

TEACHING HISTORY

History 560
Mon. 2:00-4:50pm
Graduate seminar
Fall 2018, Harris L40

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to introduce graduate students to the main issues that they will confront as history teachers. It is not designed as TA training, but as an opportunity to engage with the most substantive questions that arise in teaching history and to acquire the skills necessary for teaching standalone courses, including designing syllabi and giving lectures. Compared to other graduate seminars, the footprint of this course will be light: it meets only every other week and reading assignments are relatively short. This course is recommended for students to take in their third years and is ideal preparation for teaching seminars and for the job market.

This course is graded pass-not pass.

ASSIGNMENTS

The bulk of this course will consist of (light) reading and discussion. But you'll have two assignments, both of which, I hope, will help you in your future career as a historian.

The assignments are to write a syllabus and a lecture. But, if you've written these in the past, there's no requirement to write them again. You're welcome to simply submit (revised or not) what you've already got. The purpose of this course is not to extract labor from you but rather to prepare your toolkit.

The first assignment, due November 26, is to design the syllabus for an undergraduate course. It can be a lecture, a seminar, or some hybrid, though let me counsel you that you're better served designing a course that you might realistically teach at Northwestern or elsewhere. If you go on the academic job market, you'll almost certainly be asked to supply a sample syllabus, so this is your chance to draft one.

The second assignment, due December 3, is to write a 40-50 minute undergraduate lecture. You won't have a chance to deliver the entire thing in this course, but we will workshop some ten-minute portion of it in earlier sessions. You may write out the entire lecture or submit a full outline, containing all the points you wish to make if not the exact sentences in which they will be expressed. Please also submit any image files you'd use to accompany the talk, if any.

The object of this exercise is not to show off your command of historiographical nuance or to cram your lecture with as much information as possible but to reflect upon the big picture and figure out a way to communicate that to undergraduates.

That will involve having a clear argument and finding a way to present it simply and dramatically, in a way that undergraduates will be able to remember.

The requirements of a lecture are different from those of an academic paper and take some getting used to. I caution against delving into the historiography, unless that serves some pedagogical function. Other things to be wary of: taxonomies, long lists, lengthy “background” sections, and ground-covering of any sort. The ideal lecture is an aerodynamic machine, with a comprehensible main argument, a clear structure, just the right amount of detail (be especially careful to avoid laying it on too thick, Goldilocks), narrative hooks, and a strict subordination of auxiliary material to the main points. Your audience should know, at every point in the lecture, why they are hearing what they are hearing and how it fits into the larger structure. Feel free to signpost like crazy (e.g., “That story I just told you was a way of illustrating x. Now I’m going to argue y. Remember: these both relate to my big point A in the following way…”).

Another important distinction between the lecture and the academic paper is the requirements for originality in each. When you write an academic paper, your task is to produce an original analysis and you are rightly expected to rigorously document any words, facts, or ideas that you have taken from others. The lecture, however, is essentially a derivative genre and you are encouraged to take others’ ideas, anecdotes, narrative devices, main theses, and categorical distinctions without cluing your students into where you got it all from (unless that attribution is pedagogically useful). As a lecturer, you are not performing your original compositions, but covering the classic songbook and adding your own flourishes to your favorite tunes.

Another possible metaphor: you’re not an author, you’re a translator. Your assignment is to translate the findings of our field into undergraduates.

Remember all of those lectures you’ve heard that made you want to die from boredom? Don’t write one of those! Remember the lecture that made you want to go to grad school? Write *that* lecture.

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS, READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS

October 1: Us

- William J. Sewell Jr., *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), chaps. 1, 3, and 7.

October 15: Them

- Sam Wineburg, *Why Learn History (When It’s Already on Your Phone)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), introduction, and chaps. 3–7, conclusion
- Gerald Graff, *Clueless in Academe: How Schooling Obscures the Life of the Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), introduction and chaps. 1–2.

October 29: The Gentle Art of Lecturing

- Observe a history lecture and write a short report about what worked and didn’t.
- Prepare a 10-minute lecture (or introduction) to a lecture, as scheduled.

November 12: Designing Your Course

- Lendol Calder, "Uncoverage: Toward a Signature Pedagogy for the History Survey," *Journal of American History* 92 (2006): 1358-1370.
- Daniel Immerwahr, "The Fact/Narrative Distinction and Student Examinations in History," *The History Teacher* 41 (2008): 199-206.
- Read syllabi on Canvas.
- Prepare a 10-minute lecture (or introduction to a lecture) if you haven't already gone last week.

November 26: Beyond the Harris Hall Classroom

- Uri Treisman, "Studying Students Studying Calculus: A Look at the Lives of Minority Mathematics Students in College," *College Mathematics Journal* 5 (1992): 362-372.
- Louis Menand, "Live and Learn," *The New Yorker*, 6 June 2011.
- Anne Hyde, "Five Reasons Historians Suck at Assessment," *Journal of American History* 102 (2016): 1104-1107.
- Write a syllabus for one undergraduate course, lecture or seminar.

DUE DECEMBER 3: A copy of your lecture, accompanied by any slides you like.