

**Teaching Philosophy**

As a teacher, I want students to actively contemplate what happened and why, as well as the reasons why this past might be important. In other words, passively reading and taking notes, in order to memorize “just the facts,” is not good enough in my classroom.

One way I encourage students to become active learners is by offering them additional methodological lenses that can let these students see a historical perspective challenging what they knew before coming to class that day. To that end, my lessons incorporate the history, as well as historiographical changes, which adds a dynamic element to a long-dead past. At the same time, I lean on new findings from the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, to deploy different instructional and assessment methods, flexibly adapting to different students’ strengths and weaknesses, as well as their educational, professional, or personal backgrounds. As a result, my classroom environment is conversational and fluid, instead of one where students silently, transcribe, and repeat.

**Putting Philosophy into Practice**

As a historian, I want students to learn that history is about interpreting the past, not simply memorizing dates and names. Instead of seeing history as a static, self-apparent chronology, I show my students multiple ways to think about the past, explore it with sources, ask questions, and arrive at answers. To meet this overarching goal, each element of my course fits into one of three intellectual levels: knowing, understanding, and thinking.

Knowing certain facts, events, people and places are indeed essential first steps in any larger understanding of another time and place. When delivering this information to my students in lectures, I present question-driven lectures, bringing students from a general set of concerns about the topic of the day to a set of conclusions, presenting evidence and analysis along the way instead of simply offering them lists of disembodied details. Understanding how these specific facts relate to a larger context is often a task accomplished in discussion, a sort of learning lab for students to practice these skills as they interpret primary and secondary sources, while I watch and offer suggestions. As for thinking, in my classroom this involves giving the students space in the form of papers and in-class essays to “do” history on their own, constructing their own answers to their own questions, using their own readings of the texts to make their own connections and original analysis.

**Teaching as a Learning Process**

As a professional, I have, of course, encountered challenges along the way. However, I believe that, no matter how skilled one may be, one can always further hone one’s craft. Therefore, unintended setbacks can become opportunities for professional growth and creative new ideas. I have learned that lectures need a certain dynamism to keep the students interested and engaged, so I add short video clips, visual source analyses, or pauses to quiz the students, making sure they “get” it before moving on.

I have also learned that not all students are comfortable trying out new ideas in front of their peers (or in front of their teacher), so discussion lesson plans must respond with some flexibility to the students’ expectations and abilities. This is usually a good opportunity to recast “discussion” of “history” as an exercise very similar to tasks performed in students’ own majors, intended careers, or everyday lives as American college students, since the ability to closely read, analyze, think critically, and reasonably argue, are all essential skills for 21<sup>st</sup> century professionals and engaged citizens.

Additionally, I have learned that grading requires even-handed treatment of students' shortcomings but also needs to convey to the students that I am interested in helping them improve their skills. Using a rubric that explains what I look for in each assignment (in general terms but with some level of specificity) ensures all students' work is held against a common set of expectations. Writing comments to students offering recognition of their successes, while also suggesting ways to address their weaknesses, underlines my hope (and the real possibility) that they will do better next time.

Investing such time and effort into preparation, instruction, and grading does not always produce students who fall in love with history but it can go a long way to producing graduates who can read and think in complex ways about both the past and the present, which is one way we historians can demonstrate our continued relevance for the future.