignored institutional policies requiring shared governance and academic freedom. In thirteen months, between March 2022 and April 2023, twenty-nine state legislatures proposed seventy-eight pieces of education legislation. The majority of the bills were motivated by political, racial, and ideological animus and designed to reshape public education. Most proposed legislation sought to limit teaching about race, gender, and sexual orientation. Many of the bills forbid teaching CRT (critical race theory) and public spending on efforts to promote DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion). They sought to ban affirmative action and identity-based preferences in hiring faculty and admitting students to programs. Moreover, they sought to place limits on curriculum offerings, impose restrictions on free speech, and end tenure for faculty.

These efforts across the US were uneven; seventeen of the twenty-nine state legislatures proposed only one or two bills. Ten states proposed three to four pieces of legislation. One state proposed five separate bills, and Texas proposed eighteen bills. While many of these bills used...
the same language and covered similar issues, Florida’s House Bill 999 provided an extreme example of government censorship, including unconstitutional provisions hostile to free speech and academic freedom on its university campuses. HB 999 received significant attention from educational organizations, faculty unions, and the media due to the governor’s aggressive attacks on higher education faculty.5

In January 2023, the governor of Florida held a press conference to signal his intent to defund DEI efforts in the state and significantly reform public universities. On February 21, 2023, before the state legislative session began, HB 999 was prefiled. The proposed legislation provided the blueprint for the governor’s plan. DEI statements were forbidden and programs or activities that espoused DEI or CRT were denied funding. Boards of trustees were empowered, along with university presidents, to hire faculty without considering faculty input. Post-tenure reviews were mandated every five years and allowed at any time for cause. Numerous majors and minors were stricken from universities, including ethnic studies, gender studies, and intersectionality, as well as CRT, queer theory, feminist theory, and social justice. HB 999 also proposed significant changes to the general education curriculum and required the Florida Board of Governors (the governing board for the State University System of Florida) to oversee and revise each university’s mission statement to ensure each institution adhered to the purported objective of educating students for citizenship in a constitutional republic and for the state’s workforce needs.

The American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) posted a public statement against HB 999.6 Forty major academic organizations and hundreds of faculty members from the US and Canada signed on in support of the statement. The American Historical Association (AHA) also issued a statement against HB 999, saying, “What has previously best been characterized as unwarranted political intervention into public education has now escalated to an attempt at a hostile takeover of a state’s system of higher education.”7 Eighty-five education-related organizations signed on in support of the AHA statement. H-Net Council endorsed the ACLS and AHA statements in opposition to Florida HB 999 and voted to issue a statement of academic freedom based on H-Net’s mission and values.8 The protests and backlash against HB 999, and much of the other proposed legislation, have halted or altered most of the bills. As of April 2024, only seven of the proposed bills have passed. HB 999 did not pass, but its companion bill, Senate Bill 266, which was slightly less problematic, was signed into law. While the majority of legislation proposed has been stalled, it has had a chilling effect on the quality of public higher education.

Amid this educational climate, H-Net conference organizers decided that the theme for the 2023 Second Annual Teaching and Learning Conference would be “Critical Conversations: Teaching and Creating Community in Difficult Times.” This conference thematic afforded faculty members across various disciplines and academic levels a welcome framework that encouraged nuanced discussions over the complexities in today’s disrupted educational environment. The conference program featured sessions with a focus on pedagogical strategies, as well as those that grappled with five key issues: DEI; the reconfiguration of post-COVID-19 learning environments; the ethical implications of AI (artificial intelligence) in education; challenges to teaching CRT; and the intricacies of navigating administrative directives regarding curricular frameworks, book banning, and course restructuring endeavors.
During the conference, panelists offered insightful presentations that not only elucidated the issues but also proffered diverse approaches for surmounting them. Consequently, the presentations engendered spirited dialogues, fostering a collaborative environment wherein faculty members shared innovative solutions and invaluable teaching resources. Over the course of four days, conference attendees from five continents and fourteen nations came together in a dynamic exchange of research insights and pedagogical best practices that crossed international borders.

H-Net welcomed Wiki Education and the Organization of American Historians (OAH) as cosponsors of the conference. On Wednesday, August 23, 2023, the Wiki Education Room hosted workshops and panels concentrating on technological tools for classroom learning, specifically, the Wikipedia Student Program, where college and university instructors, alongside program staff, illustrated the benefits of assigning students to contribute to Wikipedia entries related to their coursework. Under the guidance of faculty members, students conduct research on topics relevant to their courses that are either absent or insufficiently covered on Wikipedia. After thorough review by their professors, approved student essays are integrated into Wikipedia using Wiki Education’s free tools and training resources. On Thursday, August 24, 2023, during “OAH Night,” OAH sponsored panels aimed at promoting exemplary instruction in American history across various educational levels and platforms. Panel topics encompassed discussions of the influence of state policies and legislation on teaching CRT in kindergarten through university levels. A workshop explored innovative pedagogical approaches for teaching migration and ethnic history to diverse audiences.

Forty presenters led discussions across two workshops, three roundtable sessions, and eleven panel sessions. These addressed various challenges confronting educators in diverse educational settings. The presenters shared innovative teaching strategies, useful resources, and course syllabi. Altogether, over four days, the various panels, roundtables, and workshops attracted 357 participants, with some people attending several panels across multiple days. Participants engaged in crucial conversations about fostering community during challenging times. These discussions, though often cut short by time constraints, covered such topics as teaching social justice and CRT despite bans, implementing DEI initiatives without explicit labels, and exploring the integration of AI in classrooms. Participants were well equipped with, or reminded of, valuable tools to ensure equitable learning environments for all students. For instance, an intriguing conversation emerged from a presenter’s experience of unexpected outcomes while introducing a new lesson to students. This prompted significant reflections from participants on adapting teaching methods to resolve unanticipated classroom challenges.

This edited volume contains eight essays that capture these ideas and extend their reach and application beyond the conference presentations. Yehuda Silverman and Sharon McIntyre introduce the idea that, alongside traditional educational hurdles, faculty face increased political challenges concerning classroom content and instructional methods. To mitigate potential complications associated with teaching contentious subjects, they recommend the adoption of active learning techniques as well as conflict resolution strategies to facilitate collaborative efforts between faculty and students in cultivating an environment of inclusivity when addressing challenging topics.
In their article, Jill Abney, Kate Collins, and Isabelle Blaber discuss findings from their Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL) study conducted within a college-level war and society course. The study examines challenges identified by students in learning about the Holocaust, along with their strategies for coping with the emotional distress inherent in the learning process. The authors highlight approaches for teaching difficult histories using a trauma-informed method, and they also present insights into student responses to an oral history podcast assignment designed to facilitate thoughtful and effective communication on sensitive subjects.

The pedagogical approach of Carrie Schultz, Mary Potorti, Martha Gardner, and Kristen Petersen emphasizes the ways race, class, and gender intersect and affect health disparities. Their diverse teaching methods encourage students in health science programs to analyze these intersections and consider solutions to health care challenges. Emphasizing critical thinking, their goal is to provide future health care workers with the intellectual and professional tools they will need to address health inequities and advocate for health justice.

Stephen Wilson shares a personal story reflecting on the communal loss experienced in classrooms due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In his article, he emphasizes the significance of educators cultivating intentional learning communities. Drawing from his experiences teaching remedial English and composition courses, Wilson illustrates how he guides students to overcome apprehension through the implementation of low-stakes assignments, fostering a culture of writing without worry.

Kathleen McMichael Goodyear argues that amid today's divisive atmosphere, education should emphasize holistic methods to cultivate empathy and comprehension among students. Her article recommends the use of arts-based inquiry as a means for students to explore the intricacies of identity. She also advocates using artistic activities to enhance students' self-awareness, understanding, and empathy toward peers from various backgrounds, aiming to nurture a stronger sense of belonging and community within the classroom.

Jennifer Egloff’s article presents a significant viewpoint within academia, suggesting that the use of AI in classrooms can hinder students’ overall development. She offers practical examples of how faculty members can design essay assignments that resist reliance on ChatGPT. These strategies include integrating essays into larger, scaffolded assignments; emphasizing transparent research processes; facilitating brainstorming and discussion sessions throughout the project; providing consistent feedback on writing; promoting the use of university resources; and offering personalized assistance to struggling students. Through the implementation of these strategies, Egloff ensures that students cultivate essential skills, such as information literacy, critical analysis, organization, and articulate expression, all of which are integral to successful college essay writing.

In response to societal polarization and contentious political landscapes, Erica Hayden and Allison Buzard, educators at a liberal arts college, created an interdisciplinary course titled “Power to the People.” This course delved into the history and strategies of social movements in the United States, addressing contemporary issues such as CRT and LGBTQIA2S+ identities.

Despite anticipating controversy, they recognized the opportunity to foster a critical dialogue that will empower students to navigate a polarized workforce. Their interdisciplinary approach

https://doi.org/10.33823/phtc.v2i1.257.

Jacob Ivey’s article depicts a carefully designed assignment that uses digital archives and focused historical inquiry to equip students with a wide range of research materials, fostering a deep understanding of historical content. This resource is invaluable for educators seeking to cultivate critical thinking and digital literacy skills among their students. Central to this approach is Ivey’s use of online databases, such as the South African History Archive’s “The Land Act Legacy Project Collection,” the African Activist Archive, and the Library of Congress’s “Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936–1938.” In a twenty-first century already characterized by rapid political and cultural shifts, proficiency in digital literacy and associated research methodologies are essential for navigating complex historical narratives in our increasingly interconnected world.

The Proceedings of the Second Annual Teaching and Learning Conference, “Critical Conversations: Teaching and Creating Community in Difficult Times,” present an indispensable and wide-ranging assortment of articles that provide educators with innovative teaching strategies tailored to the evolving dynamics of the classroom. These articles reflect the growing trend among teacher-scholars to explore nuanced approaches to pedagogy, acknowledging the changing educational landscape. In light of these transformations, H-Net continues to prioritize fostering ongoing dialogue and exploration in this essential domain.

However, participating in the annual conference or being published in the conference proceedings represents only two possibilities for engagement with H-Net. For more than thirty years, H-Net has been providing opportunities to share research and teaching tips; discuss historiography, methods, and tools for analysis; and so much more. H-Net (H-Net Reviews) publishes more than 1,500 book reviews each year and maintains an archive of book reviews that dates back to 1993. The H-Net Job Guide lists monthly job openings for academic jobs in history and social sciences, as well as opportunities in the nonacademic world of nonprofits, government, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). As an international interdisciplinary consortium of scholars and educators, H-Net harnesses the vast educational potential of the internet and the World Wide Web. Through two hundred moderated networks, the H-Net Commons provides a diverse array of spaces for the creation and dissemination of knowledge. This content includes peer-reviewed journals and multimedia materials catering to teachers, scholars, and the interested public. We welcome you to join H-Net - Humanities and Social Sciences Online, where global intellect and ideas converge. Whether you are a seasoned scholar or just beginning your academic journey, H-Net provides invaluable resources and a supportive community to help you thrive and engage in collaborative knowledge production in challenging times.

AUTHOR BIO


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Cultivating Social Cohesion through Conflict Transformation in Educational Environments

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ABSTRACT

Teaching in our current times brings many new challenges that professors and students are navigating together. In the conflict resolution field, there are a variety of frameworks that may support fostering inclusivity in the classroom, though these elements still need to be discovered in mainstream academia and beyond. Several strategies will be shared that were implemented in classes, along with feedback from students, indicating a successful and inclusive atmosphere, even though a majority of the topics discussed were challenging. Developing effective strategies can transform a classroom. Active learning strategies can also create inclusive classrooms. In addition to the traditional challenges that students and teachers face, there are political challenges to what, how, and why specific topics are taught. Looking broadly and critically at these challenges may result in negotiating a collaborative process to actively create social cohesion within the classroom and beyond.
Cultivating Social Cohesion through Conflict Transformation in Educational Environments
Sharon McIntyre & Yehuda Silverman

As our world continues to advance, so too does the need for new possibilities in fostering social cohesion in the classroom. The instructor’s role is vital in supporting an environment that will inform students of the ongoing and future challenges. Reimagining the role of professors is crucial. The ripple effect that education has cannot be understated. The possibilities that may manifest in the classroom—whether offline or online, or even a combination of the two—are endless. How the class is structured and the environment that is cultivated is crucial to fostering the developmental capacities of students.

Most professors generally undergo some form of diversity, equity, and inclusion training, though they seldom have an extensive practitioner/academic background in conflict resolution. These skills are vital in classroom dynamics to fostering social cohesion through conflict transformation. For many students, classes can create severe anxiety—with a significant emphasis on the teacher’s disposition and classroom management. Professors can often be seen in a position of power, which can be intimidating. Social cohesion is prevalent in political discourse, documents, and debates. However, the definition is complex, though it relates to a certain degree to tying individuals together. Social cohesion can involve behaviors and feelings toward other racial groups. Various metrics are used to indicate social cohesion. Social-psychological facets are also a social cohesion factor, including belonging and interracial trust.

Teachers who are building connections with students use tools that are not traditional teaching tools but belong to an arsenal of social cohesion tools.

Part of teaching is lecturing, which provides the teacher’s expertise through a formatted delivery for students. However, teachers likely have expectations that they carry into the classroom because of their history and background; their pedagogy informs how they teach. If the context of a teacher’s background is not understood, contributing factors lead to a classroom domain that is socially disconnected. Teachers have to understand themselves before they can understand their students. Building a symbiotic relationship instead of the one-way lecture can be fostered by using techniques that require co-creating and sharing dialogue. Teachers must include students in dialogue to have successful, inclusive classrooms. Students should feel heard and respected. Teachers should go beyond using fixed information such as ethnic demographics, SAT information, and GPA. Instructors should look for alternatives to help students express their circumstances and experiences. This type of engagement is referred to as actively participating in their learning experience. The active participation of students is a powerful tool because it encourages students to take charge of their learning.

Students and teachers can also become partners in cultivating a positive, inclusive relationship. Reimagining the student-teacher relationship to that of co-creating is situated between engaging students and partnering with them. This type of engagement encourages essential partnerships that co-create knowledge in a reciprocal manner and safe place. With reciprocity, all involved can meaningfully participate and share, although they share differently. Students get the support they need while contributing to a mutually beneficial dialogue.
However, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. proclaimed that the greatest power of all is love. Therefore, in the classroom, cultivating a beloved community is crucial to cultivating social cohesion. Therefore, professors should see themselves as inclusive facilitators—not simply as lecturers. Recognizing each student beyond the group dynamics is essential to enhancing the educational environment.

Encouraging classroom dynamics to be dialogue-oriented is also crucial. A dialogue seeks to have everyone voice their thoughts, where the dialogue flows naturally and students are respected. Some of these dynamics include accepting the experiences of the students, allowing them to speak from their own understanding and backgrounds, collaborating together toward common goals, and perhaps most importantly, an inclination to learn from students who may believe differently.5

Having a multifaceted understanding of autoethnography from a cultural context is also beneficial in the classroom.6 Autoethnography is an expansive methodology which has been defined by a variety of researchers.7 The basic tenets of autoethnography include the self (auto), culture (ethno), and writing (graphy), which can cultivate a research paradigm that is potentially transformative.8 Autoethnography often involves the individual’s life experiences as a process to gain additional understanding of the self in connection to people who are different from us, along with the broader society.9 The autoethnographic process can perhaps also cultivate an ability to embrace people who are different than us, even those who may be seen as adversaries.10

Autoethnography is being utilized in various environments beyond research-based approaches and is often now included in practitioner spaces and classrooms. In integrating the transformative autoethnography model, there are several elements to take note of, such as the awareness of experiences that may generate internal conflicts, analyzing and evaluating these experiences and previous assumptions about them, contending with conceivable new perspectives that may emerge and applying them through action, and then undergoing evaluations of the transformations that may have emerged and further thought processes that may lead to additional actions.11 This process could potentially start with the creation of a culturegram (either as part of the process or a standalone activity), which is a cultural diagram of the self in connection with society and beyond.12

A culturegram, which is a component of autoethnography, often includes elements such as religions, interests, ethnicities, and more. These categories could vary based on how the individual decides to create the culturegram, as seen in the image below (fig. 1).

However, while there are traditional templates in creating a culturegram,13 it is important to recognize that placing individuals in boxes may limit the transformative process of the autoethnography. Rather, a creative process of personally creating a culturegram may support additional transformation through the self-reflexive process.14

11. Hernandez, Chang, and Bilgen, Transformative Autoethnography.
12. Chang, Autoethnography as Method.
Fostering inclusivity can also occur through utilizing culturegrams as part of autoethnography in the classroom. Culturegrams can provide an opportunity to analyze and reflect on a variety of personal internal and external elements, which results in seeing a person’s characteristics visually. Through the process of creating a culturegram, the ability to see the self in the present from multiple perspectives can emerge for possible transformation. Questions to help guide students include:

1. What exactly does a culturegram represent to me?
2. How do I identify and connect myself with culture and heritage?
3. Who exactly am I and how do I connect with society?
4. Where may I feel disconnected and not at peace?

5. What parts of my heritage are visible within me, such as my culture, my community, my school, and in physical buildings, such as memorials, monuments, museums, and places of worship?

6. Are these areas inadequate or insufficiently noticeable around me?

7. Do I feel more connected within a digital space rather than a physical space?

8. If so, why? Or are there multiple thoughts arising?

9. Do I feel visible and seen, is my voice being heard?

10. How do I share about myself visually?

The culturegrams can be shared with one another in class—whether online, offline, or through asynchronous capabilities to support learning about one another and cultivating social cohesion in the classroom. The culturegram can also help viewers recognize a person’s values through a visual representation.

Having students understand their own values and recognizing how that contributes to the classroom and their future is also beneficial. Through an adapted and modified worksheet first developed by Maureen Metcalf and Dani A. Robbins, students have the ability to contemplate what values are most important to them, and how they may apply them in their lives. Some of the discussion questions circle around what their top values mean to the students and taking the time for students to reflect on and discuss these elements.

Later in the course or school year, students can then be asked to do a similar activity, this time together as a group. The goal of the activity is to see if students can collectively find and agree on shared values. When individuals can recognize that they may have different values but also can find elements that they all connect and agree on, a deep sense of community can be built. Feedback from open discussions and anonymous surveys shows that values activities have been very warmly received by students and participants in a variety of courses and workshops. This activity provides opportunities for deeper dialogues and a reminder that peace is possible.

Students can also be extremely self-critical, and having the ability to make students feel comfortable sharing challenges can open up possibilities for further growth. Paul Redekop encourages fostering inner peace by contemplating which features we most love about ourselves. Having an activity where students can take some time to reflect and respond to this question may help cultivate a renewed sense of self. Using words such as “I can’t” or “I won’t” can also be limiting.

Encouraging compassionate communication both within the classroom and in the personal lives of students is paramount to recognizing new possibilities for transformation. Through their observations, feelings, needs, and requests, students can become more aware of their


Intrapersonal dynamics, which can foster deeper interpersonal and classroom connections. Being cautious when utilizing some of the following communications, which can prevent students from empathy, is also helpful: shutting down, one-upping, sympathizing, interrogating, explaining, and correcting.20 Accepting each person's experiences as valid and viewing them through their own lens is key to recognizing the complexity of our humanity.

Reminding students to be in the now—the present—is also crucial. William Ury suggests that being in the present can support students' ability to focus on what they can do to make the day better, which in turn can support an encouraging future.21 Understanding and addressing our human needs is also vital for students' well-being. After all, conflicts are often the result of underlying needs not being addressed. When a conflict emerges, the instructor (with support from the students) should ask, “What are you needing right now in this moment?” This question can help open up new pathways for potential growth, especially given the sensitivities that some minority communities are currently experiencing.

Inclusive teachers should design courses to reduce inequality and foster inclusivity.22 They should also find ways to remove social structures that inhibit and marginalize students. Emotional intelligence theories refer to adolescent development benefiting from caring exchanges with adults who are not their parents, such as teachers. There is a lack of data regarding how much a student wants caring exchanges with teachers as they enter college.23 Conversely, empirical research shows that the student-teacher relationship weakens after students enter junior high school and gets worse afterward.24

However, because the need for caring, supportive connections is less after middle school, college students will likely not seek caring, supportive, inclusive exchanges with teachers even though they may benefit significantly from such dialogue. Understanding that relationships have a systemic nature will help teachers identify processes and variables inextricably tied to the teacher-student relationship. Because the relationship functions systemically, they impact the outcome of the relationships. How the student and the teacher perceive and internalize the relationship is paramount for a good relationship that fosters inclusivity. Teachers should also use trauma-informed practices (TIP) in order to promote a safe learning environment.25

Right now, there is no dominant or specific agreed-upon framework for trauma-informed practices.26 Trauma-informed practices are actions that create safe and caring surroundings as they relate to trauma. Trauma-informed practices tout designing a school culture that is safe and secure, building relationships, and promoting the self-efficacy of students. Educators can implement general trauma-informed practices throughout educational arenas. The practices have been evaluated by educators who work as specialized instructional support personnel, teachers, and professionals in the field of education.

The urgency in addressing trauma is critical, because in trauma, students can experience overwhelming conflicts that can become unsolvable.27 As youth continue to develop, the unaddressed or unhealed trauma may be further concerning. Trauma has been connected to substance abuse, depression, bipolar disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder.28 Trauma is often “avoided, ignored, belittled, denied, misunderstood, and untreated,” which can impact students monumentally.29 Additionally, the stress of these traumatic incidents can impact the
When people experience traumatic events, internal complexities may occur that can potentially distort their human needs. Instructors need to have trauma-informed modalities to recognize the elements of trauma to support the well-being of students, be aware of their individual needs, and help them succeed. Some additional trauma-informed strategies are also available through the program Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience (STAR), which has been implemented worldwide in a variety of environments. There are also other publications and resources on trauma healing and restorative justice in schools that provide additional applications.

Having more frameworks for trauma-informed teaching is also essential. Paper Airplanes offers some trauma-informed modalities during the training and onboarding process. The training is in preparation to support students who have been impacted by violence, such as war. Reflective readings are provided to help understand the impact of trauma and possible learning challenges that can emerge. Being able to recognize the complexities of trauma and how to be sensitive in discussing certain topics are also highlighted. Paper Airplanes is a nonprofit organization that focuses on a variety of educational programs for people impacted by conflict. For example, their online English program provides one-on-one sessions and/or conversation sessions. Paper Airplanes seeks additional volunteers to support this initiative, as their English program is in high demand. The skills gained through volunteering will certainly be beneficial for any classroom.

Another best practice includes educators collaborating to help students’ physical and mental health across all educational landscapes. Student support across domains helps to foster a favorable school culture. The goal is to make students feel safe and assured. Teachers have to support students and practice trauma-informed practices for successful outcomes.

As teachers, having facilitative skills is also vital for fostering inclusion. Facilitative skills include being able to make sure each voice is heard and having a variety of activities and tools to connect further with students. Sometimes teachers lack facilitative capabilities, resulting in lecture-based formats that do not fully engage and include students. Lack of facilitation experience can hinder the potential transformation in the classroom. There are a variety of facilitative tools one can include when teaching that may additionally be helpful in supporting students. Facilitation skills may also include conflict coaching and mediation, which can support conflict transformation processes when students forget the founding principles of the classroom guidelines, which should be supported by the students as well at the beginning of the school year or during the first week of a course.

Additional conflict resolution modalities can be learned through the Ripple Effect Education, which recently started a new Training for Trainers online program to support teachers in utilizing conflict resolution skills in the classroom and beyond. Acquaint is also currently implementing AI trainings in conflict prevention, analysis, resolution, and transformation, which students age fifteen and older can access for free by signing up on their website. These AI trainings focus on active listening, how to communicate across differences, and how to communicate...
There is also a need to recognize the importance of the arts in fostering inclusivity. Consider having students create puppets with personalities. In groups, students create stories that have conflicts, and apply conflict resolution frameworks within these stories. Once the stories are finalized, they can be performed in class or through a recorded video for asynchronous courses. Students can share what the process was in collaborating together, and what they learned through connecting together in exploring certain topics within a course that also includes conflict resolution modalities. Additional options include incorporating reflective practices of inclusivity from Shariff Abdullah and Leslie Hamilton, who have a workbook with engaging activities to support transformation. Shariff Abdullah offers another primer that presents a pledge to mend the world so that all can feel included. Some of these dynamics include recognizing that we are all one, and being peaceful. The possibilities are endless in fostering inclusivity, though as teachers, being open to the arts and new opportunities to learn is essential for reimagining peace and the future of our world.


38. Acquaint, "Intercultural Volunteering," 2024


40. Shariff M. Abdullah, Creating a World that Works for All (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishing)
AUTHOR BIO

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ABSTRACT

Educators charged with teaching histories marked by oppression and violence navigate a challenging duality: they must foster critical engagement and deep analysis of traumatic events without causing secondary trauma to their students, all within the context of growing political pressures on history curriculum in K-12 and higher education. This article, based on the results of a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) study in a college-level war and society course, explores student-identified challenges to learning about the Holocaust as well as their strategies for navigating emotional distress associated with that learning process. The article also considers SoTL-informed pedagogical interventions for teaching hard histories with a trauma-informed approach sharing student reactions to an oral history podcast assignment for supporting thoughtful and effective communication about sensitive topics. Among other results, this study found that students approached learning about the Holocaust with varied and self-aware strategies for emotional regulation, despite the common expectation that it would be difficult to hear about the tragic experiences of others. Students also expressed both general and specific benefits to learning this content, despite the significant challenge of navigating sensitive topics with careful language.
How SoTL Can Inform Teaching Traumatic Histories: Findings from a Holocaust Education Study  
Jill M. Abney, Kate Collins, and Isabelle Blaber

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a renewed focus on the efficacy of Holocaust education highlighted by both a marked increase in antisemitic events and public debates about the role of Holocaust education in combating antisemitism. A 2022 audit by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) reported that acts of antisemitism increased 36 percent from 2021 to 2022 with the total number of incidents representing the highest number since the ADL began tracking them in 1979. While many Holocaust education scholars agree that effective Holocaust education is no antidote for modern discrimination and antisemitism, the public discourse suggests that it is commonly looked to as an intervention in those moments. Further, the use of the Holocaust as a unifying lesson on morality or “standing up to bullies” can actually be harmful in its reductiveness.

In addition, the politicization of K-12 and college-level curriculum around the country, especially related to the teaching of hard histories, adds to the pressures and anxieties instructors face. The banning of books and “education gag orders” have increased over 250 percent between January 2021 and January 2022 according to the United States House of Representatives Oversight Committee. Oddly though, and adding to these pressures on educators, legislators across the US are passing Holocaust education mandates simultaneously as curriculum restrictions are being passed against other deeply valuable hard histories. Yet, even as these mandates are passed, educators face school district bans on important texts for teaching the Holocaust and conflicting teaching expectations. For example, school districts in Tennessee and Texas have banned the graphic novel Maus: A Survivor’s Tale (1986) from classrooms and a school administrator in Texas was forced to apologize after stating that teachers should teach “both sides” of the Holocaust. As historian Hasan Kwame Jeffries has said of the study of slavery in the US, we “have a deep-seated aversion to hard history because we are uncomfortable with the implications it raises about the past as well as the present.” Similarly, the study of the Holocaust forces students to reckon with the historical existence and modern-day persistence of harmful and oppressive ideologies. In their exploration of these topics, students must confront inhumane, violent, and oppressive actions of ordinary humans while also recognizing the lingering versions of discrimination and dehumanization that made these large-scale atrocities possible.

Lastly, students around the country and the world are also struggling to make sense of the brutality of the October 7, 2023, Hamas attacks on Israel and Israeli acts of violence against Palestinians. Though students are desperate to understand and explore these upsetting and complex occurrences, many local school districts and universities are prohibiting teachers from discussing the events and leaving their students searching for answers. Given this complex pedagogical, social, and political backdrop, educators who seek to apply trauma-informed teaching strategies are left wondering not only what they can teach but also how they can best teach it without doing harm to their students or drawing unwanted attention from politicians.

As instructors and educational developers, we were eager to explore, through the lens of
Generally, being trauma informed “is to understand how violence, victimization, and other traumatic experiences may have figured into the lives of the individuals” and then using that knowledge to “accommodate the needs and vulnerabilities of trauma survivors” to avoid secondary traumatization.\(^{11}\) Holocaust educators face questions about the potential their content carries for secondary trauma on students.\(^{12}\) Historian Angus Johnston characterizes the dilemma by stating that “it’s my responsibility to teach students about incidents that were catastrophic for the historical actors involved—one can hardly teach history without discussing that kind of ‘traumatic event.’ But it’s also my responsibility to teach about those events in ways that foster a productive engagement with the material.”\(^{13}\) A 2023 study of the potential for vicarious trauma among high school student visitors to Holocaust museums showed that “students who experienced violent adverse childhood experiences tended to have a less immersive museum experience.”\(^{14}\) Put simply, they found that students with prior experiences of trauma had more difficulty engaging productively when learning about traumatic experiences of others: as a result, it is critical that instructors are able to tailor their approaches through a trauma-informed lens to support students’ ability to learn about traumatic content.\(^{15}\)

In a politically charged era where antisemitism, racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia are on the rise, the need for critical exploration of historical events of oppression remains paramount. But intellectual guidance through these traumatic historical experiences also warrants attention to the potential for secondary trauma, the impact it can have on students’ motivations to learn, and the importance of trauma-informed teaching to mitigate potential ill effects to make space for meaningful learning.

To that end we designed an SoTL study with two aims. The first aim was to explore challenges students identified in their study of the Holocaust and, accordingly, the strategies they used to navigate emotional responses to learning. Our second aim was to assess the impact of an oral history assignment and relevant scaffolding intentionally designed by the instructor to support students’ abilities to make meaning despite the weight of content they explored.\(^{16}\) Related questions also allowed students to comment on the affective impact of encountering this content. In what follows, we share pilot data about the way students articulated the importance of learning about the Holocaust, the challenges they anticipated and experienced,
and their strategies for navigating those challenges. We also share students’ assessments of an assignment that asked them to listen to first-hand experiences of Holocaust survivors and then communicate those stories to a contemporary audience through the creation of a podcast.

**Method**

**Design**

This mixed-method pilot study used a pre/post survey design to probe students’ responses and reflections before and after learning about the Holocaust. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Kentucky. The study was designed to be administered in a 100-level history course, “War and Society, 1914–1945,” that featured a three-week unit on the Holocaust.

During that unit, students encountered two thirty-minute thematic lectures on the role of antisemitism and the progression of Nazi policies from discrimination to genocide; Art Spiegelman’s *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale* (volumes 1 and 2); excerpts from historian Christopher R. Browning’s *Ordinary Men*; a recorded survivor testimony from a local survivor living in Kentucky; and readings about Jewish resistance efforts in the ghettos of Białystok and Warsaw, Poland. They also completed two major assignments for the unit, both in small groups. One was a visual comparison presentation using images from *Maus* and digital photo archives. The other was the oral history podcast project that was included as part of this study.

**Participants**

Participants were recruited within the “War and Society, 1914–1945” course at the University of Kentucky, a large public land-grant university in the South. To qualify for inclusion in this study, participants were required to be enrolled in the course and be at least eighteen years old. For both the pre- and post-survey, twenty-three students completed and provided consent for their responses to be used for research. Sample demographics were not solicited due to the small class size and associated concerns with students potentially being identifiable by their demographic information.

A research team member who is not the instructor introduced the study to students in the course while the teacher left the room. Students were briefed about the nature of the survey and the study procedure (i.e., completing a pre- and post-survey). Students were informed that they would be awarded extra credit for participating and that they would not be penalized for opting out. Students were then offered the opportunity to complete the pre-survey during class time. After the unit was complete, the research team member returned while the instructor left the room, and students were offered the opportunity to complete the post-survey in class.

Protecting students’ anonymity was a priority in this process: as a result, the instructor was not present during survey administration, and the data was cleaned and de-identified (i.e., names and identifying information were removed) by the third author who had no known contact with students in the course. Additionally, the instructor was unable to view raw data until after grades were submitted, and even then, they were only able to view de-identified data.
Measures

The surveys were developed by Jill Abney with support from Kate Collins and Isabelle Blaber: survey items were adapted from and inspired by Timothy G. Black’s survey for students on teaching traumatic content.19 Our surveys were designed to be implemented before and after the unit focusing on the Holocaust. The surveys included both quantitative rating scales and qualitative open-response items, designed to address the aims of this study. The pre-survey included sixteen questions; the post-survey included nineteen questions. Both surveys were conducted in Qualtrics and were each estimated to take around fifteen minutes to complete.

The quantitative items were intended to supplement the qualitative questions, in response to the aims of this pilot study. As a result, the quantitative items in both the pre- and post-surveys focused on assessing students’ existing knowledge of—and familiarity with—the Holocaust, students’ confidence in their ability to communicate about the Holocaust, emotion navigation strategies and responses that students might use when learning about hard histories, and the degree of trauma exposure that students experienced in the unit.

In addition to the rating scale items, participants were asked to respond to a variety of open-ended questions in both the pre- and post-surveys. For the purpose of this article, the open-ended items of note from the pre-survey included:

• What are some of the challenges that you anticipate facing when learning about the Holocaust? Please give specific examples.

• What are your go-to practices for navigating emotional distress associated with engaging with topics (e.g., learning about histories) that might be upsetting?

The post-survey included these same items (modified to past tense), as well as the following:

• Tell us about a time when you felt particularly challenged during this course.

• How, if at all, did interacting with oral histories affect your learning about the Holocaust?

• How, if at all, did creating a podcast featuring a Holocaust survivor’s story help you make sense of the Holocaust?

Data Analysis and Coding

We examined students’ rating scale responses to get a sense of the impact of a course unit about the Holocaust—involving creating a podcast using oral histories—on students’ knowledge of the Holocaust and confidence in communicating about the Holocaust. We also examined their strategies for emotionally navigating the course and the degree of trauma exposure in the course. We were particularly interested in whether their responses might have changed over time. The data were analyzed using SPSS version 29.0.20 Analysis included generating descriptive statistics, specifically frequency tables of relevant items for the purpose of this project. Additionally, we explored the correlations between students’ familiarity with the Holocaust and

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19. Timothy G. Black, “Teaching Trauma without Traumatizing: A Pilot Study of a Graduate Counseling Psychology Cohort,” Traumatology 4, no. 3 (September 2008): 40–50. Black is an associate professor of educational psychology and leadership studies at the University of Victoria in Canada.

20. Statistical Package for Social Sciences 29.0 is the software analysis package we used for statistical analysis.
their confidence in discussing the Holocaust with others.

We used thematic analysis to examine the participants’ responses to the qualitative open-ended items of interest. Each team member familiarized themselves with the data and developed preliminary codes and associated themes. The team then collaborated on an overarching thematic structure to capture the participants’ perspectives: this process entailed iteratively comparing the codes and data until consensus was reached around the thematic structure.

Results

Aim 1: Challenges and Strategies

Student Challenges

In their qualitative responses to the pre-survey, when asked what challenges they anticipated when learning about the Holocaust, students overwhelmingly cited “hearing about or seeing images of difficult experiences of others.” Out of the twenty-three students who responded to the pre-survey, fifteen suggested that that would be a key challenge for them. Responses that fell within this code included mention of “violence,” “the gruesome treatment of some people,” “hearing stories,” and the potential “emotional toll.” The next most frequent code for responses was no challenges identified (n=4). Three students mentioned wrestling with the general magnitude of such an event while another three students suggested that the intellectual depth of the content would be a struggle for them.

In the post-survey, when students were encouraged to reflect back on their learning and identify specifically the challenges that they encountered, hearing about or seeing images of difficult experiences of others again emerged as the most frequent response (n=10). More students (n=6) suggested that grappling with the magnitude of the event was a challenge for them. Three additional types of challenges were mentioned that were not present in anticipated concerns: students feeling challenged by the need for attention to careful articulation and language (n=4), frustration they felt about misinformed peers (n=1), and an inability to relate to the victims (n=2).

We anticipated that one of the challenges of the course might be the degree of exposure to traumatic content. As a result, in the quantitative part of the study, we asked students at the post-survey, “How would you rate the amount of exposure to traumatic material during the Holocaust portion of this course?” with response options on a 5-point scale, including “none,” “small,” “moderate,” “heavy,” and “overwhelming.” Five students indicated a small amount of exposure to traumatic material, while seven students reported a moderate amount. Four students indicated that they experienced a heavy amount of exposure to traumatic material during the Holocaust portion of the course.

Students were asked, “How much do you feel being exposed to the traumatic material of this course (i.e., oral histories, stories, images) affected your ability to stay engaged?” with four response options on a 4-point scale, including “not at all,” “sometimes,” “moderately,” and “often.” A majority of the students (n=12) indicated that the exposure to traumatic course material did not affect their ability to stay engaged. Six students reported that the traumatic course content
sometimes affected their ability to stay engaged, while two reported that it moderately affected their ability to stay engaged.

Strategies for Navigating Emotional Distress

In pre-survey responses to the question about strategies for navigating emotional distress, the most commonly coded responses were “stepping away or distancing from the material” (n=5), “talking with others” (n=4), and adopting a stance of “accepting historical reality” as fixed (n=4). These students who anticipated using a strategy of acceptance appeared to use their inability to change the past as a means of distancing themselves. For instance, one student said that “I try to remember what’s done is done and there is no way to change the past.” Likewise, another student said, “I try to tell myself there isn’t anything I could do about the past.” On the other hand, two students in the pre-survey seemed to take a counter-position to that of acceptance. They indicated that a commitment to learning more or understanding the event was how they hoped to manage any emotional distress, with one student stating that “I try to think about the lessons from this terrible event that everyone in the world should learn from, so it doesn’t happen again.”

In their post-survey responses about strategies for navigating emotional distress, “talking to others” and “stepping away/distancing” remained the most common codes (n=6 for both). More students (n=5) articulated a reliance on their “quest to learn more” as a means of coping. Notably, only two students mentioned an acceptance of historical reality in the post-survey. Even one of those students who did reiterate an inability to “reverse what happened” articulated finding purpose in “learning about the stories of the Holocaust and being able to respectfully share those stories is the best way we can show respect to those who suffered.”

Students were shown a list of seven quantitative measures that included a variety of potential emotional navigation strategies and/or responses to difficult emotions that they might engage when learning about violent or oppressive historical events. For example, “I disengage from the class or activities.” On the pre-survey, they were asked the extent to which they agreed that they would likely use/experience each item, and on the post-survey they indicated the extent to which they agreed that they had used/experienced each item.

The juxtaposition of their reactions between the two surveys shows what they anticipated did not actually play out. For instance, in the case of students’ interest in talking with their instructor about working through emotionally distressing content, the number of students who disagreed that they would want to share with their instructor decreased from six to three between the two surveys. Likewise, the number of students interested in sharing with classmates also decreased from eight to five (table 1).
Table 1. Students’ anticipated and actual strategies or experience when navigating emotionally distressing material in Holocaust unit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strong disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I want[ed] to share or discuss with my classmates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want[ed] to share or discuss with my instructor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I keep [kept] my emotions to myself</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>I disengage[d] from the class or activities</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I change[d] the way I think [thought] about it so that I’m [I was] able to stay engaged</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>I feel [felt] a sense of powelessness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anticipated</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel [felt] a sense of guilt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Brackets in items text denote past tense phrasing for post-survey

*a Students’ responses from pre-survey (prior to unit)

*b Students’ responses from post-survey (after the unit)
Aim 2: Student Assessment of the Usefulness of Oral History Podcasts

During the post-survey, students were asked to assess how their interaction with oral histories from survivors affected their learning about the Holocaust. The vast majority of students characterized their encounters with those interviews as adding depth and value to their exploration. Only one student out of the nineteen who wrote responses for that item said "N/A," which we interpreted as having no impact. The rest of the eighteen responses characterized the experience as providing a deeper or more detailed understanding, making the content feel "real," or facilitating a feeling of connection to survivors.

The encounter with the oral history interview was only one portion of the podcast assignment. The other major portion was to then use the survivor’s story to create a podcast that communicated key findings and connected them with the themes of the course. Of the twenty-one responses students shared assessing the impact of the podcast assignment on helping them make sense of the Holocaust, only four students said that it did not help.

To assess student perceptions about their preexisting knowledge, they were asked to react to a series of quantitative measures gauging their familiarity with the content in general and individual survivor stories. They were also asked to rate their confidence in communicating about the Holocaust with others outside the class.

Participants were asked, “How familiar are you with the stories of individual Holocaust survivors?” at the pre-survey, on a 6-point scale, including “not at all familiar,” “mostly unfamiliar,” “slightly unfamiliar,” “slightly familiar,” “mostly familiar,” and “completely familiar.” Most participants (n=14) reported being slightly familiar with stories of individual Holocaust survivors. Two students reported feeling mostly familiar, while the remainder reported being slightly (n=4) or mostly (n=3) unfamiliar. At the post-survey, students were asked the same question regarding their familiarity with Holocaust survivor stories: most students reported feeling either slightly familiar (n=8) or mostly familiar (n=7). A few (n=4) students reported being very familiar with Holocaust survivor stories, while one student reported feeling slightly unfamiliar. Upon further analysis, we found that students’ familiarity with survivor stories was significantly related to their confidence in discussing the Holocaust with friends and family members, $r = .57, p < .01$. This correlation, while notable, is unsurprising given that students’ knowledge of individual stories and experiences likely contributed to their depth of knowledge and ability to talk about the Holocaust with others.
Table 2. Students’ reported confidence in their knowledge of and communication about the Holocaust

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How confident are you...</th>
<th>Not at all confident</th>
<th>Mostly unconfident</th>
<th>Slightly unconfident</th>
<th>Slightly confident</th>
<th>Mostly confident</th>
<th>Completely confident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In your current knowledge of the Holocaust?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before unit</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After unit</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your ability to discuss the Holocaust outside of a classroom setting (i.e., with friends or family in conversation)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before unit</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After unit</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your ability to speak meaningfully about the experiences of victims of the Holocaust?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After unit</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

To explore the implications of our data, we need to delve a bit deeper into the context of Holocaust education. Ongoing conversations about Holocaust education pedagogy reveal multifaceted and, at times, paradoxical approaches for meaningful instruction. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) urges instructors to practice “responsible methodological choices” that “do not exploit the students’ emotional vulnerability.” Thus, instructors must balance student use of primary sources and survivor testimonies with the risk of invoking student emotional responses. These responses can cause students to shut down or disengage, but they can also lead to “illusory identification” with victims hindering student learning. Scholars and social critics also disagree on the appropriate role of empathy. For instance, historian Nancy Bristow recognizes “the interconnection between intellect and emotion and the importance of empathy in students’ learning” and assumes that “many of [her] students will have powerful and even emotional responses to the material.” Yet others argue that passive empathy can cause students to remain at a superficial, sentimentalized level of investigation.
Author Dara Horn has criticized Holocaust educators as "obsessed with building empathy" and suggests a focus instead on "curiosity" as the key to ideal Holocaust education.26

**Challenges and Strategies**

Our data show that these college students, whether through previous learning experiences or other knowledge of the Holocaust, came in expecting to engage with difficult materials. Their responses suggest that students experienced anticipatory compassion toward the victims of the Holocaust even before they approached the content. They also came in with a range of strategies to navigate the challenges they expected to face. We cannot know if they would admittedly identify these as regulatory practices or to what extent they were effective, but many of the strategies they shared were varied, introspective, and reflective.

Some strategies, on the other hand, may initially seem callous, insensitive or disappointing. For example, a student in the pre-survey suggested a strategy of focusing on “the positive aspects of the tragedy and the people who survived.” This choice of wording may unintentionally imply that there was a positive side to such a terrible event. Yet the latter part of this response hints at the student’s effort to cope with an emotional response by valuing the lives and experiences of survivors. Similarly, the student response suggesting that our current actions cannot rectify historical atrocities could be interpreted as defeatism. However, these strategies could also be understood as ways of creating emotional distance from the most harrowing aspects of the subject, thereby enabling the students to stay sufficiently engaged for learning.

Strategies that help students distance or step away from content are unsurprising given that “research on the relationship between identity and teaching and learning difficult histories suggests that historical injustice with ongoing legacies provoke strong emotions among both teachers and students,” including “guilt, innocence, anger, resentment, or shame based on the explicit and implicit ethical judgements that are being made.”27 Research about learning and hard histories has identified concepts of guilt and complicity as insufficient in examining the impact of learning about hard histories on learners. But it is also important to note that "perceived responsibility does not necessarily coincide with actual responsibility" and may even reflect "irrational beliefs" of one’s connection to events.28 Furthermore, because the political discourse has come to rely on ill-defined concepts, such as “discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress,” it is pertinent that we consider what students actually have to say about their experiences.29

As students explored the Holocaust in more depth, they were asked to reckon with the broader global implications of antisemitism and its role in perpetuating the event, thus posing a chance for the development of certain feelings of powerlessness, guilt, or shame. For example, students learned about restricted immigration quotas in the US and other Allied nations, the role of Jim Crow laws as a model for Adolf Hitler’s discriminatory policies, and the part American companies like IBM played in the identification of potential victims. As a result, students must recognize the varied extent of complicity of many nations in the murder of millions of European Jews.30

However, no student mentioned in their written responses anticipating feelings of guilt (see table 1), and none wrote about any such challenges retrospectively. Their responses to the
pre-survey’s quantitative questions revealed mixed expectations about potential feelings of guilt and powerlessness when learning about difficult histories. Initially, eight students somewhat agreed that they expected to feel guilty during the Holocaust unit. After completing the unit, when students were asked whether or not they experienced these feelings, the number of students decreased slightly to seven. In terms of feelings of powerlessness, six students anticipated this emotion before the unit, but only four reported experiencing it in retrospect. The small sample size limits definitive conclusions but indicates considerable variation among students regarding the emotional impact they expected. Moreover, it seems that the educational experience did not significantly increase instances of students actually feeling guilt or powerlessness. We are eager to analyze a more extensive data set from the current iteration of this study to evaluate these proposed observations. The pairing of the quantitative and qualitative data suggests that students recognized the complexity of their emotional and psychological reactions brought on by this topic. Given contemporary attempts to prohibit the teaching of valuable hard histories by using vague arguments about feelings of “discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress,” we posit that similar SoTL projects about those histories would be useful in providing a data-informed retort to the narrative of assumption currently driving that debate.31

Not all students relied on distancing or indicated that guilt or powerlessness were concerns. These other students relied more heavily on prioritizing learning as a way of navigating emotional distress. Two students in the pre-survey along with three additional students in the post-survey seemed to find direction in what they saw as a greater moral quest. Specifically, students listed thinking about “respectfully shar[ing] those stories” and “prevent[ing] atrocities like this in the future” as strategies for navigating their own emotional distress. These strategies also seem to move beyond individual approaches to coping and toward social responsibility. Similarly, one student stated in the post-survey that seeking to “understand the people and what they were going through, even though I never could, helped me navigate the emotional stress.” There is a recognition here that in many ways, the things we seek to learn and accomplish when learning about hard histories are actually impossible. But that impossibility does not reduce the importance of it. Julie J. Golding, in her assessment of vicarious trauma at Holocaust museums, notes that “many Holocaust educators speak anecdotally about students who are unable to process what they learn about the Holocaust, some who respond negatively to the information, and others who become obsessed with a need to learn more.” The responses from our survey participants would support those reflections.32

Post-survey open-ended responses show that students experienced the unexpected challenge of paying careful attention to language when discussing the Holocaust. It can be disconcerting to discuss the traumatic historical experiences of groups and individuals in a thoughtful manner. These responses support the necessity of intellectual exercises where students wrestle with discomforting content in community. The instructor explicitly discussed the priority of using insightful and precise language throughout the course—not just in the unit about the Holocaust—and coached students on how to make effective communicative choices to that effect. While this balance is difficult to strike, it is critical to avoid making students so nervous about saying the “right” thing that they do not participate. Student comments seem to suggest that they bought into this priority and recognized the value of meeting this challenge. One student said a challenge for them was “being mindful of what words to use and how to address things that happened such as bombings and traumatic events to not make someone uncomfortable or upset.” Another

32. Golding, “Vicarious Trauma,” 4. Golding is a curator at the Holocaust Museum and Center for Tolerance and Education in Suffern, New York, and a former doctoral fellow at Brandeis University.
student pointed to "how sensitive the situations were and" how important it was "to talk about it appropriately." Still another stated that "I realized that talking about how serious it was came with a new vocabulary of sorts." While this concern about language could be interpreted as evidence of heightened anxiousness, we argue that this is indicative of how willing students were to engage because they were actively thinking how they might discuss it effectively, respectfully, and appropriately. These comments do not suggest frustration with this task, nor did the course evaluations at the end of the semester. But rather, students naturally accepted that when we talk about hard things, we must do so mindfully.

This attention to language and to mindfulness of communication in community does not come without its obstacles. Even though this course section occurred before the most recent eruptions of violence in the Middle East, students still had to confront communicating with students who have varying levels of knowledge about—and personal connection to—the region and of the history being discussed. At times, misinformation or lack of education appeared in the form of failed modern-day analogies. One student even pointed to "misinformed peers about modern events or inaccurate language being used" as a challenge they faced. Another student cited that the challenges they had in communicating with their peers in the class informed their practice of talking with their family. They admitted, "I did not feel that a supportive relationship was formed over the semester where I could talk openly about these things." Again, these different obstacles that students identified, as well as the various strategies they admitted to using, indicate that they sought to maintain their emotional regulation to continue the intellectual work of the course even though it was difficult. They also reveal that students clearly recognized the importance of conversation in this process even if they had to seek other spaces for that dialogue.

The Oral History Podcast Assignment

According to the quantitative results of the pre-survey (table 1), the majority of students were either neutral or uninterested in processing what they learned with their classmates or instructor, but in instructional spaces like this course, such shared communication and processing are vital. The struggle to grasp traumatic historical events pushes students to ask significant questions (e.g., why continue to learn about this if it is over and in the past? what can we do about it now?) that are best explored in partnership with others. Strategies for mitigating possible secondary trauma include communicating with others, working with groups, and reflecting together with those who are experiencing similar content. These opportunities to share with one another help with the development of a classroom community that can provide an environment of safety necessary for students to process and voice these emotions about traumatic exposures. Social support is paramount in cultivating individual resilience and is a protective factor against developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) especially for those who have experienced “human-generated traumatic events.”

A strong, supportive community can provide and protect space to process emotions, encouraging students to engage in productive discussion rather than an emotional shutdown.

To facilitate this meaningful conversation and collaboration, the instructor designed a podcast assignment to scaffolded opportunities for students to work in small groups to tackle tough questions together in community, especially those students who ask the challenging “what now?” questions (see appendices 1 and 2 for assignment description). It also was a pedagogical


intervention to pull students into encounters with survivors whose stories help to humanize the often overwhelming statistics and numbers. Historian Andrea Eidinger articulates the potential frustration, aptly stating that “we are often implored to ‘never forget,’ but we seldom take a moment to talk about what and how we are supposed to remember.” The podcast is representative of the act of bearing witness in that students must listen through the oral history of their choice and then communicate key points to a modern audience (in this case, their classmate) through a modern medium like a podcast. As first-generation survivors pass away, students will grow increasingly dependent on recorded survivor stories for the humanizing first-hand accounts of these atrocities. But more than that, we argue that students also play a role in communicating these stories and lessons to others. Finally, the podcast also gives students the opportunity to practice thoughtful, careful language as they explore these topics—something they were asked to do throughout the semester.

Students had to choose an oral history interview or recorded survivor testimony found in the University of Kentucky’s Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, which includes several interviews of survivors living in Kentucky, or from the US Holocaust Memorial Museum’s (USHMM) collection of testimonies. They listened closely to their chosen recording, studying it and comparing what they learned there with the themes from the course. Then they were tasked with creating a podcast where they featured excerpts from the oral history interview along with their commentary and conversation that connected the story to some key themes from the course. Specifically, students were to explore how oral history demonstrates the impact of war on individuals, what role survivor stories play in the study of the Holocaust, and how the information in the oral history interview compared with themes and information of the course.

Student responses to the assignment were generally positive and suggested that it did support them in the development of skills in communicating about hard histories. The quantitative data support that students' familiarity with Holocaust survivor stories was significantly related to their confidence in discussing the Holocaust with friends and family members. When asked how, if at all, did interacting with oral histories affect their learning about the Holocaust, the emphasis on gaining a deeper, more "real" understanding and gaining a proximity or familiarity with the victims turned up time and again. Part of that depth, of course, certainly came in the form of the "sad and eye-opening" experiences of individuals. Multiple students used the metaphor of having one's eyes opened. Students also mentioned the encounters going beyond the textbook and "reinforcing" the content they had learned elsewhere. It is also notable that students mentioned that they appreciated the "freedom in picking which audio source" they used. Student choice is one of seven principles of trauma-informed teaching (adapted from trauma-informed care). Giving students the option of which survivor stories they wished to encounter gave them control over the content they would need to engage closely with thus contributing to their feelings of safety.

When students were asked how, if at all, creating a podcast featuring a Holocaust survivor’s story helped them make sense of the Holocaust, the majority shared some ways that it enhanced their learning. Of the four who said it did not help, one aptly stated that “it didn’t really help me make sense of the Holocaust. I don’t think I will ever actually understand it, though.” Another student cited the podcast creation software as too difficult. Much of the impact noted in reference to the oral histories was echoed in the assessment of the podcast as well, with

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students citing how it added to the “realness” of the content, allowing them to connect with survivors, explore more details, and communicate with others. Notably, three students claimed that the assignment helped them stay focused and engaged. Students named the podcast creation process as a potential site for reflection and meaning making, stating that “it was nice to talk to a partner about it ... and to hear other perspectives.” In the quantitative data, students’ confidence in discussing the Holocaust with their friends and family increased after the unit (see table 2). While we can only speculate at correlation here, we feel that any practice students had in gleaning meaning and sharing with a different audience helps increase that confidence and might translate to their ability and willingness to share what they learn with others, possibly even advocating for others who are oppressed or marginalized in some way.

Conclusion

As instructors of hard histories continue to scrutinize their approaches to teaching in ways that are trauma-informed and reflective, it is useful to consider the practices for helping students maintain emotional regulation as they work through these topics. At times, this can seem like an impossible task in that, although we can make responsible pedagogical choices, we cannot necessarily control our students’ dysregulation since different things cause dysregulation in different people. But we can support them in the development of their own agency of regulation by asking them to reflect on strategies they might use ahead of time, encouraging them to consider other strategies for regulation if their initial attempts are insufficient, and continuing to empower them to do so in class contexts. The instructor’s explicit acknowledgment of the trauma of the content and approaching it in the most responsible way possible is a vital step, but pulling students into the process is key. By communicating that it is okay for them to have an emotional response to the content and to employ strategies that help them cope, students are empowered to identify where they are approaching the edges of their window of tolerance—where learning happens best—and take action to mitigate potential dysregulation. In addition, coaching students to do the hard but valuable work of communicating carefully and thoughtfully in dealing with these histories pulls them into the work of bearing witness, remembering, and meaning making.37

Hard histories are indeed hard, and they stretch our capacity to find logic and reason in the actions of others when sometimes there is none to be found. But this study demonstrates that students are willing and able to lean into the discomfort of challenging educational work and there are pedagogical approaches we can take as instructors to support them in that process. Not only that, but they want to explore these histories as they look for answers and paths forward into the future where hopefully we have more power to prevent such atrocities.

Appendix 1: Oral History Podcast Assignment Prompt

To submit this assignment please follow the instructions in this video starting around minute 8. You will upload the file of your audio recording to either your UKY OneDrive or Google Drive. Then generate a shareable link and post that link as the Canvas assignment submission.

Working with a partner or on your own, use GarageBand to create an 8–10 minute podcast in which you explore an oral history interview of a Holocaust survivor and connect that survivor’s story with what you’ve learned and read for this course. The podcast should include at least two short clips from the survivor’s recording OR direct quotations read by the presenters.

The interview can come from UK’s Nunn Center or the USHMM archive and must be preapproved by the instructor. Your podcast should explore how the interview contributes to your understanding of war and society. The podcast should be conversational but demonstrate careful listening/reading, thought, and planning. The podcast should answer the following questions:

• How do the stories in the oral history demonstrate the impact of war on individual human beings?

• What role do survivor stories like this play in the historical study of the Holocaust?

• In your opinion, what was the most interesting aspect of your selected interview?

• How does the information and insight provided by this interview compare with the themes and information from the readings, lectures, and discussions in this course?

Be sure to verbally cite the location where the interview is housed, the date it was recorded, the survivor’s name and biographic information (if available), and any other key demographic information.

Some notes on podcast creation: be yourself and be creative. If you are working with a partner, consider using an interview or “talk-show” style format. Feel free to add intro or transition music. Do one single audio clip or use different segments. You can do this however you want. Speak naturally but slow enough that I can understand what you are saying.

Note: The assignment prompt also includes links to a video tutorial of how to use GarageBand created by the instructor.
Appendix 2: Podcast Assignment Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Point Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podcast begins with an introduction including the description of the interview and the points/arguments that will be covered.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Oral history analysis</strong></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podcast provides an overview of the oral history, an in-depth look at some of the specific stories from the recording, and what oral histories provide to the study of the Holocaust. Includes at least two clips from the recording.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Impact of war</strong></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The podcast offers a clear discussion of the impact of war on individuals. This discussion should be organized and clear, using themes and transitions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Class comparison</strong></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podcast offers some commentary on how findings from the source compare to the content explored in class.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elements of clarity</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podcast includes several elements that contribute to the clarity of the message (e.g., a brief recap or summary at the end, transitions, appropriate tone, speed of speech, music when appropriate).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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AUTHOR BIO

Jill M. Abney is the associate director of the Center for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT) and an instructor of history at the University of Kentucky. In her educational development role, she supports instructors as they seek to foster community, equity, and belonging in their courses. As an instructor, she teaches war and society and history research methods.

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Introducing the Social Constructions of Race, Gender, and Socioeconomic Class in a Health Sciences Curriculum

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KEYWORDS
General Education
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Gender
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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses approaches to teaching an introductory social science course geared toward students majoring in health sciences programs. Using the methodologies and scholarship of history, sociology, anthropology, and political science, the course explores the ways in which conceptions of human identity—namely the categories of race, gender, and socioeconomic class—are socially and culturally meaningful. The authors discuss specific classroom strategies for highlighting the historical role of the natural sciences and the health professions in erecting and reifying social structures of racial, gender, and socioeconomic class hierarchy and oppression and suggest primary sources and classroom exercises to illustrate how the social construction of identity relates and contributes to ongoing health disparities. As instructors, we urge students to consider how they, as future health care providers, might apply these concepts in clinical settings to mitigate harm and promote health equity.
Introducing the Social Constructions of Race, Gender, and Socioeconomic Class in a Health Sciences Curriculum

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The four authors of this article comprise the core social sciences faculty at the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences (MCPHS) in Boston. In our roles, we champion the importance of incorporating social science perspectives into the curriculum for our undergraduates, most of whom are training for careers in health care. We believe that all college students should gain a critical and complicated understanding of society and culture, and we recognize the important role of the social sciences in providing tools for achieving that goal. We argue that developing this type of perspective is especially vital for future health care professionals. In the last decade, health sciences educators have begun to highlight how culture, society, and systems of power influence health and medicine. Not only do the socially constructed identities of race, gender, and socioeconomic class inform the individual clinical encounter between patient and practitioner, but structural forces affect individuals, populations, and health care policies and practices as well. Structural factors beyond one's immediate medical or family history influence a patient's—and a population's—health. We contend that health care practitioners are better equipped to accurately and effectively assess and treat patients when they consider the social determinants of health, "the nonmedical factors that influence health outcomes."¹ The frameworks, key concepts, and methodologies of the social sciences illuminate the historical roots and contemporary implications of the social determinants of health and the structural factors that reproduce health disparities, particularly along lines of race, gender, and socioeconomic class.

In this paper we introduce readers to our core social science course, “American Culture, Identity, and Public Life” (LIB 133), to illustrate what this looks like in the classroom. We provide suggestions for instructors who are interested in teaching an introductory social science course to health sciences students. Since its inception, LIB 133 has served as a pillar of the general education curriculum at MCPHS, providing students with an introduction to the social science disciplines of history, political science, sociology, and anthropology. We prioritize discussion of the social identities of race, gender, and socioeconomic class using a wide variety of sources, including memoirs, government documents, visual media, and journalistic and scholarly articles. We also incorporate examples and case studies from health care contexts as we examine identity, culture, and power through a social science lens. Our approach to the course topics acknowledges the reality of intersectional identities that shape experiences of power and oppression in our society. Recognizing and reflecting upon how social identity relates to systems of power and knowledge is crucial in any social science context, but it is especially relevant to the lived experiences of our students and the diverse patient communities they will care for in their professional lives.²

MCPHS's student body reflects the diversity of the city of Boston, which houses its main campus and undergraduate programs, as well as the health care settings in which our students are
trained and where many will begin their careers. According to the MCPHS website, 41 percent of our undergraduates are students of color. Among these, 46 percent are of Asian heritage, 27 percent identify as Black or African American, and 26 percent identify as Hispanic or Latino. Roughly three-quarters of our students identify as women. International students comprise 15 percent of our student body. Immigrants, first-generation students, commuters, and returning students likewise contribute to the array of perspectives present in a typical MCPHS classroom.  

The course learning objectives and classroom activities encourage the development of critical thinking and communication skills. This process includes understanding the concept of the intersectionality of identities and the importance of recognizing how interlocking systems of oppression can lead to disparate outcomes in health, education, jobs, and access to political participation and influence. Ultimately, we hope that students’ recognition of complex social identities informs their education as they progress through their professional studies and clinical training. Given that most of our student body has chosen our institution because of an interest in the health sciences, establishing the framework that central facets of identity are socially constructed requires some legwork. Many come with a preconceived notion, perhaps an unconscious assumption, that race and gender in particular are in some ways natural or inherent—that is, biologically essential identities fixed at birth. The disciplinary lenses of history, political science, sociology, and anthropology are therefore central to the pedagogical strategies by which we work to highlight the many, sometimes conflicting, ways that meanings about identity are made. Culture is, of course, central to this process, as it is through human interactions, beliefs, and values that ideas about social identity are formed and reproduced in everyday life. In other words, it is in and through these spaces that we as individuals and groups make meanings and then organize our thoughts and actions around those meanings.  

We begin our exploration of social identities by trying to define the concept of race, a term everyone knows but few undergraduates can clearly articulate. In brainstorming, students frequently conflate race with skin color but quickly acknowledge that people with widely varying skin tones are often grouped under the same racial classification, while people with similar skin tones can be assigned different racial classifications. If race is not the same as skin color, what then is it? How do we come to understand race? Students often toss out examples from popular culture or news media, as well as their personal backgrounds, highlighting the power of images and cultural assumptions in shaping our understanding and experiences of group identity. However, LIB 133 emphasizes the central role of laws and institutions like schools, research bodies, and medical facilities in shaping these definitions—an influence perhaps even more powerful than popular culture because it is often invisible and because those institutions have the power to enforce or legitimize the definitions they create. We therefore make a conscious effort to highlight the role that natural scientists and medical professionals have historically played in shaping understandings of and ideas about race, and in addressing or failing to address how those ideas contribute to racial health disparities. A 2018 issue of National Geographic has proven useful in illustrating that race is not “natural” or scientifically “real” but instead a social idea that natural scientists and health professionals have played an instrumental role in molding and legitimizing. In an article titled, “There’s No Scientific Basis for Race—It’s a Made-Up Label,” journalist Elizabeth Kolbert notes that the concept of racial difference among humans is only about five hundred years old—an almost entirely new idea in the context of human existence.
However, that concept is nonetheless older than the United States and has been a defining feature of its political, economic, and social systems.4

In examining primary sources like the Declaration of Independence (1776) and Thomas Jefferson’s Notes on the State of Virginia (1785), students analyze the role of the nation’s founders in establishing a sense that the United States is exceptional and singular in its commitment to human equality while at the same time holding and acting upon beliefs in a supposedly “natural” racial hierarchy in which people of European ancestry have historically dominated and oppressed members of other racial groups. A mere nine years after immortally asserting in the Declaration of Independence that “all men are created equal” and “endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights,” Jefferson also affirmed, “I advance it, therefore, as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstance, are inferior to the whites in the endowment both of body and mind.” Jefferson surmised, “We will not be able to know this [the source of this inferiority] until science gives us the answers.”5 Here Jefferson called upon science to explain differences among racial groups while in the same thought considering the possibility that “time and circumstance”—factors shaped by history, society, and culture—fostered the racial differences he observed as an enslaver of hundreds of human beings, among them his own biological children. The dynamic at the center of his relationship with people of African descent was one of power, a fact that shaped his behaviors and attitudes about race—and surely also the thoughts, behaviors, and attitudes of those he held in bondage. A close analysis and group discussion of this primary source allows students to understand how thinking about race took specific forms in the nation’s infancy and how the language used to discuss race has evolved over time, even as certain racial stereotypes have persisted.

Assigned sources and class exercises also expose students to moments when practitioners of science and medicine have participated in the process of social identity formation, particularly in terms of race and gender. Kolbert’s article does an excellent job of sketching natural scientists’ and physicians’ historical efforts to use scientific data to quantify and explain the world in which they lived while also highlighting how breakthroughs in science during the twentieth century disproved the very premise upon which that earlier research was based. Known today as the “father of scientific racism,” physician and naturalist Samuel George Morton set out, perhaps unbeknownst to him, to answer Jefferson’s call for science to “give us the answers” about human racial differences. Seeking to “prove” and therefore rationalize white superiority as the nation veered toward a civil war over the institution of race-based enslavement, Morton viewed the size of the human brain case as a proxy for intelligence. Building on this faulty premise, Morton measured the volume of skulls from members of different racial groups. Morton’s findings confirmed his suspicions, leading him to conclude that people of European ancestry were more intelligent, while people of African ancestry (Morton referred to this group as “Ethiopians”) were least intelligent. In a historical context well before modern understandings of evolution and genetics, Morton explained the differences he observed as the work of separate acts of creation.

He decided, in other words, that a racial hierarchy in which people of European ancestry held, in some cases, absolute power over members of other groups was not evidence of the oppressors’ inhumanity or tyranny, but was in fact the divinely ordained order. Students often respond with disbelief when prompted to consider the “science” behind Morton’s research and findings and

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are often quick to identify how the questions he asked shaped the answers he found. This explanation of racial inequality, particularly as driven by systems of white supremacy, served the interests of enslavers and “Europeans” more broadly, at the expense of those assigned to the bottom of the racial hierarchy. In 1854, on the eve of the Civil War, historian George Fitzhugh applied the implications of this race “science” in a paternalistic defense of enslavement. Arguing that “the Negro is but a grown up child, and must be governed as a child,” Fitzhugh concluded, “the negro race is inferior to the white race, and living in their midst, they would be far outstripped or outwitted in the chaos of free competition. Gradual but certain extermination would be their fate.”


As aspiring health professionals, and scientists in a broader sense, MCPHS students interact in this introductory social science course with primary sources that reflect the evolution of the scientific method and scientific inquiry more broadly, some of which make glaringly evident how culture informs those processes. Key concepts and frameworks of the natural sciences, the medical sciences, and the pseudoscience of racism are cultural products that have served specific functions in particular times and spaces. Students examine, for example, images published in 1854 by physician Josiah C. Nott and Egyptologist George Gliddon in support of Morton’s findings. In illustrating human subjects of different racial groups, the images render explicit the racial prejudices of the artists. The clearest contrast is between the portrayal of a “Negro” subject, which in its proximity to an image of a chimpanzee is meant to be associated with the subhuman, and that of a “European” specimen, portrayed as the statue Apollo Belvidere to signify the class, refinement, culture, and intellect of antiquity and its implied association with the presumed superiority and intelligence of people of European descent. The cultural values applied to these specimens are undeniable. In contrast to the classical Roman statue meant to mark the modern concept of “whiteness,” the “Negro” subject is rendered by his tattered coat and hat to be a pauper. The evidence this graphic offers seems to affirm why this is the case: the figure has been “proven” to be a lower intelligence and presumably, therefore, of lower social worth.

California Newsreel’s *Race: the Power of an Illusion* documentary series (2003) offers two illuminating examples of moments in US history when state governments explicitly and intentionally worked to reify the boundaries of race while, ironically, actively revising the legal definitions of those boundaries. Historian James Horton notes that at the same moment in US history—the early 1910s—various states legally inscribed conflicting definitions of the racial categories that today correlate with “Black” and “white.” At that time, Florida legally defined a “colored” person as someone with one-eighth African ancestry, while Virginia’s definition included anyone with one-sixteenth African ancestry, deploying a more narrow, exclusionary definition of whiteness. States like Alabama offered the most expansive definition of Blackness—and therefore the most exclusionary definition of whiteness—marked by a so-called one drop rule that rendered a person with any African ancestry whatsoever to be “Negro.” As Horton points out,
this meant that one's race could “literally, legally” change by crossing state lines. This example makes clear that race as an ascribed identity is historically, culturally, and socially contextual. Conflicting legal definitions make plain the historical role of laws and institutions like legislatures, courts, medical institutions, and public health agencies in developing, codifying, and revising racial classifications.

The film also makes clear how definitions of race have varied across time. Horton offers the example of the Commonwealth of Virginia’s efforts to broaden the legal definition of Blackness through the passage of the 1924 Racial Integrity Act, essentially instituting a “one drop” rule for anyone with any “trace whatsoever of any blood other than Caucasian,” with a notable exception for those with “one-sixteenth or less of the blood of the American Indian and ... no other non-Caucasian blood.” In addition to expanding prohibitions of interracial marriage and removing designations for mixed-race ancestry on birth certificates, the Racial Integrity Act also eliminated legal designations for Native Americans, classifying those with less than one-sixteenth tribal ancestry as white and all others as “colored.” This statute thus further reified a binary black/white definition of race in Virginia that set a path toward what scholars have called the “paper genocide” of Native Americans. As a direct result of this law, no Native American tribe in Virginia received the benefits of federal recognition until well into the twenty-first century. In effect, the 1924 law wrote those tribes and their descendants out of legal existence. The enduring power of race as an idea associated with biology and heredity is indeed evident in the notion of “blood quantum,” a colonial construct devised by the US government to reduce the number of individuals able to assert a Native American identity and therefore a claim to land, health insurance, and other entitlements. Many Native American nations today continue to employ blood quantum as a means of regulating membership, thereby affirming a racialized notion of Native American identity that researchers suggest may contribute to racial health disparities by framing them in biological terms rather than focusing on the social determinants of health.

The Racial Integrity Act provides another opportunity to engage science-minded students with primary sources that illustrate how the fields of medicine and public health have been instrumental in the process of racialization. Walter Plecker, a public health doctor, white supremacist, and eugenicist who led Virginia’s Bureau of Vital Statistics from 1912 to 1946, was a key force in the passage of Virginia’s new law. Letters from Plecker illustrate the power of physicians and public health officials in policing racial classifications while endeavoring to legitimize their roots in medicine and science. In a letter dated April 30, 1924, Plecker wrote to the mother of an infant born the previous summer, informing her that the father of her child was “Negro”:

This is to give you warning that this is a mulatto child and you cannot pass it off as white. A new law passed by the last legislature says that if a child has one drop of Negro blood in it, it cannot be counted as white. You will have to do something about this matter and see that this child is not allowed to mix with white children. It cannot go to white schools and can never marry a white person in Virginia. It is an awful thing.

Thankfully, most students cannot imagine a context in which someone in Plecker’s position could openly make such a condemnation. That Plecker did so routinely and forcefully makes clear that practitioners of medicine and public health are not simply intellectuals removed from questions of politics or identity; instead, “politics” must be understood to include struggles over
power, both played out in and constituted by the ways that humans understand bodily autonomy, self-definition, group identity, and civil rights. Health practitioners have not merely enforced definitions of race; they have worked to create and re-create the legitimacy of the concept of race itself. The present-day significance of race in terms of public health is evident in areas such as maternal and infant mortality, the racial wealth gap, access to quality health care, and myriad other social determinants of health.

Further discussion, particularly of recent examples, makes clear that these historical ideas about race and human racial difference continue to inform research and the practice of medicine. Race corrections, for example, continue to be used in multiple medical specialties, such as cardiology, nephrology, pulmonology, and neurology. Race correcting involves adjusting diagnostic test results based on a patient’s race; the results of test adjustments usually deem Black patients “less sick” than their white counterparts with the same test results. Consequences of race corrections have included fewer Black recipients of kidney transplants, fewer respiratory interventions for Black patients during the COVID-19 pandemic, and fewer payouts by the National Football League to the families of living and deceased Black football players diagnosed with dementia, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), and chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE).17

In illustrating that race is a social idea rather than a biological fact, we urge students to think about and recognize not only how race is a social construct but also how science is socially and culturally informed. Even as it measures the observable world, science is driven by culturally derived questions and funneled through culturally informed understandings of how the world operates. When we say that race is “made-up,” we echo Kolbert’s assertions that there are no biological markers for racial difference and no human subspecies, and that the attributes we ascribe to race are in fact more accurately the result of environment and culture. As Kolbert emphasizes, we do not mean that race does not matter. On the contrary, race as a social idea is incredibly powerful because its meaning is adaptable and can be made to suit the purposes of those with the power to define it. The US government has historically made race important. The US Census Bureau counts people by race, and its own evolving language makes clear that racial categories are dynamic and changing, not only in terms of terminology but also in terms of specificity. Critically, public health research and policies rely on the US Census Bureau’s data. The social idea of race is central to the ordering of US society, particularly regarding determinations about who is guaranteed which rights and protections, who has access to which opportunities, and who is left most vulnerable to environmental, institutional, and economic hazards and harms. Race is important because humans believe it to be important, and particularly because we persist in believing race to be somehow biologically meaningful and therefore unchanged, despite all evidence to the contrary.18 Understanding race as a social idea is critical for future health care professionals who will interact with, care for, or conduct research on patients whose risk factors, health outcomes, and personal experiences with and thoughts about health and health care are influenced by these structures, ideologies, and policies. Race is not biologically real, but it is socially and politically powerful and has direct and sometimes dire consequences for the health of individuals and populations.

The next unit of the course focuses on the concept of gender, which can be difficult to navigate with first-year health sciences students. Many students profess that they fail to recognize a


words, having a uterus makes a person a woman, and that woman is expected to be a maternal caretaker because of her anatomy. According to Aristotle’s logic, sex identity and gender identity are synonymous, and biology is destiny. Cleghorn posits that the conflation of biology with gender continues to impact patient care and health outcomes today. She writes that women are less likely to receive painkillers or follow-up examinations for their complaints than men, as health care providers often assume a woman’s pain and discomfort are primarily psychological, not physiological, in nature. Here, we remind students that not all health disparities and poor health outcomes are the result of a patient’s biology; instead, they can be a consequence of sex and gender biases, which many public health experts consider a social determinant of health.

We also encourage students to contemplate how considering sex and gender as health variables might have a positive impact on patient care and outcomes. Harvard researchers Tanya Rushovich and Sarah Richardson contributed to a 2021 paper on how “unidimensional reporting and analyses” of COVID-19 mortality rates can produce misleading risk profiles for clinicians. Our students read an interview with these researchers that highlights how plenty of information was disseminated about sex disparities and racial disparities in COVID-19 mortality rates, but they and their coauthors were the first to consider mortality rates from an intersectional perspective by examining “how sex and race interact in COVID-19 outcomes.” Especially in the early days of the pandemic, public health professionals and the media seized on evidence that Black Americans were more likely to die of COVID-19 than white Americans, and men were more likely to die than women. This information was used to guide the development of risk profiles and, particularly at a point in the pandemic when treatment resources like supplemental oxygen and ventilators were limited, could have influenced clinicians’ treatment decisions. Once the overlap of race and sex was considered by Rushovich et al., however, it became clear that Black women’s mortality rates were higher than white men’s, something that was not reflected in the original data analyzed along single-variable lines. Rushovich et al.’s work was unable to identify any biological explanations for the sex and race disparities and concluded that it was likely due to the social determinants of health and health care bias. Students are encouraged to think about how considering patient variables from an intersectional perspective can improve the precision of risk profiles and potentially improve patient health outcomes, a goal that should be shared by all health care professionals.

Finally, students consider the significance of gender in the developing field of transgender patient care. We ask students to think about the unique needs of transgender patients, the kinds of interactions they might have with transgender and nonbinary patients in clinical settings, and how those interactions could impact patient health outcomes. Students read journalist Denise Grady’s 2016 New York Times piece, “Living as a Man Fighting Breast Cancer: How Trans People Face Care Gaps,” which details the breast cancer treatment of Eli Oberman, a trans man. Grady describes the challenges Oberman faces in his treatment, from fearing the stares of other patients in a gynecologist’s waiting room to handling disparaging remarks from health care providers. The article also discusses the knowledge gaps in caring for trans patients, such as a lack of data on how cross-sex hormone therapy impacts cancer patients’ remission and recurrence rates.

The University of California at San Francisco’s Center of Excellence for Transgender Health provides training modules and guidelines for the care of transgender and nonbinary patients, as
well as several case studies to test students’ responses to patient-caregiver scenarios they might encounter in a clinical setting.29 Students are provided with a series of scenarios and questions like the ones below. A think-pair-share approach works well with this exercise:

**Case**

An 18-year-old individual comes into the clinic experiencing pain in the lower abdomen. The patient fills out the intake form, indicating that their current gender identity is “N/A” and their sex at birth is “decline to state.” Their preferred name is Wolf, and their preferred pronoun is “they.”

**Questions**

1. Describe the sequence of care that ensues once Wolf is called to the exam room.

2. Discuss any uneasiness you perceived while meeting and engaging with Wolf; describe how you resolved your uneasiness or questions, if you did resolve them, and if you did not resolve them, list any remaining questions you have.

3. What notations will go in the electronic medical record?

4. If Wolf has health insurance coverage, what problems, if any, might be expected when trying to obtain reimbursement?30

After answering the questions, students can compare their responses to those provided by the Center. The Center’s responses largely counsel practitioners to “provide care in a sensitive, respectful, and affirming manner” and “treat the body as if it belongs to the patient, not as if the body defines who they are.”31 These case studies provide a brief but impactful introduction to the kinds of situations that health care providers might find themselves in one day and highlight how gendered the provision of health care is in the US, including for cisgender patients.

Three weeks of covering the concept of gender and its relevance to students training for careers in health care never feels like enough time, but through careful selection of reading materials and in-class activities, instructors can efficiently define the concept of gender from a social science perspective and create a foundation that students can further build on in their advanced social science and health sciences courses. Highlighting the relationship between sociocultural understandings of gender and health care in the United States assists us in making abstract concepts more concrete in the minds of our health sciences students.

Socioeconomic class is the focus of the last unit, and we more directly discuss ideas concerning how socioeconomic class informs people’s perceptions of American identity. Before delving fully into the social categories of race, gender, and class, we began the course by asking our students to consider what makes someone American, a question that helps to introduce the fundamental social science categories of society and culture. If, for instance, someone is an undocumented immigrant but works hard and contributes to the country, are they American? How does race connect to definitions of American identity? What aspects of American society seem to epitomize our nation and culture? As we examine these issues, everything from the English language to obesity emerges as an important factor in what it means to be American. One of the
most consistent characterizations of American identity, however, relates to the “American dream”: the belief that if someone is willing to work hard, they should have the opportunity to succeed. Most students are familiar with this ideal, particularly students from immigrant households. But what, in fact, does this idea of opportunity mean in our society, historically and currently? In some ways, the Declaration of Independence’s claim of “equality” works for socioeconomic class more than race: poor white immigrants to the US historically have found opportunities not available in their countries of origin. In the classroom, we show the significant effects of socioeconomic status on Americans’ lives. We examine this question by looking at the effects of socioeconomic class position on opportunity and health.

The PBS FRONTLINE documentary Poor Kids (2012, updated 2017), as well as its corollary, Growing Up Poor in America (2020), provide a good jumping-off point for the discussion of socioeconomic class. Student attitudes about those in poverty are often connected to ideas about blame and individual responsibility. For instance, there is a prevalent assumption in America that people are poor because they do not try hard enough or work hard enough. It is one thing to blame an adult for being poor, but how can someone blame a child for poverty when they are not old enough to have made their own decisions? The films tell the stories of children in poor families through their eyes, without mediation from poverty experts. The audience sees a child dealing with losing her possessions when her family cannot pay a storage unit’s monthly fee and other children having nothing to eat but frozen pizza or food provided by their public schools.

After this personal and intimate view of poverty, we next provide sociological frameworks and terminology to help students understand socioeconomic stratification. We show a brief excerpt from the beginning of the PBS documentary Park Avenue: Money, Power and the American Dream (2012) to provide a sense of how opportunities in the United States are not equal, and how this inequality affects people. This effect is illustrated by the research of social psychologist Paul Piff, who used the board game Monopoly to explore the concept. He rigged the game in his research, giving one of the two players more money and strategic advantage than the other. This framework—of both players being able to play the game but one having a major advantage over the other—helps students to see the effects of inequality on opportunity.

We then use the work of sociologists Linda Burton and Whitney Welsh to explain some of the social processes that affect opportunity in the United States. Before discussing their article, we ask students to respond to an online survey that asks, “Have you ever had help finding a job or a place to live based on someone you or your family know?” Burton and Welsh’s focus on the concept of “social capital” helps to illustrate how those in the upper echelons of socioeconomic class not only have more money than those below but also how their connections reinforce this dynamic. Classroom discussions address many aspects related to these issues, including how residential space is usually segregated by class, and often by race as well. This segregation then limits whom someone knows, making cross-class connections difficult.

After exploring socioeconomic class and opportunity more generally, we then center our attention on connections to health. In class, students are presented with life expectancy data and asked why wealthy people tend to live longer than those in poverty. Their answers usually include health insurance, access to healthy foods, and places to exercise. Defining and exploring the social determinants of health is again important in this unit. Instead of simply saying that poor
diet and lack of exercise affect health, we consider factors that may affect one's diet and ability to exercise. Examples from the Poor Kids film remind students that unhealthy food, for example, is often cheaper and more accessible to people of limited means.

Along with providing the information and context concerning health and socioeconomic class, we interrogate the perceptions we have of people in poverty. Two key examples that often spark productive discussions are cigarette smoking and obesity. In both cases, rates are much higher among those in poverty, and often blame and stigma accompany these rates. Students wonder why, for instance, someone would smoke when cigarettes are expensive and they do not have enough money to feed their family. Such queries reveal to students that the issues of stress and addiction are often hidden from view. One teaching tool for uncovering these issues was designed by the filmmakers who produced the 2008 California Newsreel series Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick? Titled “A Tale of Two Smokers,” this “interactivity” compares Jane and Joe, both smokers in their late forties who are about twenty pounds overweight. Jane has health insurance, however, and she makes more money than Joe. The comparison outlines each of their attempts to quit smoking, to exercise more often, and to reduce stress. Unsurprisingly, Joe has a more difficult time quitting smoking because he does not have coverage for nicotine gum, has less control over his work, and experiences greater stress levels. “A Tale of Two Smokers” concludes, “It takes more than willpower and discipline to change unhealthy habits and behaviors.” The "more" the filmmakers are referring to includes social supports that could help someone in poverty improve their health.

We also explore the history of American policies connected to levels of social support. Essays by sociologists Arne Kalleberg and Matthew Desmond demonstrate how policy impacts socioeconomic class status. Kalleberg uses the phrase “precarious work” to characterize the changing nature of American work over the last few decades, including the decline of labor unions and the rise of a gig economy. Demonstrating that the social contract between the government, employers, and employees used to be stronger, Kalleberg suggests that our current system does not provide much security for workers. Desmond’s recent work reinforces the idea that those in poverty have little control over their economic circumstances and experience exploitation in housing, employment, and personal finance. Both scholars help to illustrate that poverty and socioeconomic class position are connected to the power structures in society and vary depending on historical context.

Throughout the unit, we remind students how gender and race can compound the effects of poverty. Some local examples illustrate the difficulties of achieving the "American dream." One particularly telling example is a profile of a low-wage Boston worker that appeared in the Boston Globe in 2022. Maria Rodriguez’s work as a janitor at a biotech lab requires an unreliable four-hour roundtrip commute on public transportation, and her shifts are typically limited to four hours. Her commuting and employment struggles adversely affect her ability to make a living wage, care for her family, and live a healthy life.

Another, more in-depth example concerns health care at a Boston community health center. Researchers studying the Southern Jamaica Plain Health Center explored the reasons that patients missed or were late to appointments. What they found reflects a much larger story of race, class, and transportation in Boston. They discovered that Black patients from less
privileged socioeconomic backgrounds often lived in neighborhoods where buses were the only available public transportation option, unlike the many other neighborhoods in Boston that were not predominately Black and were accessible by subway or other forms of transportation. Buses are "more crowded and less reliable," making travel much more difficult than other forms of transportation. Researchers also noted that the predominantly Black neighborhoods highlighted in the study of the Southern Jamaica Plain Health Center had been redlined and racially segregated through federal housing policy in the 1930s and 1940s. This example shows that federal, state, and local decisions about matters like housing restrictions and transportation access, not solely personal choices on the part of patients, contributed to Black patients missing more appointments and receiving less health care than non-Black Bostonians.39

The prospect of initiating conversations about race, gender, and class in undergraduate classrooms can seem daunting. We believe, however, that it is important that social science and humanities instructors of health sciences students offer a space to explore the meaning of these concepts and their application to the training of health care professionals. Our introductory social science course provides opportunities to learn how social scientists approach the social construction of identities and grapple with the persistent contemporary relevance of race, gender, and class in America. As this course continues to evolve, we maintain a dedication to developing students’ critical thinking skills, cultural humility, and structural competence while laying a social science foundation on which students can build in their future courses and, ultimately, their careers as health care professionals.40
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Write Without Worry: Creating Community in the College Classroom through Low-Stakes Writing

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ABSTRACT

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative that classrooms provide a sense of community and belonging that encourages learning and gives students a space to actively engage with their instructors, classmates, and the content in a way that allows for risk-taking and emotional reward. For humanities courses, providing low-stakes writing opportunities in the classroom can help achieve this. This article discusses how to implement a low-stakes writing practice called “Write Without Worry,” inspired by the work of Peter Elbow. Using qualitative research, the article addresses the practice itself, provides examples and strategies used in remedial English and composition courses, discusses how it helps build community within the classroom between students with various backgrounds and experiences, and shows how the practice can lead to increases in student engagement and success.
Write Without Worry: Creating Community in the College Classroom through Low-Stakes Writing

Stephen Wilson

Introduction

There’s no denying in our polarized, post-quarantine world that how we communicate, and the willingness to do so, has changed. In my first few class sessions, I realized that students didn’t really talk to one another and often they did not talk to me. I don’t thrive in relative silence. I don’t think learning should always be a quiet process. Sometimes, it is loud and messy, and it only happens when ideas and thoughts are communicated. I had to get students talking but wanted to also keep them writing, so I dug back into my old bag of tricks from my public K–12 days and modified an activity to fit the college classroom. I call it “Write Without Worry.”

The first time I projected the words “Write Without Worry” on the board, without missing a beat a student said from the back of the room: “Can’t relate.” I don’t think he is alone here. In fact, I know he isn’t alone. A lot of students can’t relate to Write Without Worry because writing makes them worry. There are rules, there are expectations, most things are subjective. Writing is a process, and sometimes a frustrating one. In creating Write Without Worry, I didn’t develop something new, I just called it something new. I sought to kill two birds with one stone, to work smarter not harder. I needed to get students to shake off some of their writing anxiety and maybe even improve their skills, and I wanted to get them to communicate with each other and with me.

That’s when I found Peter Elbow’s work, which focuses on the democratization of writing, of making writing accessible to everyone. According to an article published in Currents in Teaching and Learning, his early work promoted low-stakes writing as a “technique that helps the writer begin the journey toward ‘rational’ discourse, i.e., the formal, logical texts required in many college courses’ even outside of composition.” Elbow found that low-stakes writing prepares students for their current needs and for their future as this type of writing, he argues, allows investment, freedom, risk, fluency, and voice, all while intellectually pushing them toward learning and improving their overall writing skills, even without evaluation.

Prior to embarking on this project, my concerns were that students would think this to be a juvenile activity and that they would not take it seriously because it wasn’t graded. I worried that students wouldn’t move from their desks when asked to move around and meet someone new or that they would revolt entirely. Buy-in was not immediate, but by the third or fourth writing session, once it became a habit, buy-in was present, and the project was making a difference.

The Explanation

I begin Write Without Worry with an explanation of the project. When I tell students they will begin each class session with writing, in half the class eyes bulge, sweating starts, and bodies freeze up. Then, when I tell them they’ll also be sharing this writing with their peers, the other half joins them. To temper these initial reactions, I explain the basic tenets of Write Without Worry:

1. We will do this daily.
2. This is not graded.

3. Spelling and grammar don’t count.

4. Everyone will be talking to someone, so there are no spotlights to fear.

The Prompts

This is where, as an instructor, I initially panicked. How will I find prompts that matter, that are interesting, that reinforce what I want them to learn and know plus ones that will get them talking to each other? I eventually found three types of prompts that work well for Write Without Worry: stealth learning prompts, relationship-building prompts, and current event prompts.

Stealth learning prompts help prepare students for future course discussions or assignments. My English 101, for example, ends with a research paper, so I use the following prompt around the time I need students to start brainstorming topics:

Today, take five minutes to write about three things you’re curious about. These can be things you know a little about but want to learn more about, or they can be something you’ve heard of but don’t have any ideas about.

This prompt is intentionally broad and general. At first, students may not even be thinking about their final research paper; however, what they write about here very well could turn into their research paper topic. One student, for example, listed and wrote about social media use, fracking, and types of censorship. At the next class meeting after going over the research paper guidelines, we started to brainstorm and he said: “Can we use things from our Write Without Worry, or does it need to be completely new ideas?” In essence, he had been pre-writing before he knew he was pre-writing because of this prompt. He had not been aware that he was a step ahead for his research paper.

Relationship-building prompts are less attached to course content and instead focus on trying to get students to build relationships with one another based on their backgrounds, interests, likes, and dislikes. My favorite prompt for this category is about things that are “cringe.”

“Cringe” universally means to “recoil in distaste” and now it’s used a lot to describe social media trends, celebrities, and embarrassing actions. What are three things that you consider “cringe”? Avoid specific people and belief systems.

Students typically engage in the liveliest discussions around this prompt. They meet classmates who wrote about the same “cringe” things as they did, or they add something to their “cringe” list after another student mentions it. They share stories and reactions that break the ice and start to build relationships.

Current event prompts are a bit of a mix of the first two. They’re used for learning about what is going on in the world, to form opinions, to see what others believe, and to be more aware of the world around them. This prompt can be tricky. I tend to stick to less controversial issues but still provide students with options that make them think critically. For example, I projected an image
of a broken art piece knocked over at an art show. I showed the image without telling them what it was and asked students to guess what was happening, what the damage cost, and why the image might matter. Students shared some interesting responses. No one guessed the cost of the damage, but they all guessed that the image depicted some kind of art show, which led to questions about what made something "art," how "art" was valued, and what we could learn from it. This discussion was a perfect segue into a literary analysis paper. (The image was of a broken, very expensive blue dog balloon animal by artist Jeff Koons, in case you're curious. At least two people bid to buy the broken pieces for even more than the original!)

**The Writing**

The prompts start as a catalyst for the writing. The writing is the main event. The students can handwrite or type these assignments. They are told many, many times not to worry about grammar, punctuation, mechanics, and sometimes even organization. I want content instead at this stage. I want them to think on the page. One student's first Write Without Worry was a bullet-point list of two fragmented thoughts. His last one was a fully formed paragraph. Was it perfect? No, but it was complete and showed his ideas fully. It showed his growth in his ability to organize and expand his thinking, too.

**The Sharing**

After the writing comes the sharing. Sharing is probably the most daunting part for students. Some people do not like to talk, they don't like to share their thoughts, and they don't enjoy or feel uncomfortable meeting new people. I don't force anyone to share. For every person who doesn't want to move around and talk, usually two go above and beyond, and, in many cases, these students make an effort to include the quiet students by sharing with them.

One student came in on the first day and did not say a word to anyone including me. She did not participate in Write Without Worry that day. On the second day, she went to the restroom during that time, but at some point during the semester, she moved closer to other students, talked to more students, and eventually talked to me too. She began to write a lot and talk a lot because she felt comfortable. That's the goal with this project. Sharing and talking may be awkward, especially with people you don't know, but once students realize that they are a part of a community for however long the class is, they realize it's a lot easier to talk with others going through the same thing as they are. I always remind students to only share what they want to: to share something, listen, and interact in their own way. Sometimes, students choose me as the person they share with and ask a wide range of questions.

**The Results**

The process is nothing without some results. I've peppered in some of my qualitative data throughout my stories and examples, but I am also a visual person. I noticed visible changes. Over the course of the semester, students were making friends. The room went from everyone spread out with desks and space between them to all of the students on one side of the room. Unprompted, they created their own text thread. They met outside of class. I saw them eating lunch together on days we didn't have class. On multiple occasions, I saw two very different
students hanging out in the patio area outside of our building on campus. Students planned study sessions and had inside jokes. I felt a little left out, sure, but I was happy to see the relationships that were being formed.

Write Without Worry was mentioned on almost all classroom evaluations at the end of the term as an activity that helped students and stood out in the course:

• “Write Without Worry forced me to push past my comfort zone and interact with people despite my nervous, awkward nature.”

• “Some good parts of the class were the writing exercise we did at the beginning of class.”

• “I really liked the informal writing activities as your prompts force you to push yourself out of your bubble every time.”

• “Even though I felt forced to talk to people in the class, I enjoyed myself. I don’t really like talking to people I don’t know in class, but because [it was expected], I was able to meet some nice [people].”

• “Without the informal writing assignments, I would have never talked to some of the people in class. ______ is so different from me, but now we’re good friends.”

**Conclusion**

Like Elbow, I have seen how removing the worry from writing for at least ten minutes per class session has affected the way students approach not only writing but also each other, me as their instructor, their assignments, and even their worldview. While Write Without Worry is a natural fit for English courses, it easily could be adapted to any humanities course with relative ease. One study found that introductory psychology students who completed short free-writing assignments “demonstrated enhanced factual and conceptual learning of course concepts, improved class attendance, and better exam performance than control students who simply thought about course concepts.”2 Elbow says that these types of assignments can even be used in math courses! I’m using it now in my English courses, and, though it is still too early to gather much solid data, I see students talking, interacting, writing, and sharing, which was my original goal. I was worried about it being too elementary or taking up too much time, but like the assignment itself, I just needed to remove that worry to see some results.

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AUTHOR BIO

Stephen Wilson is a full-time instructor in the English Department at York Technical College in Rock Hill, South Carolina. After eight years of teaching middle school and high school, he now teaches first-year English composition, business communications, and literature courses. A graduate of Concord University in Athens, West Virginia, and East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina, he is interested in building community in the composition classroom, diversifying the literary canon, and implementing student-led seminars in literature courses.

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ABSTRACT

In these divisive times, it is more important than ever that education provide holistic ways for students to increase their understanding of and empathy for both themselves and others. Arts-based identity exploration activities involving students’ creative expression and sharing with one another can serve as powerful pedagogical tools in many different types of educational programs at the elementary, secondary/high school, and college levels, including in general education social justice courses, student life programs, and teacher education, social work, counseling, premed, and other helping-profession programs. Engaging in these activities can promote students’ increased awareness, understanding, and empathy both within themselves and with students of similar and differing cultural groups. Students’ emerging sense of self-worth, belonging, and being heard can also foster a sense of community in the classroom.

In this article, I first discuss the in-class dissertation research project I conducted during my arts education PhD program at the Ohio State University during the spring 2016 semester. I then provide examples of how other educators have used arts-based inquiry in their teaching. In conclusion, I propose additional ways in which arts-based inquiry can be used to deepen and enhance students’ educational experiences.

KEYWORDS

Holistic education
Arts-based inquiry
Participatory inquiry
Transformative learning
Student identity development
Multicultural social justice education
Using Arts-Based Identity Exploration Activities to Foster Students’ Increased Understanding of and Empathy for Self and Others
Kathleen McMichael Goodyear

Using Arts-Based Inquiry Pedagogy in the Social Justice Classroom

I have witnessed how arts-based inquiry activities can serve as powerful pedagogical tools in the social justice classroom to facilitate students’ identity exploration. Not only do students gain greater insights into the multifold layers of their own identities, but in sharing what they learned, they feel heard and valued as members of the classroom community. I feel that that is a value in and of itself. But I have also seen that engaging in arts-based inquiry helps students open up and be willing to engage mentally and empathetically with the experiences of people unlike themselves, not only fellow students but also people in marginalized groups whose voices we hear in the curricular material and whose works of creative expression we study, who are striving for their rights, dignity, and ability to thrive in their families, cultural communities, and societies.

Indeed, the multicultural educators Christine Sleeter and Carl Grant in their book Making Choices for Multicultural Education: Five Approaches to Race, Class, and Gender describe their fifth and most advanced approach, multicultural social justice education, also known as critical social justice education, in this way:

• Multicultural Social Justice educators view learning as active, social, and inextricably entwined with identity development. . . . They see learning as a process of constructing knowledge through the interaction of mind and experience.

• Advocates of Multicultural Social Justice Education recommend that schooling help students analyze their own lives in order to develop their practical consciousness about real injustices in society and to develop constructive responses.

This is the framework underpinning the Ohio State undergraduate general education course “Visual Culture: Investigating Diversity and Social Justice,” which I taught for four semesters during my arts education PhD program. The course first leads students in exploring what culture is and in what ways various dimensions of culture—personal, family, relationships, school, larger cultural groups, and society—have influenced their own identity. Then we discuss dominant and non-dominant cultures, stereotypes, privilege, prejudice, and structural inequities. Next, students study the histories of civil and social rights struggles in the United States. Finally, students explore cultural stereotypes as expressed in movies, television, advertising, and social media.

As those of us in the US know well, today’s conservative attack on critical race theory and teaching so-called divisive concepts includes conservatives’ saying that they do not want students made to feel uncomfortable. This is code for not wanting students from dominant groups to feel uncomfortable—Whites, males, Protestants, middle- and upper-class students, et al. They ignore the fact that students from historically oppressed groups frequently do feel uncomfortable. And, frankly, studying accurate US history should make everyone feel uncomfortable. However, I have seen that students’ engaging in arts-based identity exploration activities can foster their sense of belonging and being respected, regardless of their cultural
groups, and that they then are open to enlarging their understanding of and empathy for the experiences of others without feeling personally guilty for what they themselves did not cause. It is also my aim and hope that this two-pronged approach of experiential identity exploration and exploring history through the curricular material equips them with the knowledge and desire to take responsibility to become active citizens collaborating with others to help solve societal problems.

At the urging of the course supervisor, Dr. Christine Ballengee Morris, who also served as my advisor and dissertation committee chair, I conducted my arts-based inquiry dissertation research project in class during spring 2016, the last semester I taught the course. All fifty students chose to participate (two sections of twenty-five students). All were traditional-age undergraduates, that is, between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four. They included both American and international students of various racial and ethnic ancestries, and they included sophomores, juniors, and seniors from a wide range of majors across campus.

The course already included making a self-portrait and a personal cultural identity map and writing a personal cultural identity narrative (their life story from a cultural perspective). This time, I used eight arts-based activities. Some activities were done alone, while others were done with partners. Then, as time allowed, students shared with each other in class what they had written/created and what they had learned about themselves and other people in their lives. After each activity, students wrote reflections on their process and what they learned about themselves and others, and they also completed a short mixed-methods post-activity questionnaire assessing the effectiveness of the activity and providing suggestions for improvement. I also conducted ten follow-up interviews at the end of the semester.

First, students created self-portraits and wrote an accompanying artist’s statement (fig. 1). This activity helped them unpack how they themselves had already experienced dimensions of culture growing up.
Here are a couple of sample comments from the students’ post-activity questionnaires:

• “After seeing the whole collage together you realize how many different cultural groups you are a part of and how they have affected your life and shaping you as a person. This activity made you sit there and think of what things/people really reflect[] who/how you are.”

• “Where I come from, I feel like I wasn’t a very cultured individual, but comparing my lifestyle to others in my class, I can really tell that my life is completely different from others. The culture I grew up in may not have been as strong as the others, but I realize that I did grow up in a certain culture where we do things different than other cultures. We eat different foods, are interested in different things, and much more. This helped me understand myself as an individual in the way that I want to be perceived by my classmates.”

Second, students created a personal cultural identity map. This time, rather than drawing a simple diagram, I had them base their 2D maps and 3D mobiles (figs. 2 and 3) on the Model of
Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI) formulated by Susan Jones, a prominent college-student identity development scholar. Students noted their personal core identities, cultural identities, factors in their immediate environment, and how they are viewed by the dominant society in terms of privilege and difference.


Figure 2. Examples of students’ 2D identity maps based on the MMDI. Used with the students’ permission.

Figure 3. Examples of students’ 3D mobile identity maps based on the MMDI. Used with the students’ permission.

Here are two sample comments from their post-activity questionnaires:

• “The Phase 1 2D Identity Map made me think a little bit deeper about how I would categorize my culture. Initially, before I really understood what culture was, I would have probably said that I didn’t have much culture. Now I know that is far from true. On my Identity Map, I included 7 important [cultural] aspects of what makes me who I am today.”

• “I felt that I learned a great deal about myself through this activity because I had never really sat down and ranked the core values that are important to me. This activity allowed...”
me to take time to sit down and think about what is really important to me. I also found it interesting to listen to what everyone else had placed close to their core and what they placed further away because everyone had different ways of ranking what is important to them. And some people ranked things I did not even think to rank."

Third, each student created a “My Life’s Musical Playlist” of five to ten songs that had deeply impacted them, and then they wrote a reflection on the roles the songs had played in their lives, including as bonding agents with parents, siblings, friends, and school mates. This is an adaptation of an activity that the educator Steven Aragon discussed at the 2015 International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry. Here are three particularly poignant excerpts from their reflections:

• “I played this song [Darius Rucker’s “It Won’t Be Like This for Long’] for my senior year slideshow at my graduation party and it brought tears to my eyes. After I made my slideshow and was listening to the lyrics, it made me step back and look at my life. I realized in that moment that I was graduating, moving away from home and never seeing my childhood friends again. This one hit home for me and I thought about my parents and how much they did for me growing up. I definitely would not be where I am in life if it wasn’t for them.”

• “‘You Should Be Here’ by Cole Swindell . . . describes my life quite perfectly lately. This summer I lost my best friend to Leukemia. It is hard going on each day and not having her there to share life experiences with. It does not seem fair and sometimes makes me feel guilty. I connect perfectly with this song and it evokes how I feel on a day-to-day basis.”

• A Sri Lankan American student wrote: “I came to America when I was at the very young age of 5. It wasn’t an easy transition for me at first. Songs 8-9 [‘No Way Out’ and ‘Nothing Stopping Me,’ both by Vicetone] kind of represent that time period in my life for me. Song 8 is more of the sadder version where I felt kind of trapped and that I wouldn’t be able to make it, but I eventually got stronger and built up a ‘persevering’ attitude to push through, which song 9 represents. This never-give-up mentality is something that is still instilled in me to this very day. Being able to come to America I believe is one of the best things to ever happen to me in my very short life because all my accomplishments and achievements would all be null and void if I didn’t have the chance to come here. With that being said, not being back to my roots in so long has me kind of missing home. Especially when I hear about how all my cousins and family have all gone back and visited, yet I still haven’t. Songs 1-3 [‘Time’ by Mikky Ekko, ‘Bloodstream’ by Stateless, and ‘Come Home’ by OneRepublic] kind of capture this kind of sad, homesick feeling I sometimes get.”

Fourth, students wrote their personal cultural identity narratives expressing their life’s story. Students really put their hearts into these narratives, and I found them quite moving. Here is an excerpt from an African American student’s narrative, which he entitled “My Journey to 20”:

I am who I am today because a 32-year-old single mother of three did not give up. To begin to describe what makes me, me, I have to start with who has inspired me since day one. My mother had her first child at the age of 20. Being 20 currently I could not fathom raising a child and then having another child a year later. Fast forward ten years to her final son being born, me. To say the least, the odds were not in our favor. Now I must
answer the question, How [has] my mother inspired me? My mother never allowed my brothers or me to feel we were at a disadvantage. She allowed us to play all sports, attended all of our games, and put us in a great school district. Her inspiration does not stop there. While also working full time at the age of 40 she graduated from the University of Cincinnati with a master’s in criminal justice. Her three sons would all go onto college with academic scholarships. One son having already achieved his master’s in education. To answer the question of who I am or who I want to be, I would be lucky to be a fraction of the person my mom is. She has put me in the position I am today to be successful[,] the least I can do is give my children the same opportunity. I begin with this because I feel the cultures that have become a part of my life would not be there if not for the foundation my mother laid.

Success in my eye is not viewed [as] a monetary or materialistic accomplishment. Success for me comes from accomplishing academically all that I strive to do. I view success as putting those around me in the position to reach the goals they desire. Who am I? I am the youngest son of a single mother of three. I am an academic scholar. I am the president of my fraternity. I am a person who is not perfect but seeks to better himself with the mindset that my goals are possible.

Students’ comments on the post-activity questionnaire included:

• “It made me think through the experiences of my whole life to sift my experiences into three pages, which was extremely hard. It made me think about my core life experiences to share with others.”

• “This activity definitely made think about where I stand in the certain groups I am in. It opened my eyes to my past and how over time my experiences in these similar groups shifted, some more drastically and others gradual. . . . I honestly enjoyed writing this paper a lot.”

• “I really enjoyed this assignment. I enjoyed how I could express my feelings on a subject that I never have spoken about before [being harassed growing up for attending a Catholic school]. I was able to understand why I was different, instead of always categorizing myself as ordinary or basic. Culture is all around us and it is not just defined as skin color. This assignment helped me to see that.”

Fifth, students had a choice of writing a poem, a short story (fiction or nonfiction), or song lyrics. While some students were unfamiliar with doing creative writing and expressed some uncertainty, they gave it their best effort, and I found many of their works moving and even stunning. Here is an example short story by a Syrian American student:

A young girl wakes up, wide-eyed and ready for the day. She looks outside, greeted by the blue sky and the sounds of yogurt carts. This girl is my mother, the woman I look up to; the one who I call my best friend. This girl wakes up 30 years ago, to the light-hearted mornings of her Syrian town. The aroma of fresh hummus and Moroccan tea, encasing her home, filling her senses. Her father calls to her, she runs to him, greeted with good-morning kisses. This is my mother’s bliss.

25 years later, this girl, now woman, wakes up. She looks to her window and sees destruction—gone are the bustling food carts and bright smiles. Gone is the scent of Arabian culture. My mother looks to her window and sees her home, her childhood memories—all disintegrated. Her family scattered across the globe, her father’s
home taken hostage, her identity lost. My mother wakes up in the United States—lively and safe, but far from bliss. Torn apart by revolution, her heart and soul.

10 years ago, I look over at my window, greeted by the sun and a traffic-stricken road. I walk downstairs and run to my dad, the house smelling of warm pancakes and fresh coffee. I look to my sisters and we begin to dance around the house. This was my bliss.

Hoping my own country does not betray me like hers did.

Comments on the post-activity questionnaires included:

• “This activity had me writing the first poem that I have written since somewhere around the eighth grade. . . . It helped me better understand myself as an individual as I don’t normally take time to evaluate my emotions very often. This allowed me to take time to write down those feelings. . . . I liked the activity, specifically the options given to us.”

• “I think it made me think more deeply about being a sister and what type of words or phrases reflect our relationship. . . . I liked the openness of this activity and the multiple routes you could take with it.”

• “This activity allowed me to reflect on how I have changed due to being a part of an unfamiliar culture.”

• “Writing this poem really hits me hard. . . . I realized that I’m a lot angrier about this when writing this. It really helped me blow off some steam and think of this situation in a sort of different perspective. . . . This activity definitely helped me have better understanding of myself in a bad situation that I am in with my boyfriend right now. It helped me realize how I deeply feel about what is going on between us two. . . . This paper was a great assignment!”

In addition, two people in follow-up interviews shared with me that their experience writing poetry showed them how powerful a healing tool poetry writing can be and that they continued writing poetry on their own after completing the assignment. In fact, one said that she shared the assignment instructions with a friend who was going through a challenging time and said, “Here, do this—it helped me!”

Sixth, each student, with a partner, created and performed reader’s-theater style, sitting on bar stools in front of the class, a duoethnographic script in which they explored the similarities and differences in their life experiences from cultural standpoints.6 Even though this was late in the semester, by which point students felt they knew each another pretty well, they learned a lot more about their classmates through this activity. In class and in their post-activity questionnaires, they expressed surprise and delight to discover that some students with seemingly different backgrounds shared experiences in common, and those with seemingly similar backgrounds had some distinctively different motivations and experiences. Other comments included:

• “Overall, I think this activity probably best helped me understand my classmates out of any of the activities we have done thus far. I really enjoyed listening to the different topics and

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• “For me, this exercise stressed the importance of taking the time to find out about other
people’s backgrounds and cultures. While everyone came from different areas, especially
the international students, everyone was able to find commonalities. This ability to
empathize with other people and where they are coming from helps us to see the humanity
in others, when otherwise we might have categorized them as different from us. Talking
about similarities and differences between cultures also helped me to further examine my
own identity, because I had to identify the certain aspects of my background that I found
important enough to share. . . . In addition, performing the duoethnography was a beneficial
experience, because it is enjoyable to share with other people where you come from and
what has made you who you are today, because that type of sharing situation is a rare
occurrence.”

Seventh, students in pairs first participated in a warm-up activity and then in a “Body as
Metaphor” body-sculpting activity in which they sculped a metaphor for themselves (“I am a
______”) using their partner’s body as clay. I had previously participated in this activity at a 2015
International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry workshop led by theater educator and arts-based
researcher Tamy Spry.7 This activity was not successful overall with my undergraduate students;
many had never participated in a somatic activity like this and became silly and unfocused. Still,
several students reported gaining personal insights from it, including one with whom I worked
individually after he had had to miss class that day. One student commented on the post-activity
questionnaire:

• “It was definitely very interesting because there was so much grey area when it came to
molding the body. It could appear as anything! But I learned a lot as I put a water bottle under
[his partner] and created a bridge. It was different but it worked! . . . Upon my reflection, I have
never done something like this before so it was very cool and unique to have participated
in this activity. We warmed up which really got me a lot more engaged and it was fun to try
to guess what I was sculpted into as well as how I was going to make my sculpture. I had
a hard time choosing three things which was very surprising, when I had to think on the spot
I could not! But eventually the ideas came to me and I was able to think of something that I
thought I was and used, which was a bridge. Connecting people and ideas, as well as a sign
of hope and something more!”

Based on my own experience with body-sculpting and similar activities, I know how powerful
they can be. I would do this activity again with students, but I would make a point of discussing it
more fully beforehand, and I would also ask a friend or two to help facilitate the activity with me
to help students remain focused.

Eighth and last, each student created a shadow box diorama expressing their hopes and dreams
(fig. 4). My advisor dubbed them “dream boxes.” I was inspired to create this activity by the
shadow boxes of the artist Joseph Cornell. It was amazing to watch students in both classes
go into “the zone,” “the flow,” while making their boxes. On the post-activity questionnaires, this
activity, “My Life’s Musical Playlist,” and the duoethnographic reader’s-theater activity received
the most votes as students’ favorites.
Sample comments from their questionnaires:

- This comment was from the student who created the top-left box above—he was studying accounting and dreamed of working in London: “This activity was an opportunity for me to think about where I see myself in the next five to ten years. The hands on learning aspect made the project more enjoyable versus having to write a paper on where I see myself in the future. Having to create something forced me to think a little more of what my dreams truly were and how could I illustrate those dreams with this box. It forced me to really think and when I put those dreams in the box it brought some realness and possibility to the dreams. In my mind I have had the thought that I one day want to work and live in London one day. So for the box I looked up a picture of the city and placed it as part of my background. This allowed me to sort of see myself in the city. Thinking about dreams such as these is a surreal experience because it is actually possible that they could happen.” (Since this course, not only did he graduate with his BA in accounting, but he subsequently completed his accounting MA, both at Ohio State.)

- A student who wanted to become a physician wrote: “I thoroughly enjoyed this activity, as I created my dream desk tag, labeled ‘Dr. [his last name].’ I am an aspiring physician, but have never done something like this. It was unique because for a little while I got to envision myself as successful, feel what it was like to have that nametag. I actually felt proud for a brief bit, but then I had to come back to reality. It actually served a motivation however, that day I studied very hard! I really believe that in order to achieve your dream and be successful, it is first important to envision yourself as successful. Take a step back and dream about your being in the spot that you are striving for. That is exactly what this project was and it was fantastic!” (This student is now completing his medical residency at the Cleveland Clinic.)

At the end of the semester, I asked students to complete the end-of-semester questionnaire,
which entailed responding to the same two-part question they had responded to in the beginning-of-semester questionnaire:

Do you feel that arts activities (including narrative and creative writing) can help you and other 18- to 24-year-old undergraduates further understand and develop your identities? If so, what activities do you think would be helpful and in what ways?

Not surprisingly, they had a lot more to say about this after having completed the activities. For example:

• “Arts activities . . . are an important experience for an undergraduate. We need to understand who we are before we decide what we are going to be doing for the rest of our lives. Our minds are at a fragile state and not many people truly understand who they are. They think that stereotypes define them and in this class they will learn that this is not true.”

• “The ages of 18 to 24 is a very important age range where students are still figuring out what they want to do and what their passions are. Up until college students are living with their parents in most situations and have a very structured schedule. In addition to this, many of the activities we do are influenced by our parents. When this age range leaves home and starts to be on their own they have the freedom to develop their own schedules and do activities that are of their own choosing. This is often the first time where some people really truly have their own choice in doing what they want to do. Experiencing a variety of activities is important to developing who we are and understanding who we are.

• “The art activities that w[ere] done in this course helped me understand that even though it looks like I belong in certain culture groups that I am not defined by these groups. I can be parts of certain groups and then be parts of completely different groups at the sa[me] time. The activities also showed that looking at someone and making assumptions about them based on a stereotype often does not actua[ll]y reflect who they are. Just because they fit a certain stereotype does not mean they represent the values that stereotype has.”

After the course was over, I analyzed the qualitative and quantitative data from students’ written output, post-activity questionnaires, and follow-up interviews thematically and by student demographics and majors. Of the fifty students, one dropped the course part-way through, so forty-nine completed the full set of activities; an average of forty-seven students completed each post-activity questionnaire. The median on the five-point Likert scale responses to “I learned a lot about myself” was a 4 (“Agree”) on seven out of the eight activities, with the outlier being the body-sculpting activity. The median for “I learned a lot about being a member of various cultural groups” for all but body-sculpting was a 3.5 (between “Neutral” and “Agree”); I expected this to be a bit lower because for the poem/short story/song lyrics activity, I gave students the option to focus on whatever they felt the need to focus on, whether or not it involved cultural groups.

I was surprised to discover that the medians on both questions for students not majoring in the arts or humanities—STEM, business, health care, forestry, etc. (n=42 after the one student dropped out) —was consistently higher than the medians on both questions for the arts and humanities students (n=7). Several students in these non-arts/humanities majors shared with me
that prior to this course, they had been given no opportunities whatsoever in college to reflect on who they were as people and what their aspirations were in life. I suspect that that was because they were in vocationally oriented majors. They expressed gratitude that they finally had a chance to do this.

I analyzed the qualitative data using various college student development, transformative learning, and multicultural social justice education theories. Their written reflections evidenced many instances of developmental growth, transformative learning, and increased self-awareness and cultural sensitivity. One student, who is currently finishing up his dentistry program at Ohio State, told me that the course and the activities were a “life-changer.” I was particularly gratified that he said this—he is an American of South Asian ancestry, and even though he was born and raised in the US, he has long had to deal with being “othered.” Even though coming into the course he was already sensitized to issues of identity, he still found the course and further exploring his and others’ identities transformational.

Other Examples of Pedagogical Uses of Arts-Based Inquiry

Other educators are also using these types of activities with their students. For example, in a workshop I attended during the 2016 Original Lilly Conference on College Teaching at Miami University of Ohio, graduate students involved in the Miami teacher education program demonstrated how they use Augusto Boal’s Image Theatre activities from his Theatre of the Oppressed participatory inquiry techniques to foster students’ exploration and sharing of their experiences growing up in the educational system. One of the graduate students also proudly showed us a large piece of kraft paper on which she had artistically depicted her personal journey into teaching.

At the Pennsylvania State University, Lisa La Jevic and Stephanie Springgay use visual journaling with their preservice elementary education students. They explain that “we introduced visual journals into this course as a way for students to engage in living research and to develop an embodied and relational understanding between self and other.”

Also at Penn State, Kimberly Powell has used Boal’s Image Theatre exercises with her graduate students to facilitate explorations of their conceptions of democracy. Her students then recreated their image tableaux in public areas on campus and engaged undergraduate students passing by in exploring their conceptions of democracy as well.

Joe Norris, who is a Canadian arts-based researcher who has taught theater in education at the University of Alberta and Brock University in Ontario, has developed an interactive method called playbuilding, based in part on Boal’s interactive Theatre of the Oppressed techniques. Through engaging in the playbuilding process, university students, members of his troupe, and others collaboratively devise vignettes exploring the various aspects of community issues; they then present the scenes to audiences, inviting audience members to actively participate as well.

Norris explains:

Mirror Theatre, throughout its 25-year history, primarily in Alberta and Ontario, has devised dialogic participatory performance/workshops for community development and educational purposes. Casts,
consisting of university students, faculty and staff and members of the wider community, have addressed a range of social justice topics, including person-centred care, implicit bias, homelessness, safe and caring schools, early warning signs of heart disease, interpersonal challenge[s] in practicum placements, academic integrity and mental health.15

In 2008, Ann Grugel of the University of Wisconsin Madison conducted a photo-elicitation project in Milwaukee with urban elementary-age children who were participating in a summer children's community garden project.16 Grugel invited the children to take photos documenting their gardening experiences. She then met with the children individually and invited them to choose a few photos that really meant a lot to them and to tell her about what was happening in the photos and how they found them meaningful. With regard to Tamika [pseudonym], Grugel states:

It was not until after a series of photo elicitation interviews that I realized the deep connection between her self and the natural environment. Through her photographs and our conversations, Tamika was exploring her personal self as linked within the broader context of the natural world. She in fact was constructing an ecological identity. . . . Photo elicitation helped me unearth and explore the dominant social and environmental practices that support the development of a child's ecological identity within the social context of a community garden.17

In a photo-elicitation project, Gary Knowles and Suzanne Thomas of Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, asked photography and visual arts students at a local high school to explore their "sense-of-place, locatedness, or placelessness" in school through taking and discussing photos.18 Knowles and Thomas state that this participatory inquiry project was "significant since little educational research directly involves students in the gathering, arranging, analyzing, or representing of information related to schools, curriculum, or pedagogy from their perspectives."19 During the study, the students responded to these prompts:

Tell us about your experiences of school. Tell us about your place in school. Tell us about a significant place within or immediately outside the school building. Convey to us how you see yourself in this place. Tell us what you think about school as a place to be.20

They each created a "self-portrait, memory map, photo of place, narrative, photo of self-in-place, found object, and a two- or three-dimensional artwork."21 Knowles and Thomas then met with students individually to discuss the artworks, what they meant to them, and their inquiry processes. The students' comments included the following:

"I feel that I am not noticed at school." "I do not look into the camera lens because I don’t let people see me at school. I am scared of being criticized." . . . "My portrait is cropped closely around my face to represent the lack of freedom I feel at school." "I double-exposed the portrait of me in the foreground to emphasize how my place in school is vague and uncertain."22

The students overall expressed a strong disconnect with school as place and a strong sense of not belonging. These results appear to have surprised Knowles and Thomas, although in their discussion they mention the upheavals that had been occurring in Ontario schools. What remains unclear to me is whether the students’ feelings of not belonging reflected those specific tensions or the longer-term structural issues of schools’ being impersonal, institutionalized environments.


11. La Jevic and Springgay, 73.


13. Joe Norris, Playbuilding as Qualitative Research: A Participatory Arts-Based Approach (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2009 (2nd ed. to be published in April 2024).

14. Mirror Theatre, last modified 2023. The site includes an explanation of the playbuilding process and videos of performances, including as part of school classwork.


17. Grugel, 51, emphasis in original.

In South Africa, Shan Simmonds and Cornelia Roux of North-West University, together with Ina ter Avest, a Dutch researcher, conducted a photo-elicitation project with South African schoolgirls focusing on gender equity/inequity, gender-based violence, poverty, and HIV/AIDS. The researchers comment that such an approach "has proved particularly useful in research involving schoolgirls, who are vulnerable and often under-acknowledged research participants." In this study, the girls were asked to "take photographs of landscapes/objects/people/situations/symbols anywhere in your school and home environment to express what you perceive and experience as gender equity." Each participant then chose five of her photos and discussed with a researcher what each photo represented to her. Afterward, they wrote reflections concerning their experiences of gender equity as well as what they experienced taking the photos. Then in a focus group the girls discussed their photos and stories and identified overarching themes that arose. The researchers reported that by participating in the project, the girls became consciously aware of the psychological and tangible effects that societal power differentials had on their lives in terms of gender inequities and violence and socioeconomic and health injustices.

Other Potential Pedagogical Uses of Arts-Based Inquiry

These are but a few examples of the ways in which educators have used arts-based inquiry with elementary, secondary/high school, and college students. I now consider arts-based identity exploration activities to be indispensable pedagogical tools in teaching general education social justice and civics courses. I also wholeheartedly champion their use not only in teacher education programs, but in all helping-profession educational programs, including in social work, counseling, and premed programs and in medical school. In my dissertation, I also strongly advocate their use in student life extra-/co-curricular programs and in college career centers. Indeed, when I presented conference sessions and a workshop on my research, several college student affairs practitioners told me about how they are using these types of activities with their students. I also discuss in my dissertation potential uses in college high-impact programs such as first- and second-year seminars and first-generation, service- and community-based learning, study abroad, undergraduate qualitative research, and internship programs.

I hope this has given you some ideas as to how you might use these types of activities both inside and outside the classroom! Additionally, please do take a look my dissertation's chapter 4, "Arts-Based Inquiry," chapter 5, "Artistic Modalities in Arts-Based Inquiry," and chapter 9, "Potential Uses of Arts-Based Identity Exploration Activities in Undergraduate Education," including that chapter’s section on issues regarding facilitating arts-based activities. I wrote these chapters with educators in mind in the hope that the discussions would spur yet more ideas about how such activities can be used as effective pedagogical tools.
AUTHOR BIO

Kathleen McMichael Goodyear has a PhD in arts education from the Ohio State University (2018) as well as master’s degrees in library science (2013) and American studies (2023) from PennWest Clarion and Northeastern State University (Oklahoma), respectively. She obtained her BA in psychology, with minors in literature and public administration, from Metropolitan State University of Denver in 2001. She is currently working on a graduate history certificate from Pittsburg State University (Kansas). She and her husband, Dennis, currently live in Cedar Falls, Iowa. Kathleen taught at Ohio State for two years, and now, post-pandemic, she looks forward to getting back into the college classroom teaching American studies through a social justice lens. She can be reached at goodyear.24@osu.edu. She wants to hear how others are using arts-based inquiry activities in their pedagogy! Her ORCID®: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2932-4135.

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The College Essay Is Not Dead: Using Scaffolding and Presentations to Create ChatGPT-Resistant Research Projects

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ABSTRACT

Comparing and reflecting on the structures and outcomes of research projects for both a required first-year writing course, Writing as Inquiry, and an elective advanced history seminar, Popular Culture and the Scientific Revolution, which the author taught simultaneously at New York University (NYU) Shanghai during the spring 2023 semester, yield several strategies that instructors can implement to help deter students from using ChatGPT, and other AI tools, to generate their research essays. These strategies include making essays one component of larger scaffolded assignments in which students are explicit about their research process; devoting class time to brainstorming and discussion at the beginning of, and key points throughout, a project; providing periodic feedback from the instructor and classmates; requiring students to use available university resources, such as libraries and academic resource centers; and intervening to create additional personalized scaffolding for students who are struggling. By doing so, students can continue to gain the information literacy, critical analysis, and organizational skills—as well as the ability to express themselves clearly—that writing college essays provides.
The College Essay Is Not Dead: Using Scaffolding and Presentations to Create ChatGPT-Resistant Research Projects

Jennifer Egloff

In response to the sudden wide-scale availability of ChatGPT, and other artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots, journalist Stephen Marche declared "The College Essay Is Dead" in the title of his December 2022 article in the *Atlantic*. The fact that AI tools can generate full essays at the click of a button is a major cause for alarm and source of anxiety for educators throughout the world, especially those who teach writing and history courses, like I do. Nevertheless, since the information literacy, critical analysis, and organizational skills—as well as the ability to express themselves clearly—that students develop when they research and write essays are invaluable for their subsequent courses and future careers, it would be misguided to abandon college essays entirely.

My experiences at New York University (NYU) Shanghai during the spring 2023 semester, in which I simultaneously taught a required first-year writing course, Writing as Inquiry (WAI), and an elective advanced history seminar, Popular Culture and the Scientific Revolution (PCSR), have enabled me to craft assignments for which it is virtually impossible for students to use AI tools to generate their research essays. Having planned the scaffolded research projects for these courses prior to the sudden wide-scale availability of ChatGPT, I think they serve as valuable case studies, especially because WAI did not have detectable AI-plagiarism issues, while PCSR did.

Comparing and reflecting on the structures of the projects in each course reveal strategies that instructors can implement to make written assignments ChatGPT-resistant. By writing essays as only one component in a larger scaffolded project, which tracks students' progress and provides numerous opportunities for feedback and intervention, students gain confidence as they develop their ideas incrementally. Since each aspect of the larger scaffolded assignment is manageable, students are less likely to face desperate situations—such as not having started the project until the day before the deadline—which could make them feel as though using an AI tool to generate their essay is the only viable option. Moreover, requiring students to do interactive oral presentations, in which they explicitly discuss their research process and answer clarification questions from their instructor and classmates, provides an additional incentive to do their own work.

Not surprisingly, content-driven courses can benefit from incorporating some of the strategies of method-driven writing courses, including worksheets that help guide analysis, one-on-one meetings with the instructor, and library and peer feedback workshops, as well as in-class activities, such as brainstorming and small-group discussions. As with all assignments, providing students with clear prompts and rubrics, explaining the expectations in class—including policies related to ChatGPT usage—and allowing opportunities for questions decrease ambiguity and help students feel confident that they can optimize their performance by doing their own work, rather than relying on a chatbot to do their work for them. I have included the WAI and PCSR prompts, some scaffolding assignments, and rubrics in the appendices.

NYU Shanghai's diverse student population, combined with my interdisciplinary training,
influences how I structure my courses and plan my individual class sessions. As a Sino-American joint venture, NYU Shanghai has a student population of more than two thousand, with about half of its students coming from China, one-quarter from the United States, and the other quarter from over seventy other countries throughout the world. The majority of our students speak English as a second language.

A product of my interdisciplinary training in early modern Atlantic history and the history of science and mathematics, PCSR is an advanced history seminar, in which students learn to use historians’ methodologies by analyzing primary sources and engaging with relevant scholarship. As a class, we explore the dissemination and reception of some of the quintessential concepts of the Scientific Revolution within their social and cultural contexts, as well as the interrelationship between popular culture and scientific processes. Each student then applies what they learned throughout the course to a research project on an approved topic of their choice—which can focus on any period and geographical region. The end product is a ten-to-thirteen-page argumentative essay and associated oral presentation.

Although this course is primarily intended for advanced humanities majors focusing on history, it is open to all undergraduate students. During the spring 2023 semester, fourteen of the seventeen students enrolled in the course were first-year students and the other three were second-year students. None of the students had declared humanities as their major at the beginning of the semester, and most students had not taken any college-level history courses previously. This enrollment is not surprising, because many NYU Shanghai students are interested in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) topics; PCSR fulfills NYU Shanghai’s science, technology, and society (STS) core requirement; all third-year students are required to study away; and fourth-year students are likely focusing on their capstone projects, which they need to complete to graduate.

The enrollment of the course more than doubled during the two-week drop/add period, which I assume was related to positive feedback disseminated by initially enrolled students. Seventeen students took PCSR, which was capped at eighteen. This is quite high for an NYU Shanghai humanities course. It is not uncommon for such courses to have single-digit enrollment. While I am very glad that so many students wanted to take my course, the fact that some students did not begin attending until the fifth class session led to some challenges.

To ensure engagement and facilitate feedback, I had each student do a variety of activities on a Google doc that they shared with me. Unfortunately, some of the students who joined late never caught up with the activities they had missed during the first two weeks of class and did not complete many of the subsequent activities either, which suggests that they were not fully engaging with the course materials. Although NYU Shanghai faculty from virtually every department have discussed the pedagogical benefits of a shorter drop/add period with the administration, we have repeatedly been informed that it is unlikely to be implemented anytime soon.

Unlike PCSR, which is an advanced elective course, all students are required to take WAI during the spring semester of their first year. Since we need to offer it to about five hundred students at
the same time, it is taught by numerous instructors. Although each instructor’s course is unique, all WAI courses have common learning outcomes, and it is customary to assign a research project as the final major assignment. The goal of the research project is to build on the reading, writing, and critical analysis skills the students have been developing throughout the course, while also helping students develop their information literacy skills.

During the spring 2023 semester, I taught three sections of WAI. One section had twelve students and two each had thirteen students. The enrollment is intentionally kept around twelve students per section to facilitate discussion and timely feedback. Although some students joined the course during the two-week drop/add period, it was not on the same scale as PCSR, and most students put in the effort necessary to catch up quickly. Both PCSR and WAI met for seventy-five minutes Mondays and Wednesdays throughout the fourteen-week semester.

Since ChatGPT and related tools were a new technology, faculty members created working groups to explore the pedagogical implications, and the administration allowed each instructor to decide whether and how they would use it in their courses. I made it clear in my syllabi, on the project prompts, and verbally throughout the semester that the use of AI tools was strictly prohibited for all aspects of the course and that choosing to use them was a violation of NYU Shanghai’s academic integrity policies.

When creating the scaffolded research projects, I drew on my experiences teaching a variety of history and writing courses. I divided up the research process into a series of manageable steps, as indicated on the table below. In PCSR, the library workshop was intended to help students prepare their topic and initial source assessment assignment. I provided feedback on this assignment to help them choose a focused topic, for which relevant sources were available and about which they could say something meaningful in ten-to-thirteen pages. Since they were required to put forth an argument, support it with primary source evidence, engage with relevant scholarship, and include properly formatted Chicago-style citations, there were a variety of assignments in which students reported and reflected on their progress, including the bibliography of secondary sources and the primary source reflection. As I describe below, I provided feedback on each of these assignments to help them prepare their progress report and project outline, which they discussed with both their classmates and me in the peer feedback workshop and primary source workshop, respectively. Therefore, by the time they submitted their final essay, they had already completed—and received feedback on—five assignments, which included detailed analysis of their sources and an outline of their intended essay. Since they already did all of this work and needed to incorporate it into their final submission, it would have been virtually impossible to use AI to generate their essay at that point.

Although the course material focused primarily on the early modern Atlantic, each student was encouraged to choose a topic that interested them, without temporal or geographical limitations. During the spring 2023 semester, students chose a variety of interesting topics. For instance, one student explored how scientific ideas were presented to children in early Chinese Communist films, while another analyzed popular YouTube videos that claim that the Quran predicted modern science, and another examined the connections between gender and brewing in early modern England. From the first day of class, the project prompt and a list of potential topics were posted on Brightspace, our course learning management system. I encouraged students to start
thinking about topics right away and come to office hours to discuss their ideas.

As shown on Table 1, a librarian came to the tenth class session to provide a workshop intended to help students find primary sources, and their topic and initial source assessment was due at the end of the following week. Between class eighteen, in the ninth week of the semester, and the end of the thirteenth week, when the final essay was due, there were a variety of scaffolding assignments, which are included in the appendix. As mentioned above, these were intended to help students find and analyze their sources and develop their ideas. For instance, on the primary source reflection, progress report, and primary source workshop prompt, I asked them to answer the following questions:

- What is your research question?
- What is your working thesis statement?
- How have you located your primary sources?

I then asked them to provide a Chicago-style citation for each source and a paragraph explaining how they planned to use it to answer their research question and support their thesis. Building on their bibliography of secondary sources and reflection scaffolding assignment, I also asked them to relate these primary sources to the secondary sources they indicated they would be using. To facilitate their analysis of primary sources, I provided a worksheet for them to complete for each source. Part of the assignment required them to submit one of their worksheets and be prepared to discuss it with two of their classmates during our small-group discussion.

I encouraged students to consult with me about their in-progress scaffolding assignments and gave them written feedback on their submissions, often encouraging them to narrow their topic, refine their research question, and consult the additional sources I suggested. During the final

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Scaffolding Assignments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Library Workshop</td>
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<td>12*</td>
<td>Topic and Initial Source Assessment</td>
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<td>Bibliography of Secondary Sources and Reflection</td>
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<td>20*</td>
<td>Primary Source Reflection</td>
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<td>21*</td>
<td>Progress Report and Primary Source Workshop</td>
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<td>22*</td>
<td>Project Outline</td>
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<td>25*</td>
<td>Peer Feedback Workshop</td>
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<td>26*</td>
<td>Final Essay</td>
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<tr>
<td>27-28</td>
<td>Project Presentations</td>
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</table>

*Indicates that it is due the following Friday.
class session’s discussion about the fundamental takeaways of the course, several students emphasized that the workshops we had during the twenty-first class session, in which students discussed their progress in small groups, and the twenty-fifth class session, in which students gave each other feedback on their outlines, were especially useful. Some students highlighted the utility of the peer feedback prompt, contained in the appendix, which both provided guidance about the aspects of their classmate’s outline on which they should focus and ensured that they received substantive comments on their own outlines—as opposed to the customary “pretty good” that often happened in their other courses when no guidelines were provided.

I also encouraged—but did not require—students to follow up on the library workshop by making individual appointments with a librarian. The students who chose to do so tended to include more relevant primary sources in their project than students who chose to find sources on their own. I also encouraged them to visit NYU Shanghai’s Academic Resource Center (ARC), which can help with conceptualizing, formulating arguments, drafting, and editing. In addition, many students chose to discuss their progress with me during office hours. Since this is a content-driven course, students were expected to do the initial aspects of the project in addition to their other required reading and assignments, which is common in many courses.

Since WAI is primarily focused on methodology, from the time that students began their projects during the seventeenth class session, all of the assigned sources and class content were intended to help them develop their research projects, including classes devoted to research, drafting, and presentation strategies. As indicated on the prompt, included in the appendix, students were required to use NYU Libraries resources to research and write a seven-to-ten-page paper on an approved topic of their choice. Since they were required to make an argument, I encouraged them to choose a controversial topic that was narrow enough that they could research it in the allotted time and write something meaningful about it in seven-to-ten pages. Among the three sections, students chose a wide variety of topics, including transgender women in sports, the ethics of self-driving cars, and a comparative analysis of US and Chinese policies on Taiwan.

To discourage the superficial analysis that often results when students are required to use numerous sources, I required them to use only a minimum of three secondary and two tertiary sources. They were also welcome to use primary sources to help support their argument. Unlike PCSR where meetings were recommended, WAI students were required to meet with either me, a librarian, or the ARC and to write a one-paragraph reflection and plan of action. This proved to be a successful method, which I plan to require for all subsequent courses with substantial writing components.

As shown on table 2, WAI also had a library workshop and several of the scaffolding assignments were similar to those assigned for PCSR. For instance, I provided worksheets to help students analyze their sources. Since I devoted about twenty minutes of class time to individual brainstorming and subsequent small-group discussion of ideas for their projects during class seventeen, the library workshop in WAI was much more successful than the PCSR counterpart, where I had asked students to brainstorm ideas individually outside of class. Having given each WAI student personalized feedback about topics they brainstormed, I was able to help them put the research strategies that the librarian suggested into action during the library workshop.
Most students left the workshop with at least some idea of what their topic would be and some sources they could consult. I intend to devote some class time to brainstorming and discussing topics in PCSR in the future. Although doing activities during class leaves less time for the discussion of assigned content, spending even a little time—especially at the beginning and key points throughout the process—can help empower students to formulate their own ideas, rather than relying on AI tools.

### Table 2: WAI Scaffolding Assignments

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<th>Class</th>
<th>Scaffolding Assignments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Individual and Group Brainstorming in Class</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Library Workshop</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Topic and Initial Source Assessment</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>One Annotated Bibliography Entry • In class Workshop</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Annotated Bibliography</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Draft</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>Peer Feedback Workshop</td>
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<td>Final Essay</td>
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<tr>
<td>27-28</td>
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*Indicates that it is due the following Thursday/Friday.

Since analyzing sources can be challenging for students, we spend a lot time doing it together in classes, and, as mentioned above, I also provided worksheets intended to facilitate source evaluation and self-reflection. Moreover, I tried to ensure that students received the optimal benefit from their peer feedback by requiring each student to comment on specific aspects of their partner’s draft (WAI) or outline (PCSR). Since many of the scaffolding assignments required students to discuss their research process and analyze their sources, using ChatGPT to generate their final essays would not have been much help, because they would still have had to incorporate their specific sources and analysis into the essay. Despite the prohibition of using AI tools, I suppose that it is possible that some students *did* do that. If so, I applaud them for doing so in a way that was not detectable.

To further guard against AI plagiarism, in both classes, students were required to prepare five-to-seven-minute presentations about their projects, in which they discussed their research process and answered clarification questions from me and their classmates. The fact that students chose topics that interested them—and presented about them in front of their peers—contributed to the majority of students putting in a lot of effort and ultimately crafting well-structured essays and giving successful presentations. However, several PCSR students did not fully engage in the scaffolding process—likely choosing to use the prohibited AI tools, rather than doing their own work, as I explain below—and ultimately did not successfully complete the course. The following detailed discussion of the choices to (most likely) use ChatGPT that several PCSR students made illustrates the limitations of AI tools and the methods instructors can use to help struggling students get on track.
Ideally, NYU Shanghai students should have completed WAI prior to taking PCSR, so that they would have the information literacy and analytical skills necessary to do a research project. Unfortunately, that was not the case during spring 2023. Since the vast majority of students in PCSR were first-year students, I spent extra class time and provided additional office hours to help students develop their analytical and argument-formation skills. Some second-year students said that they appreciated this also, because their writing foundation was somewhat rocky due to the abrupt switch to online instruction as a result of the COVID-19 lockdowns in Shanghai during the spring 2022 semester. Nevertheless, despite these extra preparations, many PCSR students were ill-equipped to complete the first assignment, which was intended to help them prepare for the historiographical aspects of their project by putting two works of “Scientific Revolution” scholarship in conversation.

Five of the seventeen students submitted essays with noteworthy nonsensical elements, including claims that images or texts had nonexistent details and references to imaginary sources. Having attended a variety of ChatGPT pedagogy workshops, I assessed that these seemed to be the types of responses generated by a chatbot. At that time—early March 2023—there was no way of detecting whether something had been generated by AI, so I consulted with the dean of Academic Affairs, who is responsible for evaluating cases of suspected academic integrity violations. We agreed that since we did not have definitive evidence, I should meet with each student to discuss the situation and they would receive the grades that their nonsensical essays earned according to the rubric, which is included in the appendix. According to the parameters of the assignment, each of the five students earned between 60 to 70 percent of the total points. After the meetings, two students began to take the class more seriously, by engaging with the sources and portfolio activities, participating in class discussions, and coming to office hours to consult about their assignments. They both ended up doing very well in the course, submitting well-reasoned and coherent final projects.

Perhaps thinking that they had “gotten away with it,” the other three seemed to have continued using ChatGPT for their scaffolding assignments, submitting extremely vague—yet long-winded—responses for their initial and subsequent assessments of primary and secondary sources. Vague and rambling responses are another tell-tale sign of ChatGPT usage. After reviewing their submissions, I called them in for individual meetings, telling them that their answers seemed as though they were generated by AI but giving them the benefit of the doubt that they had done their own work. I also told them that they needed to narrow their focus considerably and engage more with the author’s arguments and use of evidence, rather than merely providing vague summary.

Nevertheless, when these three students had virtually nothing to say at the progress report and primary source workshop during class twenty-one, it was clear that they had not done much, if any, of the foundational work. None of the three students submitted an outline. A workshop presented by NYU Shanghai’s Center for Teaching and Learning articulated the problem using Bloom’s taxonomy of educational objectives, which was developed by the educational psychologist Benjamin Bloom and his collaborators in the 1950s and continues to influence curriculum and assessment design during the twenty-first century. Since the students had not fully engaged with the lower-order skills—at the base of the pyramid—including “understand” and “apply,” it made it difficult for them to “analyze” or “evaluate” sources and virtually impossible to “create” an original work of scholarship.2

2. Vanderbilt University provides a concise overview and guide to using Bloom’s taxonomy. Patricia Armstrong, “Bloom’s Taxonomy,” Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching, accessed March 19, 2024
Table 3: Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives.

- **Remember**
- **Understand**
- **Apply**
- **Analyze**
- **Evaluate**
- **Create**

**Source**: Patricia Armstrong, “Bloom’s Taxonomy,” Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching.

Even if I had asked them to submit a draft instead of an outline, it would have been very difficult for them to have used ChatGPT to generate it, because in their essays students were required to use the sources they had indicated on their scaffolding assignments. Not submitting the outline also disqualified these students from doing the peer feedback assignment. Since the outline and peer feedback together accounted for 8 percent of their grade, they had already done very poorly on their other assignments, and it was unlikely they would be able to complete the entire project by the deadline, they each decided to withdraw from the course.

Although I met with these students several times and encouraged them to apply their own critical analysis to their topics and sources, I ultimately learned that more structured interventions are necessary. Regardless of whether a student uses ChatGPT, completing scaffolding assignments unsatisfactorily indicates that they need additional guidance. In the future, after individual meetings, I will require struggling students to revise or redo the assignment. Then I will work with each student to create additional scaffolding, by breaking the assignment down further. For instance, since the bibliography of secondary sources requires students to discuss at least three sources they are planning to use, I could have them submit a draft of their discussion of one of the sources a week ahead of the deadline to ensure that they are on the right track. I will also require periodic check-ins, as well as meetings with me, a librarian, or the ARC, as appropriate. Although this is a fair amount of extra work, it is time well spent to ensure that students learn the foundational skills they will need to thrive in their educations and careers.

Ultimately, these experiences taught me a lot about strategies I can use to help minimize students’ impulse to use ChatGPT and steps I can take when illicit usage is suspected. Scaffolding assignments and periodic feedback from the instructor and classmates are an excellent way to ensure that students are making progress on their research and writing, while simultaneously instilling them with confidence that their own work will earn them a respectable
grade. Devoting some class time to brainstorming and discussing ideas and offering guidance in the initial stages and at key points throughout the project are instrumental, as is collaborating with the library and the ARC to create workshops geared to the specific assignment. These workshops are an excellent way to orient students and ensure that they are engaging with the project from the start, and they can help encourage them to seek additional individualized help from these resources. Moreover, requiring students to schedule, attend, and reflect on individual meetings with the instructor, a librarian, or the ARC can provide students with another level of valuable feedback. Since AI tools are rapidly becoming more sophisticated and currently available AI detectors are not reliable, it is often difficult to know for sure whether a student engaged in unscrupulous behavior or produced a response themselves. Regardless, in the future I will work more closely with students who submit vague or nonsensical scaffolding assignments—essentially creating additional individualized scaffolding—to help them narrow their topics, choose and analyze appropriate sources, formulate their arguments, and use their sources to support them. By helping students feel empowered by doing their own work, we can ensure that the college essay will remain alive.
Appendix A: Writing as Inquiry (WAI) Materials

Essay #3

Researching, Writing, and Presenting

Prompt

Use NYU Libraries materials to research and write a seven-to-ten-page essay on an approved topic of your choice. You will want to choose a topic that is narrow enough to be researched in the allotted time and with resources available via the NYU Libraries databases. Since you will need to formulate an argument, choosing a controversial topic is encouraged.

Using at least three secondary and at least two tertiary sources, your essay should put forth a clear thesis that you support with properly cited evidence. You are welcome, but not required, to use primary source evidence to help support your argument. All sources must be cited using Chicago-style citations.

You will also do a five-to-seven-minute presentation based on your research and the argument you make in your essay.

For this assignment, you are required to have an appointment at the ARC, with a librarian, or with Dr. Egloff, for which you will write a one-paragraph reflection and plan of action.

Scaffolding

Wednesday, March 29, 2023 – Library Workshop

Wednesday, April 12, 2023 – No Class – Individual Meetings

Thursday, April 13, 2023 – Essay #3 Scaffolding – Upload Topic and Initial Source Assessment to Brightspace by 10pm.

Monday, April 17, 2023 – Upload In-Progress Bibliography with at least one Annotation to Brightspace by 8am. Bring four paper copies to class to facilitate discussion.

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 – Upload Annotated Bibliography to Brightspace by 10pm.

Sunday, April 23, 2023 – Upload Draft to Brightspace by 10pm.

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 – Upload Peer Feedback by 8am and bring three hard copies to class. Be prepared to discuss your peer feedback with your classmate during class.

Wednesday, May 3, 2023 – No Class – Individual Meetings. Reminder: This is the final day to
have meetings prior to Essay #3 due date. Upload one-paragraph Reflection on Meeting (with ARC, a librarian, or Dr. Egloff) and Plan of Action to Brightspace by 10pm.³


Monday, May 8, 2023 – Upload Presentation to Brightspace by 8am. Be prepared to do your presentation during class.

**Formatting**

Use 12-pt Times New Roman font, double-spaced, justified left, with one-inch margins for the body of your paper.

Include a header in 11-pt Times New Roman font, which contains the course name and your section number on the left and your full name and page numbers on the right.

Footnotes should be in 10-pt Times New Roman font, single-spaced, justified left, and in sequential order. The “References” feature on Word makes formatting them this way simple. If you are unsure how to use it, please ask Dr. Egloff for guidance.

You are not required to include a separate Works Cited page.

Please do not include an MLA heading.

**Grading**

Essay #3 accounts for 30 percent of your grade, which is distributed as follows.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic and Initial Source Assessment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-Progress Bibliography with at least one Annotation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Annotated Bibliography</td>
<td>5 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft</td>
<td>1 point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Feedback</td>
<td>1 point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-paragraph Reflection on meeting (with ARC, librarian, or Dr. Egloff) and Plan of Action</td>
<td>1 point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Version of Essay #3 uploaded to Brightspace by 10pm and a stapled paper version submitted in the following class session</td>
<td>15 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>5 points</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>30 points</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Rubrics

Each of the one-point scaffolding assignments will be graded for completion. The final version of the essay will be evaluated using the rubric posted on Brightspace.

Choosing not to bring/submit paper versions will result in a 5 percent reduction.

Annotated Bibliography – A separate prompt and rubric will be posted on Brightspace.

Presentation – A separate prompt and rubric will be posted on Brightspace.

Academic Integrity

All students are expected to work independently and adhere to NYU Shanghai’s guidelines for academic integrity. Each portion of this assignment will be evaluated using anti-plagiarism software. Use of AI tools (ChatGPT, CopyGenius, etc.) for drafting or editing written work is not permitted in this course. Doing so is a violation of NYU’s academic integrity policy.

Annotated Bibliography

Follow the guidelines in section 53d of Hacker and Sommers’s Rules for Writers, 10th edition, to “construct an annotated bibliography” for all of your required sources.

You should do a Chicago-style “bibliography” citation for each source and organize the entries alphabetically by the authors’ last names.

As Hacker and Sommers explain, each annotation should include both summary and evaluation.

Your summary should include the following:

- Author’s credentials
- Purpose of the article
- Thesis
- Author’s main ideas
- Evidence the author uses to support those ideas

Your evaluation should include the following:

- Assessment of the reputability of the source (similarly to Essay #2)
• Evaluation of how and why this source might help you answer your research question
• Indication of how you plan to use this source in your essay (e.g., background, evidence, counterargument)

Be sure to include Chicago-style “notes” citations in footnotes to cite the page numbers of the sources as you describe them, which are referred to as “internal” citations on the rubric, as well as any “external” sources you consult.

**Formatting**

Include a header in 11-pt Times New Roman font, which contains the course name and your section number on the left and your full name and page numbers on the right.

Bibliography entries should be justified left. The second and subsequent line should be indented one-half inch.

Annotations should be justified left and not indented.

For presentation purposes, and to save space, everything should be single-spaced. Be sure to include space between the bibliographical citation and the annotation, and the annotation and the next bibliographical citation.

Note: While you are only required to include bibliographical information and annotations for the sources described on the prompt, including at least the bibliographical information for all sources you are considering using is recommended.

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**Annotated Bibliography Rubric**

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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Chicago-style Bibliography</td>
<td>5 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Summary</td>
<td>5 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Evaluation</td>
<td>5 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Details</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Alphabetical Order</td>
<td>5 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Internal Citation</td>
<td>5 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• External Citation</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Header</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Formatting</td>
<td>5 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Project Presentation**

Essay #3

Prepare a five-to-seven-minute PowerPoint presentation in which you introduce your topic, argument, and evidence to your classmates. Be sure to address all of the following aspects and consult the rubric to optimize your evaluation.

Include a title slide containing your name, class name and section number, and title of your project.

Research process:

• What was your initial topic idea?
  • What was your initial research question?
  • What resources did you consult to initially explore your topic?
• What search terms did you use?

• How did you refine your topic and research question during your research process?

Background – Explain the relevant background information for your topic. Remember to tell your reader when things happened.

Scholarly Conversations – Describe the scholarly conversations surrounding this topic.

• Discuss the specific sources that you used to learn about these conversations.

Argument – Clearly articulate the argument that you are making in your essay.

Evidence – Discuss the specific evidence that you use to support your argument.

• Incorporate visual representations as appropriate.

Conclude by suggesting additional research that scholars could do to further explore this topic in general and your research question in particular.

Save at least one minute for questions.

Your final slide should be a Works Cited page, which has Chicago-style “bibliography” citations in alphabetical order for all the sources from your essay.

Throughout your presentation, you should include Chicago-style “notes” citations referring to specific page numbers in the notes section of each slide.

Be mindful of the time, speak loudly and clearly, and create a visually appealing presentation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title Slide (name, class and section number, and project title)</td>
<td>5 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Process</td>
<td>10 points</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Initial topic idea</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>– Initial research question</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Initial resources consulted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Search terms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– How you refined topic and research question</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>5 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarly Conversation (Specific Sources)</td>
<td>10 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argument</td>
<td>5 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>20 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further Research</td>
<td>5 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>5 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>10 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes Citations throughout Presentation</td>
<td>5 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correct Length</td>
<td>5 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity of Oral Presentation (loud, clear, and moderately paced)</td>
<td>5 points</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Visually Appealing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uploaded Prior to Class</td>
<td>5 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Popular Culture and the Scientific Revolution (PCSR) Materials

Project Overview

A fundamental aspect of this course is a project on an approved topic of your choice. While the topic must be related to popular culture and science, broadly conceived, you are not required to focus on Europe or the early modern period.

By the end of the semester, you will research and write a ten-to-thirteen-page paper on your approved topic.

Throughout the semester, you will receive feedback on a variety of scaffolded assignments. This process is intended to help you develop your research, critical analysis, argument formation, and writing skills.

A list of potential topics is available on the course website. You may choose from this list or propose a topic of your choice. Please feel encouraged to discuss potential ideas with the professor as you think of them.

Written Component

Prepare a ten-to-thirteen-page paper on your approved topic that

- Puts forth an argument
- Supports it with primary source evidence
- Engages with relevant scholarship
- Includes the required number sources, with accompanying Chicago-style citations
- Follows the formatting parameters (see below)

Academic Integrity

All students are expected to work independently and adhere to NYU Shanghai’s guidelines for academic integrity. Each portion of this assignment will be evaluated using anti-plagiarism software. Use of AI tools (ChatGPT, CopyGenius, etc.) for drafting or editing written work is not permitted in this course. Doing so is a violation of NYU’s academic integrity policy.
Parameters

You are required to use at least four primary and four peer-reviewed secondary sources. You may also use tertiary sources, but you are not required to do so.

Header

Include an 11-pt Times New Roman font header in which the name of our course is justified left and your first and last name is justified right, along with the page number.

Body

Begin the body of your paper with a title that is centered and either in bold or underlined.

Use 12-pt Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins.

Include Chicago-style footnotes – see chicagomanualofstyle.org.

Footer

Format your footnotes in 10-pt Times New Roman font.

Topic Selection and Initial Source Assessment

Review the prompt for the project, as well as the list of suggested project topics. You are free to choose a topic from the list or choose your own topic. You should choose a topic that has some scientific aspect—broadly conceived—and has some relation to popular culture. You are not required to choose a topic related to Europe or the early modern period, but you are welcome to do so. Since you will be putting in effort to research and writing about this topic, it should be a topic that you find interesting. Making an appointment with a librarian is highly recommended!

Be sure to include Chicago-style bibliographical citations for all sources that you list.

What topic are you considering researching?

How does it relate to science (broadly conceived)?

How does it relate to popular culture?

What NYU Libraries database(s) do you think will have relevant primary sources?

Why? (Review the notes from the library workshop regarding how to use NYU Libraries databases to locate primary sources. The link to the slides is posted on Brightspace under the Class 10 tab.)
Locate at least two primary sources that you think could be useful for your project. For each source, include at least one sentence explaining why you think it would be useful.

Use NYU Libraries databases to locate at least two secondary sources that you think could be useful for your project. For each source, include at least one sentence explaining why you think it would be useful. (Note: The secondary sources should be journal articles or scholarly books, as opposed to encyclopedia entries or textbooks. JStor is an excellent source for scholarly articles and the “Books & More” tab is a good place to search for books.)

Rubric

This assignment is graded for completion.

Project Scaffolding: Bibliography of Secondary Sources and Reflection

Complete the following and submit it by the deadline. Writing your responses in a non-bold font is recommended.

Write a paragraph describing your specific topic and what you have done to research it so far. Include your research question. If you have not yet formulated a research question, it is wise to do so now. (10 points)

List at least three secondary sources that you are considering using for your project in alphabetical order, using Chicago-style “Bibliography” citations. (35 points)

Write a paragraph about each source, in which you summarize it, offer a brief analysis of the argument and use of evidence, and discuss how you plan to use it for your project. Be sure to include Chicago-style “Notes” citation in footnotes to the individual pages you are referencing. (30 points)

Review the deadlines for the components of the project as indicated on the syllabus. Write a plan of action for the remainder of the semester as well as a timeline for how you will complete each component on time. (25 points)

Primary Source Reflection, Progress Report, and Primary Source Workshop

Primary Source Reflection

Complete the following. Be sure to cite all sources using Chicago-style citations. You should use “bibliography” citations when listing sources and “notes” citations—referencing specific page numbers—in footnotes, when you are discussing them. As with all assignments, failure to include citations is a violation of academic integrity.
What is your research question? (3 points)

What is your working thesis statement? (2 points)

How have you located your primary sources? (2 points)

List all the primary sources that you are considering using. (Use Chicago-style bibliography citations and list the sources alphabetically. You are required to list at least three primary sources. However, it is highly recommended that you list all sources that you are considering, so that you can get the best possible feedback.) (10 points)

Include a paragraph for each source, in which you describe what it is and how it helps you answer your research question and support your working thesis. (15 points)

How do these primary sources relate to the secondary sources you submitted for the “Bibliography of Secondary Sources and Reflection” assignment and any additional secondary sources you have analyzed since then? (10 points)

Do you plan to look for additional primary sources? If so, where? (3 points)

Progress Report (5 points)

Be prepared to discuss your answers to all of the above questions, report on any additional progress you have made, and present on one primary source during the scheduled class session.

Primary Source Analysis

Choose one of the primary sources that you are considering using for your project and analyze it according to the following criteria. (It is advisable to do this for all of your sources.)

Bring three physical copies of this analysis, as well as a link to the source with you to class on the day of the workshop. Choosing not to bring the required physical copies will result in a 10 percent penalty.

Rubric – Five points for each bold heading.

Author – If the author of the document is not clear, be sure to indicate that. What other information is available that could offer some indication?

• Credentials – What is the author’s training? Where were they employed? And so on.

• Impression of the source based on this information

Full Title of the Source
Date of Creation – If it is not clear, be sure to indicate that. Offer its approximate date of origin along with a justification for your estimate.

- Previous editions? – For texts. If it is an instrument or artifact, consider the similarities and differences with similar items that preceded it.
  - When?
  - Changes between editions

Publication/Creation Details
- Assess the significance

Intended Audience

Project – What was the author hoping to accomplish? Do you feel as though they did accomplish it?

Arguments/Intentions
- Evidence – What sources/strategies did the author use to support their points?
  - Do you find these to be convincing? Why or why not?

Contemporaries – Does the author engage with contemporaries/predecessors? If so, in what way?
- Are you familiar with the work(s) of these contemporaries/predecessors?
- Do you think that it is worthwhile to become familiar with it/them? Why/why not?

What role will this source serve in your project?

Next Steps
- Based on this source, what, if any, additional primary sources will you analyze? Why?
- Based on this source, what, if any, additional secondary sources will you analyze? Why?

Outline

Working Thesis Statement (10 points)

Outline – Create a "Formal Outline" based on the criteria we discussed in class.4 (45 points)
By providing as much detail as possible, your classmate will be able to provide you the best possible peer feedback.

**Works Cited** – Include a Chicago-style bibliography of all sources you intend to use. Remember that you are required to use at least four primary sources and at least four secondary sources. You should also include any tertiary sources that you plan to use. (45 points)

**Peer Feedback**

**Project Outline**

Each student will offer feedback on the outline of a classmate’s research project. As Hacker and Sommers highlight in *Rules for Writers*, “It is your job to offer thoughtful, encouraging comments to show peers what they’re doing well and how they might build on their strengths.”

Annotate your classmate’s outline.

- Make notes in the margin with positive feedback, questions you may have, aspects that you think need more explanation, etc.
- Note if you think that anything would benefit from being removed or rearranged.

Write a one-to-two-page double-spaced analysis of the outline, with suggestions on how it could be improved prior to drafting the essay. Your analysis should be written in paragraph form, as opposed to bullets. Refer to the numbered points on your classmate’s outline throughout. (If they did not include numbers, please add them as part of your annotations.)

Be sure to address the following.

- Restate your classmate’s main idea in your own words.
  - “After reading your outline, my big takeaway is...”
- Thesis
  - Is it clear, specific, and concise?
  - Suggest a way to rephrase it.
- Historical Context
  - Does your classmate provide enough information about their topic for someone who knows nothing about it to understand their argument and analysis? Particularly, do they say *when* and *where* things happened?
  - If not, what would you suggest they add?
• If you think that they include too much detail, what do you suggest they remove?

• Required Secondary Sources
  • Does your classmate use at least four secondary sources?
  • Do they use these sources effectively?
    • If not, what would you suggest they add?
    • If you think that they include too much detail, what do you suggest they remove?
    • In what ways could this analysis be improved?

• Required Primary Sources
  • Does your classmate use at least four primary sources?
  • Do they use these sources effectively?
    • If not, what would you suggest they add?
    • If you think that they include too much detail, what do you suggest they remove?
    • In what ways could this analysis be improved?

• Overall Argument
  • Are you convinced by your classmate’s overall argument and use of evidence?
    • Why or why not?
    • If not, suggest opportunities for improvement.

• Organization
  • Is the outline easy to follow?
  • If not, make some suggestions for reorganization.

• Title
  • Does the title fulfill its intended function of catching the reader’s attention, indicating what the essay is about, and hinting at the argument?
  • Suggest at least one alternative title.

• Conclude by highlighting:
• Two fundamental strengths

• Two aspects that need the most attention

Upload the following to Brightspace as one file by the deadline. Also email them to your peer feedback partner and bring three physical copies to class (one for each of you and one for Dr. Egloff).

• Your one-to-two-page (double-spaced) analysis of the essay

• The original essay with your annotations

**Project Presentation**

Prepare a five-to-seven-minute PowerPoint presentation in which you introduce your topic, argument, and evidence to your classmates. Be sure to address all of the following aspects and consult the rubric to optimize your evaluation.

Include a title slide containing your name, the course name, and title of your project.

**Research process**

• What was your initial topic idea?

• What was your initial research question?

• What resources did you consult to initially explore your topic?

• What search terms did you use?

• How did you refine your topic and research question during your research process?

**Background** – Explain the relevant background information for your topic. Remember to tell your reader when things happened.

**Scholarly Conversations** – Describe the scholarly conversations surrounding this topic.

• Discuss the specific sources you used to learn about these conversations.

**Argument** – Clearly articulate the argument that you are making in your essay.

**Evidence** – Discuss the specific evidence that you use to support your argument.

• Incorporate visual representations as appropriate.
Conclude by suggesting additional research that scholars could do to further explore this topic in general and your research question in particular.

Save at least one minute for questions.

Your final slide should be a Works Cited page, which has Chicago-style “bibliography” citations in alphabetical order for all the sources from your essay.

Throughout your presentation, you should include Chicago-style “notes” citations referring to specific page numbers in the notes section of each slide.

Be mindful of the time, speak loudly and clearly, and create a visually appealing presentation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title Slide (Name, course name, and project title)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Process</td>
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<tr>
<td>–Initial Topic Idea</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>–Initial research question</td>
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<td>–Initial resources consulted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>–Search terms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–How you refined topic and research question</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarly Conversations (Specific Sources)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argument</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Further Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
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<tr>
<td>Notes Citations throughout Presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Correct Length</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Clarity of Oral Presentations (loud, clear, and moderately paced)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Visually Appealing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uploaded Prior to Class</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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### Appendix C: Essay Rubric (WAI and PCSR)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>F</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thesis Statement and Content</td>
<td><strong>(50%)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(50%)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-Thesis statement is easily</td>
<td>Thesis statement is</td>
<td>Thesis statement</td>
<td>Thesis statement is</td>
<td>-Fails to answer</td>
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<td>identifiable, clear, and</td>
<td>identifiable but</td>
<td>missing, but the</td>
<td>missing, and the essay</td>
<td>prompt.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>somewhat vague.</td>
<td>essay does not</td>
<td>essay does not have a clear</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Fully answers the prompt</td>
<td>-Mostly answers the</td>
<td>have a clear</td>
<td>argument.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with excellent detail.</td>
<td>prompt with good</td>
<td>argument.</td>
<td>-Partially answers the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>detail.</td>
<td></td>
<td>prompt with some detail.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>-All concepts are accurately</td>
<td>-Most concepts are</td>
<td>-Some concepts are</td>
<td>-Few concepts are</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>explained.</td>
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<td>accurately</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(45–50%)</td>
<td>(40% - 45%)</td>
<td>(35–40%)</td>
<td>(30–35%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evidence and Analysis</td>
<td><strong>(30%)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(30%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-Consistently uses reliable</td>
<td>Mostly uses reliable</td>
<td>Uses some reliable</td>
<td>Uses few reliable sources.</td>
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<tr>
<td>sources.</td>
<td>sources.</td>
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<td>-Very little critical</td>
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</tr>
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<td>-Critical analysis of all</td>
<td>-Critical analysis of</td>
<td>-Some critical</td>
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<td>-No critical analysis.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>(0–18%)</td>
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<td>Citations</td>
<td><strong>(10%)</strong></td>
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<td>(10%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Citations are included in</td>
<td>-Citations are</td>
<td>-Citations are</td>
<td>-Many missing or incorrect</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>all relevant places and</td>
<td>included in all</td>
<td>included in all</td>
<td>citations.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>formatted perfectly.</td>
<td>relevant places, with</td>
<td>relevant places,</td>
<td>-Academic integrity issue.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10%)</td>
<td>minor formatting</td>
<td>with significant</td>
<td>(0–5%)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>errors.</td>
<td>formatting errors.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(9%)</td>
<td>(7–8%)</td>
<td>(5–7%)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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**Note:** The rubric is designed to evaluate essays based on the following criteria: Thesis Statement and Content (50%), Evidence and Analysis (30%), and Citations (10%). Each category is further divided into subcategories with specific criteria and percentage ranges to provide a comprehensive assessment of the essay's quality.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Format (10%)</td>
<td>- Fully meets expectations for academic writing.</td>
<td>- Mostly meets expectations for academic writing.</td>
<td>- Somewhat meets expectations for academic writing.</td>
<td>- Meets few expectations for academic writing.</td>
<td>- Below minimum academic expectations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.B. – The expectations for academic writing are indicated in the style guide. Be sure to closely review them prior to submitting your essay.</td>
<td>- No errors in paragraph formatting.</td>
<td>- Few errors in paragraph formatting.</td>
<td>- Few errors in spelling or grammar.</td>
<td>- Errors do not cause strain for the reader.</td>
<td>- Errors cause strain for the reader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10%)</td>
<td>(9%)</td>
<td>(7–8%)</td>
<td>(5–6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0–5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
AUTHOR BIO

Jennifer Egloff  A strong advocate of interdisciplinarity, Jennifer Egloff combines her PhD training in early modern Atlantic history and the history of science and her undergraduate training in mathematics in both her teaching and research. Having a joint appointment in NYU Shanghai’s Writing Program and Humanities Department, Egloff teaches the two-course writing sequence that all students are required to take, elective introductory and advanced interdisciplinary history of science and mathematics courses, and introductory mathematics courses. Her research explores multivalent ways that Anglophone individuals used numerical methods and mathematical techniques to confront challenges brought on by the opening of the Atlantic to increased exploration and commerce, competing religious philosophies, and increased availability of information. Her current book project, “Apocalyptic Atlantic,” explores the impact that the discovery of the Americas, and ongoing events within and across the Atlantic, had on conceptions of the Apocalypse and predictions of when and how the “End Times” would unfold.

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Power to the People: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Difficult Topics

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KEYWORDS
Interdisciplinary teaching
History
Social work
Co-teaching
Difficult topics

ABSTRACT

In the fall of 2022, two professors from two different academic disciplines, Dr. Erica Hayden (history) and Dr. Allison Buzard (social work), launched an interdisciplinary undergraduate course entitled “Power to the People: Social Movements in United States History” (henceforth “Power to the People”) at a small, private, religiously affiliated liberal arts college in the southern United States. The goal of the course was to provide students with a comprehensive background of historical social movements and the strategies and tactics used by the people to make change. In an era and climate where critical race theory; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual, Two Spirit (LGBTQIA2S+) identities; citizenship status, and other social identities and issues have become political flash points, the faculty developers knew this course might incite controversy, yet they also believed it could foster critical dialogue needed by students preparing to enter careers in a society plagued by binaries and divisiveness. Furthermore, the students in these two disciplines expressed interest in this subject matter, as it related to their professional pursuits. This article presents a rationale for this course, the experience of team-teaching an interdisciplinary class, the course design, and the pedagogical strategies employed, concluding with reflections on challenges and successes from the first year of teaching this course. This article seeks to provide educators with information and ideas for broaching difficult topics in the college classroom with a collaborative, interdisciplinary course.
Power to the People: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Difficult Topics
Dr. Erica Hayden and Dr. Allison Buzard

Introduction

In the fall of 2022, after a year of planning, Drs. Erica Hayden, associate professor of history, and Allison Buzard, program director and assistant professor of social work, launched an interdisciplinary historical and social justice-oriented course aimed at teaching students social action strategies for liberatory change. This course was imperfect but impactful, and we believe that the keys to its effectiveness rest in collaborative teaching and cross-disciplinary content. We have written this article in our own voices (you’ll see our names, Erica and Allison, in the headings indicating who authored each section) as a way for you to experience, even momentarily, how our students experienced a co-designed, co-taught, varied expertise course. In this article, we offer our rationale for this course, our experiences of co-teaching and interdisciplinary modeling, the course design and pedagogical strategies, and a reflection on the challenges and successes from the first year of teaching this course. It is our hope that this reflection might inspire more collaborative and innovative courses at other institutions of higher education.

Rationale for “Power to the People”: Erica

Several factors coalesced during the span of 2020 and 2021 that encouraged my colleague and me to pursue creating an interdisciplinary, team-taught course that focused on social reform and social action in US history. The context of this course design is significant to understanding how this idea relates to fostering challenging conversations. Our small, private, religiously affiliated liberal arts college located in the southern United States was established over 120 years ago, when most institutions of higher education were segregated by race. Our institution was founded as a historically White-serving institution and remains a predominantly White institution (PWI). Nationally and locally, the populations of Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian and other People of Color (BILAPOC) have grown since the institution’s founding at the turn of the twentieth century, and our university student population reflects those demographics shifts as well.¹ More than 50 percent of our undergraduate and graduate and continuing studies population identify as White, 25 percent of our undergraduate student body identifies as Hispanic/Latino/Latine, and 28 percent of our Adult Studies and 36 percent of our Graduate Studies students identify as Black.² While many at our institution celebrate the growth in student diversity, there is a growing concern about inequities in student achievement by racial group. Graduation rates within four years show significant disparities between BILAPOC students and White students. While 48 percent of all undergraduate students graduate within four years, only 3 percent of our Black undergraduate students and 45 percent of our Hispanic/Latine students do so.³

With these changes, students have increasingly voiced frustrations about the lack of cultural appreciation and representation on campus. Since 2015, I have been diligently working to revise the history curriculum of our university to incorporate more social and cultural history, by developing women’s history and African American history courses, which had been absent from the curriculum. Students in these classes showed keen interest in these topics and expressed a desire to learn more. These history courses always drew students from other disciplines,
indicating a need on our campus for discussion and learning about often difficult histories. Allison realized a similar need among her social work students as well as a need for more macro (policy, systemic, and community change efforts) social work courses to balance out the micro (individual work) and mezzo (small group work) courses that were well covered in the current curriculum. A course like “Power to the People” fit both of these curricular needs, especially considering the populations our social work students would engage with in their careers.

Following the killing of George Floyd in 2020, BILAPoC students at our institution called for a response, and leadership responded by assembling a task force of administrators, faculty, staff, and students. Through focus groups, individual meetings, and town hall meetings, students expressed distrust and concerns about disconnection and disparities within the community. While our institution intends to be an inclusive community, embracing diversity, statistics and anecdotal evidence indicate that our impact has not always been consistent with providing holistic education that encourages all students to grow intellectually, socially, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Too often, we have seen students opt not to discuss their challenges with faculty and staff, due to a variety of reasons; and they fall through the cracks in particular classes, withdraw from participating in or attending classes, or even withdraw entirely from the university. Both Allison and I have held space with students who felt unheard, silenced, or like they did not belong at our university. We both realized the need to amplify the voices of our students and to illuminate the robust history of social justice movements in our country’s past and present to celebrate the diversity of our nation and of our university. The murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and many others became a stark warning that the time was now to put our words and thoughts into action for our students, and thus the germ of “Power to the People” was conceived.

Finally, both Allison and I had shared multiple conversations about our interests in social history and justice work. Neither of us had been necessarily able to teach a full course on our doctoral work (I studied nineteenth-century prisons and reform and Allison focused on anti-racist pedagogy within social work education), and we had settled for incorporating bits of our research into classes when we could. Being able to create an entire course that focused on our research passions was an easy decision—it was a labor of love for us and one of needed value for our students.

Interdisciplinary, Team-Teaching Model: Erica

Once we determined we wanted to create a course like “Power to the People,” we began the task of thinking about how we would create this course using an interdisciplinary model. While it was daunting, it was also fun and gratifying. I will be candid in saying that it certainly is a struggle to blend two disparate academic disciplines, and we had multiple discussions about methodologies and how they might work together. L. Earle Reybold and Mark D. Halx acknowledge this struggle, noting that “disciplines have constituted ways of knowing the world, establishing intellectual, social and methodological boundaries that define them,” and these disciplines adjust course as updated scholarship enters the discussion.4 They argue that interdisciplinarity ‘challenges the disciplines’ hold on knowledge. It allows different lenses to be applied to inquiry.’ These scholars posit two lenses of inquiry in interdisciplinary endeavors. Integrative lenses incorporate “knowl-
edge from one discipline into another” while transformative lenses “reconstitute knowledge and knowing” into a new form.5 Essentially, the idea that knowledge and knowing should be siloed does not always adequately prepare students, but an interdisciplinary approach might be more useful.6 “Power to the People” falls into the integrative category, if using this framework. In one finding, Reybold and Halx observed that when interviewed, “faculty members noted two particular strengths of an interdisciplinary pedagogy: Interdisciplinarity primes students for learning and reiteration across disciplines encourages deeper learning.”7 This is ultimately what we sought to do in this course.

Since we crafted this course at a small, religiously affiliated liberal arts university, we knew we would have to be thoughtful about what we taught and how we presented the material, and the interdisciplinary model enabled us to do that. By blending the disciplines of history and social work, we could show students that these movements/actions do not appear out of nowhere but have a history and context and are not just isolated in one discipline. Showing that these topics are interdisciplinary and intersect with a host of different fields provided us with some buffer or protection when we broached potentially controversial topics. Because we reinforced ideas and topics from different academic backgrounds, students could see that we were not lecturing from personal perspective or individual bias. In essence, interdisciplinary team teaching helped us to corroborate our evidence to our students, which is critical during a turbulent time in academia. Students were then equipped to engage with and analyze the material through multiple academic lenses. This is especially important considering the climate in which teaching accurate history is increasingly under attack from politicians. The American Historical Association and other professional organizations are actively combating this trend at a policy and pedagogical level, yet it remains treacherous terrain for faculty.8

Navigating this treacherous terrain was made easier in part by the fact that our university is focused on building strong relationships between faculty and students. The connections made in the classroom or in advising meetings strengthens the overall learning process. Both Allison and I are passionate about making sure our classrooms are places where students not only learn about disciplinary content, but also about themselves. We understand deeply that student-faculty interactions “enhance learning, completion, motivation, critical thinking, career aspirations, belonging, and self-confidence.”9 When we have this ethos on campus and embody this in our classrooms, the learning environment can be richer and more authentic, which is especially important when we are dealing with human stories and experiences across time and space.

Another benefit of the interdisciplinary model is that by co-teaching across disciplines, we were able to model for our students what collaboration looks like. They saw us interact as professors, jumping into conversation with each other in lectures and adding alternate perspectives and ideas, and we were able to do this in a collegial way. While we told students this was part of what we wanted them to understand about working with people from different backgrounds, it was an element that was integrated into this course from conception to classroom activities. Because of this integration, we hoped that students understood the importance of what we were modeling for them,. that is an element that is almost impossible to gauge. We were also intentional about blending our student groups, called coalition groups, across disciplines to make sure our groups were looking at issues from multiple perspectives and learning to work together and overcome differences of opinion. We will examine the coalition groups in depth in a subsequent section of

5. Reybold and Halx, “Coming to Terms,” 324.
6. Reybold and Halx, “Coming to Terms,” 327. Although this article looks specifically at scientific disciplines, the values hold for our social science endeavor.
Finally, it was a great experience for our students to learn about different research methodologies and ways of thinking from other disciplines. It is easy for faculty to stay within a given discipline where we are “tied to content, methods . . . and rhetorical practices” despite knowing that if “we collaborate and collaborate well, we bring many advantages to our students’ learning.”10 I encourage faculty to take the step, even with all of the potential hurdles. Students were exposed to various sources: archival primary sources were new for social work students, and it was a learning curve for them to learn to analyze these sources through a historical lens. History students became grounded in social work theories and learned to apply these theories to the actions of activists in the past and in their final project proposals. Students were also exposed to new skill sets, making each student more versatile as they move into careers. Students fostered flexibility and awareness of other perspectives through this course. As we will talk about later, this experience of co-creating and co-teaching an interdisciplinary course showed that “collaborative teaching also educates and contributes to our own growth as teachers.”11 We were able to move beyond our disciplines’ methodologies and ways of teaching and learned value from each other’s teaching styles. As Hoon suggests, “pulling various perspectives together on one platform, . . . if well scaffolded, can only serve our students well as these can add a broader and more holistic understanding of a subject.”12 “Power to the People” served to not only educate our students about social movements in United States history, but it empowered all of us in the classroom, faculty included, to think more broadly about learning and the human experience.

While we did not specifically utilize Ken Bain’s framework for best practices of pedagogy, his list of things that the “best college teachers do” is important to consider and can help in navigating some of the barriers placed by our focus on our disciplines. Here are his seven points:

1. Create a Natural Critical Learning Environment
2. Get Their Attention and Keep It
3. Start with the Students Rather than the Discipline
4. Seek Commitments
5. Help Students Learn Outside of Class
6. Engage Students in Disciplinary Thinking
7. Create Diverse Learning Experiences13

While not all of these will necessarily work for each interdisciplinary endeavor, they can act as a starting point for working collaboratively. In our development of “Power to the People,” we certainly utilized many of these points, and I think they provide a universal set of ideas to craft an interdisciplinary learning experience that meets the goals of professors and students.
Course Design: Allison

We had both a fun and challenging time organizing the course. Because neither of us had seen a model for this type of course content nor for an interdisciplinary, co-taught course, we designed this from our own scholarship, passion, and four-year collegial relationship. We outlined our course description as follows: "Many assume that systemic societal changes come from legislation and policy, but often social change starts with people organizing to generate their own power. This course examines social movements and social action through the lenses of historical sources and present iterations to learn how the people have been and continue to be change-makers for social causes, shifting conditions of human oppression to human liberation."

We approached the course from a movement-centered lens rather than an oppression-centered lens. We heeded Paulo Freire’s prompting that without the study of oppression, there can be no liberation.14 And so, in this course, we studied conditions of oppression; however, we chose to focus the brunt of our readings, lecture, and assignments on the social movement—on power to the people toward liberation.

Texts

We did not use one central text for this course, in large part because of the way that we constructed the course to be equal parts historical analysis and social action strategy. We did assign three books for this course, which were: The Politics of Protest: Social Movements in America by David Meyer, Reveille for Radicals by Saul Alinsky, and The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander. We then created a robust reader for students comprised of primary and secondary sources aimed at amplifying the voices of people fighting for liberation across varied movements. We started with primary sources that focused on the foundations of power and social action and then included primary and additional secondary sources for each of our thematic units (see below). In each of these units, the primary sources started early in the nation’s history and worked their way toward the present. These sources came from a variety of readers and online repositories, and the sources offered a variety of voices not only speaking about oppressions but also about resilience and liberation through action.15

Narrowing and Selecting Units of Study

We had so many options of United States-based social movements to choose from for units of study in this course, but we decided to narrow it down—for the sake of a semester timeline and accessible primary sources—to racial, economic, sex/gender, and disability justice, knowing that they would intersect often because, as Audre Lorde stated, “we don’t live single issue lives.”16 We organized each unit to explore the oppression as a whole, as evidenced in different eras with varied tactics, and then explored how people fought against the oppression toward liberation in different eras with varied tactics. We have included visuals from PowerPoint slides to demonstrate how we organized each unit (fig. 1).

We knew that within the units we designed, that we would not have time to adequately cover all of the oppressions and social movements within. And we knew that there were many units that we could not cover due both to time constraints and recognition that our course could potentially...
Figure 1: Movements Depicted
raise concerns from the university and its constituents. As a way to incorporate missing and incomplete content, we offered students a final project opportunity to learn more about a social movement not covered in our semester. Students chose topics such as gun control/March for Our Lives and violence against women/Me Too during the first semester. Students also gave feedback indicating a desire to learn more about specific populations and tactics within existing units, such as Indigenous resistance within our racial justice movement.

**Pedagogical Strategies**

With Saul Alinsky and bell hooks as our guides, we attempted to design a course that was liberatory and collaborative in nature and that modeled the concepts we were teaching. During the first week of class, we worked with students to develop some community agreements, which helped us bridge gaps between students from different disciplines, offered scaffolding for holding difficult conversations, and aided both of us as instructors to have a baseline of community engagement expectations. The class agreed on these: respect one another, listen actively (with intent to understand rather than a focus on response), accept that we will likely have different opinions and perspectives (from which we can learn even when we don’t agree), cultivate an open mind, embrace cultural humility, and be willing to engage, share, and contribute to the dialogue.

We wanted to build our students’ capacities with knowledge and skills in this course. We started the course with a primer on oppression, power, privilege, language, and social action tactics so that they would have scaffolding with which to approach each unit. At the end of each unit, we asked students to explain the unit through the lens of the scaffolding offered so that they had a chance to apply their knowledge.

Early in the semester, we organized students into coalition groups, comprised of students from different disciplines so that students could practice the concepts they were learning. Merriam-Webster defines a coalition as “a temporary alliance of distinct parties or persons for join action.”18 In this course, coalition groups remained consistent throughout the semester and were intended to be a space of learning, collaboration, and group work. These groups facilitated class discussions several times during the semester as a way to practice collaborative dialogue and to foster a sense of teamwork as they worked toward their final projects together. Coalition groups’ final projects were the creation of a proposal for a community education project or community organizing plan centered on a movement not covered in the course, and students developed a written brief and group presentation outlining their proposals.

Assignments & Assessment of Student Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignments/Grades</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Points Possible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Engagement, Discussion, &amp; Professionalism</td>
<td>All Semester</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalition Group Class Facilitation</td>
<td>To Be Assigned</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Movements Essays</td>
<td>10/17, 10/31, 11/21</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalition Group Presentation/Written Proposals</td>
<td>12/9, 12/12, 12/13</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Assignments at a Glance

Students had individual and group assignments in this course as a way to model that in community organizing, both individual and collective investment are necessary (fig. 2). The interactive nature of this course required community participation, so we included engagement and professionalism as 25 percent of the course grade. Individually, students were asked to generate a historical movement essay in which they summarized key learnings from each unit through the scaffolding of the original unit. In each end-of-unit essay, students were asked to write about the historical context(s) that birthed the movement, the oppressive systems and structures the movement sought to dismantle, key leaders of the movement and their specific organizing strategies, the similarities and differences between organizing strategies within the larger movement, and the outcome of the movement including an analysis of its effectiveness and remaining work. Coalition group discussion and final presentations and written proposals were part of a group grade on assignments.

We created detailed rubrics for each assignment and split up the grading by assignment so that each of us graded all submissions for varied assignments. As we didn’t have a lot of models for co-teaching, this plan seemed to offer the best chance for equity and fairness. We both graded the final projects and averaged our scores for the written and presentation proposals.

Concluding Thoughts

Challenges: Allison

Professors learn as much, if not more than students during the first (and often the second) time teaching a course, and this was amplified for me with a course we created out of our own knowledge, passions, and relationship. During this first round of instruction for “Power to the People,” we learned a great deal about how to improve and edit the course for future iterations. One of the first significant lessons came after the first assignment submission that students were struggling to see connections and patterns between smaller movements within larger movements. We created the visuals (fig. 1) after this realization and students seemed to be able to track these connections more easily in the following units.

As instructors, we were cognizant during the planning and implementation of this course about power to the people that we ourselves held a lot of power within the course, including over course content. Throughout the semester, as we learned about student interests, we wondered about ways to incorporate more student voice and choice in the selection of units and the organization
of assignments. Candidly, we did not land on an approach for doing this in future years, but it’s still something important for course instructors to consider.

Based on student questions and assignment submissions, we learned that we needed to be clearer about assignment expectations, especially for the final project. Throughout the semester, we edited and clarified our rubrics. We gave students time throughout the semester to work on their final projects; however, we realized that it was difficult for them to conceptualize their final project until several units into the course, as that was when they started to demonstrate comprehension of key concepts related to social action.

There were a few challenges to facilitating this course that seemed contextual, era-based, and out of our control to impact. This first class section contained many seniors who expressed and embodied academic burnout. This was evidenced by several students not reading for class, missing frequent class sessions, and having limited investment in group work, all of which impacted the learning environment of a discussion-based seminar. Additionally, this group of students had been in college during COVID-19’s height, and many seemed to have additional pandemic burnout in addition to standard senioritis. Lastly, we recognize that it is possible that students avoided readings, class, and discussions because this course asked them to engage in difficult conversations, and despite scaffolding and support, perhaps their difficult conversation muscles were still developing. We will likely never know if one or all of these challenges were the reason for limited engagement from some students.

**Successes: Erica**

As with any new course, there are issues that arise along the way that demonstrate where the instructors’ ideas and intentions perhaps failed to impact the students in the way we hoped, but I will say there were a number of successes that we wish to highlight. One is that the entire semester was filled with fruitful discussions across disciplines. We saw students engaging with each other in dialogue, grappling with the source material, and applying ideas between disciplines. Students were exposed to multiple disciplinary methodologies, which created not only awareness about a different academic discipline while they engaged with each other in class, but also a more versatile and comprehensive knowledge base that each student will take back to their particular field of study. While I think both Allison and I wished we had had more time in each class period, and frankly, during the semester to include everything we wanted to explore with our students, I often left the classroom feeling energized by the students’ points and questions, especially when they started to put together how these movements intersected. While the course started with critical theoretical scaffolding, by the end of the first month students were able to see how the foundations applied to historical movements, and how the movements often overlapped at various points in history. Those moments in class when the final puzzle piece connected for students made the complications of creating a course like this worth it!

Another success was enabling students to have access to different teaching styles. This is especially important at a smaller university where students often have the same professors for multiple classes when they reach the upper-division courses required for majors. "Power to the People" not only provided new content for students but also offered variety and awareness of how we approached topics within the course. For example, history courses tend to be lecture-
heavy, so sessions where I led class were often geared toward explaining the historical context of events as we worked through our various justice movements. I also like to use a lot of primary sources in my classes and sought to have time for document discussion toward the end of each class. Although in some class sessions I had to forego discussion because of a lengthier or more complicated topic, we built in coalition-group discussion days where some of these other sources could be brought back into the conversation. Allison’s class sessions focused more on application and activation of these movements, particularly in present contexts. She was able to tease out the historical through lines from past iterations of the justice movements to show how they influenced the movements’ current identities. She also reinforced the theoretical underpinnings of social action, always bringing us back to the key components of successful social movements. Finally, in true “Power to the People” fashion, we had each coalition group lead discussion twice in the semester, which provided yet a third set of voices crafting the instruction of the course. It was important for Allison and me to see how the students were synthesizing and analyzing the course material, and student-led discussion demonstrated to us which issues were resonating with students and what questions they still had.

On a more personal, professional level, the final success we wish to share is that we were able to engage in constructing a course that examined topics that we are both personally passionate about researching. Even while preparing the course, we were both reading extensively and listing topics that we wanted to talk about in class. I think I came to one of our curriculum-design meetings with about twenty-five books to pull from for ideas and sources. This class enabled us to teach about things that might not neatly fit into other classes, or topics that would be glossed over in certain settings. My graduate research focused on female criminality and imprisonment in the nineteenth-century United States, and I spent a lot of time reading about antebellum reform movements for that project. Before this class, I talked about the antebellum reform movement phenomenon in one fifty-minute lecture in the US I history survey. It gutted me not to be able to go into depth on any of these movements. Since social movements are so central to my research and teaching interests, “Power to the People” became a joyful venue to do a deep dive into the material.

Our enthusiasm for these topics exuded in our teaching, perhaps to the dismay of our students who were not fully awake at 9:00 a.m. This course enabled us to share our research passions with our students, but also with each other. Our personal reading lists grew extensively after all of our brainstorming and references to scholarship in class. We grew as educators and scholars by learning from each other in this course.

One final note: as is common in academia, new career opportunities arise, and Allison moved on to a different university after we taught the class together in 2022. I, in consultation with the new social work faculty, determined that the course should continue, so I taught this course solo in the fall of 2023. While this time around we were missing a key voice in the classroom, I will say that Allison’s presence was still there. I did not change much of the structure of the course, so her ideas were still woven into the fabric of the content. We taught our students that sometimes in movements, activists have to pivot, change tactics, and reorganize to achieve the desired goal. I took a lesson from our own course material and shifted gears to make this into a solo-taught, yet still interdisciplinary course.
Appendix 1: Essay Rubric

Appendix 2: Group Paper Rubric

Appendix 3: Group Presentation Rubric

Appendix 4: Scope and Sequence
AUTHOR BIO

Dr. Erica Hayden is associate professor of history at Trevecca Nazarene University in Nashville, Tennessee. She earned her Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University and is the author of Troublesome Women: Gender, Crime, and Punishment in Antebellum Pennsylvania and coeditor of Incarcerated Women: A History of Struggle, Oppression, and Resistance in American Prisons. Her scholarly interests include nineteenth-century US social history, particularly reform movements, crime and punishment, and amplifying the voices of the marginalized.

Dr. Allison Buzard is the MSSW program director and associate professor of practice at the University of Tennessee Knoxville's College of Social Work at the Nashville Campus. She earned her DSW from the University of St. Thomas. Her scholarship focuses on anti-racist pedagogy within social work education.

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CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

Teaching Black Diaspora Stories with Digital Archives in the Classroom

ABSTRACT

One of the prime difficulties in the current teaching environment is educating students to make use of research skills that teach them not only how to be good historians but also how to be critical thinkers who can engage and evaluate sources. This piece focuses on the use of well-managed digital archives, which provide students with a focused set of research materials that help build a foundational point of historical inquiry. In addition to discussing the pedagogical benefits of such research, emphasis is also placed on specific assignments centered on several online databases, including "The Land Act Legacy Project Collection" of the South African History Archive (SAHA), the African Activist Archive of Michigan State University, and the "Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936 to 1938" of the Library of Congress. If these current times have taught anything, it is that digital literacy and proper research methods are essential components in understanding information during times of political and cultural change. By engaging with the stories in these digital archives, students learn about the diversity of opinions and opportunities that defined these stories of the Black diaspora throughout the twentieth century and beyond.

KEYWORDS

Digital Archives
South Africa
Black Diaspora
Pedagogy
Research Methods

Jacob Ivey
Florida Memorial University, USA
For so many of us, it is difficult to remember what it was like to be a student staring at the directions for our first research paper, topic in hand, but unsure where to go from there. Feeling lost, uncertain, and unprepared for how to proceed was a hurdle many of us had to overcome at the beginning of our careers as historians. Yet these difficulties have not changed, as the prime complication in our current teaching environment is educating students to make use of research skills that teach them how to be not only good historians but also critical thinkers who can engage and evaluate sources. While this acknowledgment might seem incredibly elementary to veteran teachers who have experienced this complication for years, the recent shortcoming of students’ ability to think critically has driven me to the point where I am seeking out the bare minimum in my teaching accomplishments.\(^1\)

Fundamentally, students often have little ability to begin some of the most basic tasks of historical research, much less compile a meaningful piece of historical inquiry fueled by such research. They stare at the directions feeling lost and unsure how to move forward. Like most teachers of history, I make every attempt in the very first week of each class to provide the necessary basics, including what it means to think historically, drawing heavily on the idea of the “five Cs of historical thinking” (change over time, causality, context, complexity, and contingency).\(^2\) Nevertheless, these basic methods of understanding are often not enough to prepare students for the craft of research.

One difficulty in teaching students how to do research is to help them overcome being overwhelmed by the massive number of resources available to them in our digital age. To combat these difficulties, I have found that well-managed digital archives provide students with a focused set of research materials that help build a foundational point of historical inquiry. These online archives act as a means of not only facilitating research skills for students but also illustrating where “good sources” can be found in the massive sea of the internet. In this article, I discuss the pedagogical benefits of such research, specifically the details of assignments centered on several online databases, including “The Land Act Legacy Project Collection” of the South African History Archive (SAHA), the “Forward to Freedom” web archive of the organization Anti-Apartheid Movement in the United Kingdom, and the African Activist Archive of Michigan State University, along with the projects these archives have helped to inform. I also discuss further projects that were informed by this process in my American and African American history courses, notably the Works Progress Administration (WPA) slave narrative project, “Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936 to 1938,” and The Green Book travel guide. Through the use of these digital archives, students learn about the diversity of opinions and opportunities that defined eras of global protest, making transnational connections between Black intellectual life and late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century politics and revolutions. Such digital literacy and the proper research methods necessary to engage with these archives are essential components in understanding information, especially during our recent uncertain times of political and cultural change in higher education and beyond.

Such aspirations to teach proper research methods have been at the center of my pedagogy for years. I have always envisioned my upper division or non-intro history courses to be a chance to revel in the research and writing method I had come of age with: papers, papers, and more papers.
papers. But, when the COVID-19 pandemic transformed the very nature of teaching, I reevaluated my assignments and overall pedagogy. When my spring 2020 undergraduate course on the history of South Africa shifted online, I quickly realized that, in this new classroom environment, research papers failed to have the desired impact of reinforcing historical techniques and research skills. Instead of continuing to assign paper projects, I turned students’ attention to online archival analysis and used a series of assignments in which students presented findings on researching the archives and online databases themselves. 3

In previous semesters, like many young teachers right out of grad school, I had been assigning fifteen-to-eighteen-page research papers in order for students to learn how to participate in historical research and archival analysis; this was a foundational part, I believed, of the historian’s craft. This assignment was never perfect, but I continued to believe it was a necessary, if potentially arduous, component of any history course. But after the move online due to COVID-19, students (and often teachers) were left precariously on their own, without the resources they would need—archival and instructional—to write a successful research paper. Instead of meeting with me in person or with the university library reference staff to help guide their research, most students waded into the internet virtually unfiltered, despite my best efforts to facilitate an understanding of credible and reliable sources. While Zoom meetings and online discussions helped keep students on task, the pressures of our online transition led me to several new assignment options.

In this new online environment, I created an assignment titled “Land Act Legacy: 1913 to 2013.” Students researched and prepared short papers and presentations on the 1913 Land Act’s legacy of economic and political disenfranchisement in South Africa. A focus on this piece of legislation in the course was critical, as this act laid the groundwork for the disproportionate land allocation that eventually defined South Africa in the second half of the twentieth century and is seen by many historians as the beginning of the racialized legislation that eventually became what we know as “apartheid.” More than just a piece of legislation allocating land across South Africa, the law provided the pretext for the forced removal and settlement of Black people into the homelands (Bantustans) of “Grand Apartheid,” which defined many Black South Africans’ experiences throughout the twentieth century. 4

To reveal the legacy and diversity of Africans affected by this unjust law, I walked students through the personal narratives from the SAHA’s “The Land Act Legacy Project Collection,” an online depository of oral history materials and photographs collected for the centennial of the 1913 Land Act. 5 This archive of interviews, collected by the SAHA from March to September 2013, illustrates a contemporary foundation for the legacy of the acts and the people affected by this monumental piece of legislation. Though focused on the three small villages of Driefontein, Mogopa, and Braklaagte in rural South Africa, it provides a visual snapshot of life in South Africa in 2013 with a slew of quotidian photographs by Gille de Vlieg. But critically, it also gives voice to the people living in these communities whose families confronted the legacy of the 1913 legislation. Instead of just lists of government documents or vague maps about the movement of people and limited access to land, these interviews explore “issues including the role of women as agents for resistance (including the Women’s Rural Movement), modes of divisions within communities, as well as an exploration of both state and community tactics for resistance.” 6 In

3. I should acknowledge that the period of many of these early assignments was before I arrived at my current position at Florida Memorial University, but, in many of these cases, the majority of my students were either non-majors or students with limited experience in the research process, either in person or online.


5. Debora Matthews, “The Land Act Legacy Project Collection,” South African History Archive. (This archive was established on March 30, 2016.)

6. Ibid.
the end, these interviews provided students with a snapshot of not only life under the apartheid system but also the impact of racist policies on a community, which have endured a century after the initial pieces of legislation that gave these policies birth.7

Taking the research skills and practical knowledge acquired up to that point during the semester, students began scouring the SAHA for oral interviews from those affected by the land removal in 1913 and its aftermath. From there, students focused on one individual and the geographic areas they or their families moved to, investigating how the removal influenced individual lives and the landscape of South Africa. And while these interviews were conducted with people born after 1913, they provide insight into the underlying impact of apartheid on everyday South Africans. Moreover, what made this project so fruitful was the chance for students to delve into a single, well-managed archive that provided them with a focused set of research materials that helped to build a foundational point of historical inquiry. Instead of just learning how to write like a historian in a research paper, they learned to engage with the tools and mechanics of historical research. Students “thought like historians” by looking at causality, context, complexity, and more. But with the entire class focusing on one event and its legacy, the 1913 Land Act, students could concentrate on this law’s impact on the lives of everyday South Africans and its resonance in present day South Africa.

Students responded well to this guided research project. Notably, with a select set of resources, including interviews and photographs digitized by the SAHA, students were able to overcome the initial hurdles of research, including identifying a topic early in the semester, finding and accessing the validity of certain archives, and writing without hands-on support during our transition to online teaching. The framework of the assignment was already laid out, giving time to focus more on the detail-oriented analysis of researching archival material. With the SAHA’s resources in hand, students had the time to deconstruct sources and material while developing deeper insight into the people and places affected by the racist apartheid policies in twentieth-century South Africa. While some students expressed reservations about a project on “land,” they soon realized that land policy remains a heated issue within South Africa and one of the clearest avenues to understanding the legacy of imperial influence in the postcolonial world.

In some instances, students discovered interviewees’ family members who are active in the “Land Expropriation without Compensation” campaign of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) party in contemporary South Africa. Not only did this give students a clear illustration of the continued importance of land in post-apartheid South Africa, but it also provided a wonderful opportunity in the classroom to discuss strikingly current issues. This issue of land is still at the center of South African politics, as a bill was introduced to amend the South African constitution shortly before this course was taught in 2018. But the bill was eventually rejected by EFF leader Julius Malema in 2021 after he claimed that the final version agreed upon by the African National Congress (ANC) was insufficient for his goals, stating that “the bill that this house is asked to approve today will take black people’s struggle for land repossession many steps back.”8 Students discovered that the issue of land was alive and well in twenty-first-century South Africa.

In addition to these successes, the process revealed multiple hurdles that significantly affected the outcome of students’ projects that spring. For one, some interviews were sadly contemporary in the collection, making the requirement to connect these issues all the way
back to 1913 somewhat challenging. Further, with students’ limited knowledge of South African geography (despite weeks of attempts on my part to teach them), students often became confused by names and locations, especially when some of these places have been renamed in the post-apartheid era. The grandness of the scope and breadth of the project was an issue for many as well. To help confused students overcome some of these hurdles, I directed them to other databases, including Michigan State’s “South Africa: Overcoming Apartheid, Building Democracy” collection. But, as is usually the case for the first versions of such projects, the scope and expectations for this assignment were perhaps too ambitious.

With these difficulties in mind, I created a similar project, called “Protest and Promise: An Anti-apartheid Activism Archive Project,” for a course on the global Black diaspora that I taught in spring 2021. For this assignment, students dug into one “focus” of activism in the United States or across the globe that supported the struggles of South African peoples against colonialism, apartheid, and social injustice from the 1950s through the 1990s. This focus could be in the form of a city’s actions against apartheid, a smaller campaign within the wider anti-apartheid movement, or a group or organization that was part of the larger anti-apartheid struggle. Critically, these foci could not be a specific leader or politician or organizer, as the purpose of this project was partially to highlight that citizen activism was a group endeavor and not precipitated by a single individual. I wanted students to see themselves in these groups and organizations, highlighting the fundamental importance of everyday people in the eventual destruction of one of the greatest human rights abusers of the twentieth century.

Once again, to give students a database to act as the foundation for their research, I pointed them to the African Activist Archive of Michigan State University. This is a fantastic database of posters, pamphlets, photos, campaign buttons, and speeches that provided a research foundation for their focus. Learning from my SAHA experience, I also encouraged students to use several other archives to help provide a further foundation and global connection to their focus, including the “Struggles for Freedom: Southern Africa” archive, formerly through Aluka, now through JSTOR, filled with thousands of documents and primary sources, and the “Forward to Freedom” archive of the Anti-Apartheid Movement based out of the United Kingdom.

I also explained to the class that the archival collection they were using wasn’t just a random online archive but, instead, a tool used by historians, including me, across the United States and the globe. I underscored that, as part of my scholarly work, I had used these sources in my writing on the anti-apartheid movements in Florida. Students learned, as I highlighted the usefulness of this particular set of digital tools, that our work in the classroom was part of broader research on the history of the African diaspora and the anti-apartheid movement. I also shared my work with students to reinforce their understanding of the relationship between research in the field and their professor in the classroom.

Using these databases of documents and ephemera, students dug into their selected element of activism, critically engaging with the underlying motivations and organizations for their groups. Students quickly attached their interests to particular groups and organizations, whether a legal civil rights committee based out of Washington, DC, or the attempts to boycott Coca-Cola for its role in “sweetening apartheid.” What was most satisfying was when students made personal
connections to their focus, including tracing the movement back to their homes. This included one student who talked about protests of South African Outspan oranges in their native Holland and another about the Delaware Pacem in Terris anti-apartheid organization in their hometown of Wilmington, Delaware. In all of these cases, students were exposed to the everyday nature of these protests and the participation of individuals from all walks of life in these movements. It showed that no matter where one was, even thousands of miles away from South Africa, they could have a meaningful impact on history and the global struggle for human rights.

This revelation was even more important in light of the year 2020 teaching us that protest movements are essential components in understanding the importance of civil disobedience during times of political and cultural change. By engaging with the stories in these digital archives, students learned about the diversity of opinions and opportunities that defined eras of global protest, making transnational connections between Black intellectual life and late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century politics and revolutions. Students learned that the anti-apartheid movement matters because it taught individuals to sympathize and act on the suffering of others, whether in their neighborhood, in their state, in their nation, or on the other side of the globe. Our current cultural climate highlights a similar level of uncertainty about the intentions of our governments, the state of international peace, health and security, and the importance of human rights at home and abroad. Through this project, I believe my students were able to view the anti-apartheid movement as a model for future action and change.

Such successes have also moved their way into my introductory courses at my current position at Florida Memorial University, South Florida’s only HBCU. Just as a level of adaptability was required during COVID-19, this new position has caused its own frustrations with our ability as teachers to engage with the past. But despite recent legislation limiting the teaching of Black diaspora history in university classrooms, I’ve continued to use curated archival collections as a foundation for student research and engagement with online digital sources. One of these is a WPA slave narrative project. This assignment lets students access one of the most extensive and informative collections of oral interviews regarding the history of American slavery: the WPA’s seventeen-volume Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves (1941) and its digitally preserved database, "Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936 to 1938," of the Library of Congress. An archive of some 2,300 recollections from formerly enslaved Americans that have been transcribed and preserved as typescripts, the collection offers a treasure trove of primary sources.

Just like in the SAHA 1913 Land Act project, students were confronted with the faces and words of people who lived through periods of immense change, while also engaging with critical questions about the nature of memory, narrative, and the advantages and limitations of oral history. Students encountered not only the horrors of the institution of slavery but also the unnerving “positive” memories that some African Americans had of their experiences. Wrestling with these contradictions, students came face to face with how this archive is, according to American historian Lawrence W. Levine, “a mélange of accuracy and fantasy, of sensitivity and stereotype, of empathy and racism.” The very fact that these interviews occurred in the 1930s and in the living memory of some of their oldest relatives resonated significantly with the students, who reveled in the ability to literally hear the voices of their ancestors who lived through
the time of enslavement.

And finally, I would be remiss to not mention the material culture assignment that really got the ball rolling in my mind for many of these projects: a group project looking at a resource used by African Americans to travel across the country during the Jim Crow era, The Negro Motorist Green Book or simply The Green Book.¹⁸ First created for my introductory US history courses before the pandemic, this group project was a means to facilitate basic research skills for my intro classes, all linked to a common collection of historical material. Like thousands of African Americans throughout the twentieth century, each group traced a trip across the United States and the Jim Crow South using the Green Book. Beginning with the near full list of Green Books available at the New York Public Library, the group selected a city bordering the demarcation line between “the North” and “the South” and mapped a journey from their starting city to a city in Florida.¹⁹ Then, they presented their findings, including the history of the locations they would have stopped at, to the class or in a recorded presentation, depending on the timing of the class. I’ll note the intention of this presentation was not to have students “role-play” as travelers but instead to help highlight the possible paths individuals may have taken during this era and the difficulties they could potentially have encountered during their travels.

The success of this project has been illustrated in the generally positive feedback from students, as it allows them a chance to use their research skills from previous projects in an organized, focused digital environment. During the research process for this assignment, the most surprising element for students was finding that many of the locations no longer exist, highlighting not only the changing nature of Black entrepreneurship in this country but also the changing landscape of the nation. This produced both enlightening and interesting conversations all around in the post-project discussion in class.

Because I have had such valuable experiences with these online projects, I encourage educators to think about their approaches to pedagogy and to consider using such digital archives in the classroom. To be sure, my pedagogy can and will continue to evolve and improve because of the types of tools and resources that online collections hold and the historical scholarship that is being produced because of them. From these sources, students’ learning and researching can continue to engage with the unique and compelling story of the Black diaspora as revealed by vital archival collections.

There is an isiZulu phrase, “Akulanga lashona lingenazindab,” which roughly translates to “No day goes without its stories.” Stories of individual experience are central to how and why we teach, as well as the connections we make in the classroom and our own research. These stories found in the archives push our students to take part in articulating, creating, and using stories regardless of whether they are engaging with them in person or online. The stories have not changed, but the way we teach them has.

¹⁸. I should note that I first implemented this project a year before the 2018 film of that same title, though students often admit the film was the first time they were aware of this piece of Black history.

Appendix A

Guidelines “Protest and Promise” African Activist Archive Project

(15% of Total Grade)

This project will build on the material we will cover in Week 13: Global Protests on Race and the Anti-Apartheid Movement. The anti-apartheid movement was one of the last great human rights campaigns of the twentieth century and perhaps one of the most important and wide-ranging human rights struggles of that century. The overthrow of the racist South African regime that initially came to power in 1948 has been considered one of the most enduring legacies of the postcolonial era. But this struggle was not isolated exclusively to the nation of South Africa or even the African continent. Instead, it was a global struggle that involved citizen activists, community organizations, and grassroots campaigns that helped topple the apartheid state.

For this assignment, you will dig into one “focus” of activism in the United States or across the globe that supported the struggles of South African peoples against colonialism, apartheid, and social injustice from the 1950s through the 1990s. This focus can be in the form of a city’s actions against apartheid, a smaller campaign within the wider anti-apartheid movement, or a group or organization that was part of the larger anti-apartheid struggle. Your focus cannot be a specific leader or politician or organizer, as the purpose of this project is partially to highlight that citizen activism was a group endeavor and not precipitated by a single individual. If you are interested in what a fully formed focus might look like, I have included in this assignment module a copy of an article I wrote on anti-apartheid protests in Orlando to give you an example.

Once you select your focus, you will investigate the history and composition of this piece of the movement. Why and when was this focus created? Did geographic context influence this focus? Who was involved with this focus, and how did it resonate with the local population? How did this focus fit within the larger struggle against apartheid? And, finally, was the focus a success or failure?

Answering these questions will require extensive research on your part, moving beyond a simple Google search. In fact, you will be making primary use of a series of online archives curated for just this kind of research. One of the best sources for this movement is the African Activist Archive of Michigan State University. This fantastic database of posters, pamphlets, photos, campaign buttons, and speeches will provide your research foundation for your focus. African Activist Archive

You are also encouraged to use several other archives that will help provide a further foundation and global connection to your focus.

- The “Struggles for Freedom: Southern Africa” archive, formerly through Aluka, now through JSTOR, filled with thousands of documents and primary sources: Struggles for Freedom: Southern Africa

- The “Forward to Freedom” archive of the Anti-Apartheid Movement based out of the UK:
Forward to Freedom

• The “South Africa: Overcoming Apartheid, Building Democracy” collection hosted by Michigan State, a broader collection of material on the history of South Africa and the protest movements connected to it: South Africa: Overcoming Apartheid, Building Democracy

You are encouraged to use all of these resources, but you must, at the very minimum, make use of the African Activist Archive.

This assignment will be graded in two ways:

1. You will present your project to the rest of the class, illustrating the composition and historical details of your particular focus for the anti-apartheid campaign. The presentation should have visual sources and will be no more than ten minutes. You are required to submit the visuals of your presentation (in PowerPoint or another presentation program) before class. Your presentations will be during the second half of our final class session.

2. Each student will write a short essay on what they found regarding their focus, including answering the questions listed above. This essay should be between 900 and 1,400 words and include citations, sources, and images. Sources should preferably be academic, public history, or archival sources and illustrate a level of intellectual rigor in your research. You will turn in your essay online before our final class session.
Appendix B

Guidelines for “WPA Slave Narrative Project” Project
(10% of Total Grade)

This project is designed to allow you to access one of the most extensive and informative collections of oral interviews regarding the history of American slavery: the Works Progress Administration’s seventeen-volume Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves (1941). The complete collection was digitally preserved by the Library of Congress in 2001 and will work as the foundation of your project.

First, you should familiarize yourself with the “Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936 to 1938” of the Library of Congress.

I suggest that you read over the short history of the collection available here.

Once you have familiarized yourself with the collection, you will find two narratives from formerly enslaved individuals. You should find examples from two different individuals living in two different states. Read over these narratives and take note of what these narratives can tell us about the lives and tribulations of these individuals.

Once you have selected your figures, you will address these key questions:

• Who were these individuals and what was their experience as an enslaved person (this should be a brief summary of the interviews)?

• What do these interviews reveal about the nature of the enslaved experience in American history?

• How does this experience of enslavement differ between the two states discussed?

• What problems, difficulties, or contradictions do you find within these narratives? This can include discrepancies in facts, the position of the interviewer, inconsistencies in narrative, or general limitations of oral history.

You will write a short essay answering all the questions listed above. While you will use the “Born in Slavery” database as the central resource for your primary source information, the information related to the broader context of African American history will require some level of research on your part, moving beyond a simple Google search. These sources should be of an academic nature and illustrate a level of intellectual rigor in your research. You must have a minimum of three sources beyond the “Born in Slavery” database. I suggest starting with the library and databases available to you.

This essay should be between 600 and 800 words and include your sources, citations, and a works cited page/bibliography. (Your list of sources, citations, and a works cited page/bibliography do not apply to your word count.)
AUTHOR BIO

Jacob Ivey is an associate professor of history at Florida Memorial University, South Florida’s only HBCU. He is a historian of the British Empire in southern Africa and issues of race, conflict, and protest in South Africa and the Black diaspora across the globe. His first book, Policing, Race, and the Formation of Nineteenth-Century British Colonial Natal (2024), was published with Palgrave Macmillan’s Britain and the World series. His current project is on anti-apartheid movements in Florida and their links to the global anti-apartheid movements of the late twentieth century.

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