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Statement of Teaching Philosophy
October 2011

A liberal arts education, in my opinion, is ultimately about producing knowledge. Therefore, I best summarize my teaching approach as students "getting their hands dirty" in such production. For me, engagement with history means writing history, using primary and secondary sources to develop an argument about why an event or process happened. Students coming into my courses can expect to learn not only the content of the class, but also a skill-set centered on critical analysis, engaging discussion, broad research, and argumentative writing—the combination of knowledge and practice that lie at the heart of an active, democratic society. Such activities first attracted me to history, and were those I most enjoyed as an undergraduate at Oglethorpe University, a small liberal arts college in Atlanta. I attempt to recreate those experiences for my students in courses at the University of Alaska Anchorage, as well as past classes at Emory University and the University of Georgia. These courses ranged from Western Civilization surveys through upper-division thematic and French history topics, with student bodies including first-generation college attendees, international students, detached- and active duty military personnel, and non-traditional students. Guiding all these students through their own historical explorations allows me not only to impart the specific content of the discipline, but also the techniques of research and writing that are the foundations of any intellectual or professional endeavor.

I view working with primary sources as essential to understanding history. Students bring into the classroom a series of preconceptions of history as nothing more than a chaotic succession of dates and events, or a requirement to be more "well-rounded," or as a battleground for political debates. My goal is to present history as a dynamic process of past generations confronting the questions facing them, struggles students should learn to see within primary sources. In my survey courses, I introduce a series of texts ranging from Caesar, Luther, Gibbon, Marx, and Keynes to contemporary newspapers, worker's songs, and biographical pieces. Digital technology allows me to supplement these with dynamic tours of Mesopotamian river valleys, the Sistine Chapel, or the nineteenth century world's fairs. Classroom discussions focus on the dialogue between sources, a difficult task at first for students. In a survey class at Emory, students were having trouble understanding the appeal of Rousseau's "general will." I addressed this in the following class by a role-playing exercise that divided the class into groups presenting the complaints of different French towns drawn from the *cahiers de doléances*, and to propose solutions as part of a mock Estates General. As I wrote the responses from each group on the board, the students saw the parallels—and why the general will went from an abstract concept to a seemingly real phenomenon. I now use this exercise as a standard component of my survey classes. By assisting students in working through similar questions, I help them understand how the reactions of one generation were structured by the experiences of the previous—which ultimately helps them reflect on the contemporary world and the issues facing it.

The extensive work with primary sources prepares students for the written projects at the core of my courses. These assignments are designed to help students develop a skill set from formulating a research strategy for an unfamiliar topic to constructing an historical argument based on critical engagement with sources. I start each semester with a Scavenger Hunt project to teach the fundamentals of research. Students select a topic from a list, and compose a brief summary of the topic and a list of related primary and secondary sources. Sessions with the library reference staff helps students locate sources and introduces an

often underappreciated resource. Later projects ask students to prepare a causal argument for a historical event, based in part on sources provided by me. Knowing my students through classroom and office hour conversations allows me to tailor such assignments. In a class composed primarily of economics, business and public health-related majors, I asked students to write on the British Public Health Act of 1848, an admittedly obscure topic that allowed students to explore the development of the regulatory state, industrialization and class conflict in a context that resonated with their own interests. The Scavenger Hunt project gave students the confidence to find and work with relevant sources, while in-class and office hour discussions of writing strategies guided them towards a critique of both the sources and their own writing. This combined approach not only allowed me to help students develop an understanding of history, but also to critically analyze their own research and writing strategies—a skill applicable far beyond the university classroom.

Technology represents one of the greatest developments in contemporary education, which I believe enhances the liberal arts classroom. Students are increasingly relying on electronic databases and the Internet, and the ability to access research sources beyond the campus library needs to be encouraged. This creates an obligation, however, to help students identify and assess such sources—and to remind them that digital technology is a tool for applying their skills, not a replacement. One goal of my Scavenger Hunt projects is to promote proficiency with databases such as WorldCat and JSTOR as a fundamental component of a research agenda—with the reminder that sometimes the best way to find sources for an unknown topic is to go to the library shelves and pull books about it. In the classroom, I have used technology not only for class management and to introduce non-textual sources, but also to expand the teaching environment. A simple "Getting Started" guide or a Frequently-Asked-Questions list for projects increases student confidence, while alerts of relevant events on campus create the opportunity for deeper involvement with the academic community. My work with other faculty at the Emory Center for Interactive Teaching has led me to consider future Internet-based presentations and pod- and video-casting. Although I have a deeper appreciation of the very real problems that arise when a project becomes more about the technology than the content, pressing students to move beyond the analytical essay can help enrich their understanding of history and provide them with another tool to interact with the world to which they belong.

Reflecting back over my teaching experience, I believe my approach of emphasizing primary sources and writing history has been successful. Yet my teaching style is continuing to evolve, in both approach and content. Teaching the full sequence of Western Civilization over the last few years has encouraged me to make students more aware of the broader trends. I feel more confident in introducing in classes that Thucydides' interpretation of the Peloponnesian War poisoned Western views of democracy as long as he remained a core part of the education corpus for elites, or that Napoleon was very self-consciously modeling his speeches to the troops of the Army of Italy on Julius Caesar's dispatches, even if the vocabulary Napoleon used was that of the French Revolution. I am more willing to let students turn discussions to matters tangential to my lesson plan but of interest to them. Students articulating that one of the strengths of a course was "the level Gavorsky made us think on (much more deep in reasoning)" and naming a skill that improved as "enjoying history" indicate to me that I am merging both the discipline knowledge and the broader goal of educating students in the best liberal arts tradition. One of my non-traditional survey students recently summed up my goal in recent e-mail: "The class is really more of a two-for, history and writing. So far it's the best money I've spent at UAA."