

## Teaching Philosophy

I teach because of my deep conviction in the value of a liberal arts education. Given the financial burden of acquiring a post-secondary degree, I recognize that students must graduate with a set of skills that matches the demands of the job market. In my history classroom, students cultivate critical thinking and communication skills that they will need after graduation. With my help, they learn to study and analyze challenging texts, to identify an author's argument, and to convey complex information in succinct and clear terms to their peers. Equally as important, they learn to develop a written argument and support it with specific evidence. When hiring college graduates, employers look for all of these skills. At the same time, I believe that exposure to the humanities, and the study of history in particular, has the potential to be a transformative experience that equips students to become global citizens. I want students to learn to evaluate dominant historical narratives by considering the perspectives and contributions of a diverse set of individuals. They learn to form their own interpretations of events through careful analysis of evidence. I know I have done my job right when, rather than simply accept what I tell them, they begin to question me as well.

To that end, I have adopted a constructivist approach to teaching. My role as the instructor is not to convey facts about a series of historical events but to facilitate discussion and active learning. I continuously emphasize the value of each student's perspective and promote the engagement of all students. My goal is to minimize the time that I spend at the front of the classroom delivering information and to maximize the time that students spend interacting with each other. One of the most effective activities to foster student participation is "Think, Pair, Share." I often begin a class by posing an open-ended question, sometimes accompanied by an image or a video clip. For the "Think" portion of the activity, I ask the students to write non-stop

for two to three minutes. This gives each student the opportunity to formulate his or her ideas before being required to discuss them. Introverted students and non-native English speakers in particular are more likely to feel at ease sharing their ideas if first given the opportunity to think. Students then discuss their response with a partner, and this is followed by a whole-group discussion. I do my best to ensure that each student contributes to the class conversation, and “Think, Pair, Share” ensures that no student sits silently in a corner. I use this and other cooperative-learning activities to create a student-centered classroom.

I am committed to making my classroom accessible to all learners, and I recognize that students have a diverse array of learning styles. For example, I give activity instructions orally and include them in my PowerPoint. This ensures that both auditory and visual learners receive information in the preferred form. I accommodate the kinesthetic learning style by promoting movement in the classroom. This includes role plays where students adopt the perspectives of historical figures and act out a short skit for the class. Another activity is the “kinetic quiz,” where each student receives a piece of paper with a historical event. The students’ task is to work together to arrange themselves in chronological order. Given that the majority of students hate memorizing dates, this is a great way to encourage them to pay attention to the order of events.

Beyond an awareness of different learning styles, I respect that fact the students come from varied cultural backgrounds. This value is made manifest in my effort to expose students to source material by diverse authors. This also reflects my view that history is shaped by individuals from all social groups, not just the ones that have traditionally had access to positions of power. Finally, I strive to dispel the deeply ingrained belief that some students are innately “smart” and that some students are just “not good at history” or “not good at writing.” I conscientiously offer specific praise related to effort. When working with students on paper

drafts, I remind them that writing is a challenging process. No writer gets her ideas down perfectly on the first try. In sum, the fundamental goal that informs all aspects of my teaching is to help each student to succeed. Doing so requires recognizing that each student is an individual with a unique set of skills and challenges.

My constructivist approach to education is reflected in the assessment tools I use. My goal is to promote student metacognition. In other words, I want them to think about how they learn. For that reason, I use both formative and summative assessments. My formative assessments are an informal means for me to determine how well students understand the material *before* they complete a graded assignment. This often takes the form of “exit slips” that students complete in the last five minutes of class. I ask them to reflect on the most important point they learned about a topic, what they found most interesting, and what they are still confused about. The exit slips help me to identify material that I should review in the following lesson. For writing assignments, I often ask students to identify two to three specific criteria for improvement on their next writing assignment. During the fall 2015 semester, I asked students to work in groups to develop the criteria with which I should evaluate their weekly writing assignments and used these criteria to develop a rubric. Overall, I advocate transparency and clarity in grading. Students should understand what they will be evaluated on and why they receive their grade.

Teaching is a demanding but rewarding vocation. Standing in front of a classroom for hours can be both mentally and physically draining, and perhaps nothing is more frustrating than a lesson plan that fails miserably. After being confronted with classrooms of students with different personalities, knowledge bases, and interests, I have concluded that teaching is most certainly an art rather than a science. To a large degree it is also theater, every lesson a

performance designed to hook the audience. Most importantly, teaching is a skill that I will never perfect but must constantly revisit, hone, and develop. Seeking ways to improve as an instructor ultimately makes my academic research more meaningful. I am honored to have the privilege to participate in students' higher education and to share my passion for history with them.