A HANDBOOK OF GOOD TEACHING PRACTICE

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TOPICS IN THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN WEST

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Why Teach?

My desire to teach grows from my passion for my subject. I have loved history since I was very young, so I have always been disappointed that most people see it as a boring subject that is irrelevant to their lives. My goal as a teacher, then, is to pass a little bit of my passion for history on to students. While they might not come away loving history as much as I do, I want students to recognize the intrinsic value in studying the past as well as the connections between the past and the events occurring in their own lives.

I want to teach to help people know themselves. I want people to understand who they are, where they came from, and what might be done with all that information.

I teach because I do not wish to stop learning. Teaching is a discipline, like writing, that depends on attention to others, and attention to details. My grandmother told me that teaching is like going out on the mission field, that one has to have a religious fervor about it to do it well.

I teach because I have fun doing it. Persuading a room full of people to share your interests and passions is exciting, challenging, and maybe a little risky. On days when I'm discouraged and they're discouraged, the risk is even greater, but the rewards richer.

There's something so incredibly exciting to me about connecting with someone's mind. Now, this may not sound too exciting; but the moment I see that proverbial lightbulb go on--the "a-ha!" of understanding-- then I know a gift has been passed along. To me, that gift is the ability to think critically and compassionately about ourselves and about the world that surrounds us. Making this connection with reason, with thought, with action-- that's why I teach.

We should teach well for at least two reasons. First, it is the most effective way to convey the knowledge of one generation to the next. Second, students are more likely to be interested in engaging their world intellectually if they have a living, breathing example with whom they can relate. It has been my experience that it is this human connection that provides both the motivation and the sense of relevance for students as they encounter a topic or discipline.

Teaching has always been a calling for me for somewhat selfish reasons: I love to be able to share what I've learned with others! To me, learning something new isn't much fun if you can't share your excitement with others. Beyond personal satisfaction, however, I want to teach because teachers have always been some of my strongest role models. Teachers make a difference in our society through the day to day impact they have on so many people's lives. Being able to reach out and connect with a number of people in a way that just might help them to know themselves and their world a little better is the most powerful incentive for me. That is why I teach!

Teaching is not so much a vocation, I think, as a con-vocation. At its best, learning is a cooperative venture. We learn together, from the comments of colleagues, from the words of long dead scholars, and from our students. What better place to model this team effort of thinking than in the classroom?

I want to teach because I want to pass some of my enthusiasm for ideas and learning to my students. I hope that I will be able to expose my students to new issues that they may be unfamiliar with—issues that might allow them to see the world in a new way or think about things differently. As a teacher, I would like my students to grow in my classroom, developing both as individuals and concerned members of our society.

Amanda P., Sandy R., Kellie O., Dan D., Sarah C., Sam B-C., Andrea B., Gilbert R., Tara D., Charlie H-C., Jamilla W., Joe S., Chelsea R., Tagar O., Janine G., Chris G., Brooke P., Ben H., Wendy M., Paul B., Rebecca M., and many others. Those are the reasons why I teach.

For me teaching is about empowerment and liberation. I want to help people to learn new skills, and develop skills they never knew they had. For me teaching is learning--I grow wiser with each experience. I love to share in the spirit of the collective endeavor--growing together toward understanding our purpose, individually and collectively. I want to teach because I love what I have learned and can't contain it!!!

Why teach? Because 100 years from now it won't matter how much money you had or what kind of car you drove, but the fact that you made a difference in the life of a child makes all the difference in the world. (And the same applies to students.)

I've wanted to become a teacher for years now, principally because I'd like to have a positive, inspirational effect on young students—just as I was inspired to learn as an undergraduate. I have a lot to be thankful for, and I'm convinced that much of this is a direct consequence of the opportunities and encouragement given to me by a handful of teachers. In a sense my goals are a bit selfish: it's a good feeling to have a positive effect on other people's lives. But I'd rather think of teaching in a different way--perhaps more as an effort to give back the inspiration that I have been given.

My desire to teach largely stems from the ways that teachers have moved me. My best teachers have brought their subject material and themselves into my life. They are my true inspiration for wanting to teach. These teachers opened my eyes to the intimacy of teaching: few fields open so many paths to touch and to be touched. Only after completing this seminar do I realize how hard all of these teachers worked; the vein of teaching goes much deeper than just inspiration. Few fields present such continually challenging and even dangerous situations. A first-rate teacher must continually reassess and develop craft skills to deal with all of these possibilities. I hope to find my base as an educator dancing somewhere between a teacher who inspires students and a teacher who constantly refines their pedagogical skills.

I teach history because I want my students to understand that the actions of the past reverberate into the present and that decisions they make now have implications for the future. I want them to know that one's actions DO have an effect on the course of events. And I TEACH because I love to watch people learn.

Inventing the Course: Syllabus Design & Teaching Goals

No course is “great” if it lacks a well thought-out syllabus. The syllabus is an obligatory contract between the instructor and the students – but it is also an invitation to explore a body of knowledge, and a window on the professor’s teaching philosophy. The language of the syllabus is the first part of the course the students encounter, and hence establishes the “tone” for the entire semester. Thus it is important to pay careful attention not only to information that will be contained in a syllabus, but also the way in which it is presented.

College students are adults, and are frustrated by flippant instructors and vague courses. Use the syllabus to be as specific and direct as possible. The syllabus is a quasi-legal document, which represents your intellectual contract with the student. To the extent possible, it should contain explicit ‘’ground rules’’ for interaction in the classroom, and expectations for establishing “community.” Consider, for example, how to represent attendance policy in your syllabus, and its potential effect on the students. Ideally, the course would be so stimulating that the student would be crazy to miss class, but some students need to be prodded to attend. The authority of the instructor underpins that community, and the rules that regulate it, and that authority is best used providing incentives to students rather than penalties. Additionally, flexibility should be built in. Being lax in the syllabus leaves little room for contingencies that arise later in the semester, by implying that attendance can be monitored on a case-by-case basis. Providing clear standards, and simultaneously projecting flexibility, makes space for someone who has a legitimate reason to question the policies, without undermining expectations for the rest of the course. The instructor should write a syllabus that is both potentially open and fair.

The syllabus is also a clearinghouse for important information. Provide the ways that the instructor can be reached, as well as office hours, and the location of books that are to be purchased for the class or are on reserve. Detailed guidelines for papers, other writing assignments, and test structures are vital as well. Optional additional sources for related information, such as listserv information, and relevant web sites, could all be included in the syllabus. While detail and tangential information leads to a hefty document, students may respond better to excessive “attention” than to (perceived) terse indifference. The instructor needs to balance the desire to provide information with a healthy sense of restraint, so as to mediate between the two extremes. A well-balanced syllabus signals the students about the instructor‘s teaching objectives by establishing a firm structure of material and assignments, and coherent flow (or narrative, or, if you prefer, meta-narrative!) for the course. It is also an opportunity for the instructor to consider how to arrange such events as field trips, movies, review sessions, and guest lectures so as to maximize their integration with the course themes.

Events that occur outside of the classroom should be designed (as much as possible) in a way that respects the diverse schedules of the students. An effort should be made to make films accessible multiple times, and to give enough advance warning of long field trips. The field trips themselves should be scheduled during times of benign weather conditions (first Nature) as well as during times in the semester when the student is not overly burdened with other class work and commitments (second Nature). Also Fall and Spring semesters are fundamentally different, because they have different breaks. In Fall students can have a tendency to tire late in the semester. In the Spring they can get too complacent after the break. The syllabus should also be

considerate of religious events and schedules, and should be designed so as to minimize conflicts with religious obligations.

In designing the course, one needs to be conscious of the number of grading events throughout the semester, and the pedagogical goals that those events reinforce. More grading events help make the course less risky for students, but they can also lead to a grade-intensive rather than knowledge-intensive environment. One should also be sure that the evaluations are staggered in such a way that the instructor can meet the demands of the course as well. This is especially true if the instructor knows in advance that they will be away, for example, at a conference during a certain part of the semester, and thus be unable to commit, at that time, to a heavy grading load. One also needs to consider the relative merits of different forms of evaluation. Establishing grading procedures by type (tests or papers, for example) and percentage often leads to a philosophy of progress for the course.

The instructor should be thinking early on how they want to organize the knowledge that is being presented. The course could be organized chronologically, like a default history course. It could be organized thematically, as our graduate course is. It could be organized serially. For example, one could imagine a political science course that is built around a subscription to the New York Times. The course could be organized around research methodology and independent study (as Fredrick Jackson Turner's seminars were) or around historiography or other tracings of scholastic or philosophical movements. The course could also be organized around ethnic groups, wars, laws, and categories of difference as well as from conflicting points of view. One could imagine a course that was organized from a Native American point of view and a colonist point of view as an organizational strategy of comparison. It could be organized in a dialectical way, with a thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. The course could also be organized by genres or by one genre. A history class that focused only on memoirs might be an interesting gesture in this regard. Within these possibilities one should also consider to what extent the course develops from beginning to end. Does it move comprehensively, like a snowball at the top of a mountain that becomes a boulder at the bottom, or does it consist of discrete and independent chapters that do not overtly lead into each other? A format might include both possibilities. For example, one could imagine a course that culminated in a consultant's proposal, or a public policy statement, but was developed through discrete units that each taught a particular skill.

Readings should be assigned in relation to their effectiveness in propelling the narrative of the course. The readings should be chosen so as to accommodate the level of the expertise that the students bring to the course. The instructor needs to make sure that the reader has a point of entry into the readings. If the readings are difficult, the instructor should acknowledge this to the students, so that they do not feel as if they are "dumb" because they do not follow its argument. If the reading is difficult, the instructor should consider laying out in advance the key points they want the reader to absorb, and should be ready to guide the students to a fruitful reading of the text. A particularly central text in the course could be scheduled for re-reading, so as to emphasize its importance. Also, students will respond more actively to an abbreviated or condensed reading, especially one that can serve as a concrete example that propels the reader toward a more theoretical view. For example, Angle of Repose could illuminate Rodman Paul's book on mining.

The instructor also needs to consider the cost of the readings. Using many books may help the student achieve a nuanced perspective, but the cost could be prohibitive, especially at a public university. Although course packets are an economical solution to this problem, they run up against concerns over fair use and other copyright issues. The best policy with packets is to get permission, which can take months, because publishers are becoming more and more vigilant on the issue.

Finally, one needs to consider most of all the ability for the course of action outlined in the syllabus to happen at all. The worst thing that can happen in a course is that it be cut off before it reached its climax. Always save space for the climax. Prepare, if necessary, to get rid of the less important ‘’middle.’’ Even better, build in ‘’wiggle room’’ so that the course is allowed to compensate for interesting events that were short-changed because of time limitations early on.

TIPS ON CREATING AND DELIVERING LECTURES

Collected by Spencer Fluhman, Abby Markwyn, and Stacey Smith

Why do we Lecture?

* Lecturing is a social experience that unites a class as a group. It depends on the creation of a community of learners that is crucial to education. It is thus a more personal experience than reading an essay, for instance. It depends on personal contact for its effectiveness and a good lecturer responds to the classroom atmosphere and dynamics in a way that a video cannot.

* Some people learn differently than others, so it is important to reinforce readings with lectures. They help people who learn aurally. Notetaking acts as a reinforcement for those who hear a lecture.

* Lecturing has a long historical and practical precedent. It is an efficient way to disseminate information to large groups. It is an accepted way of teaching that is cost effective especially at schools like UW where there are huge numbers of students who need to be taught.

* It is a way to synthesize and prioritize information. Additionally, you may model the thinking and learning process as you lecture. It has the potential to engage students in a way that reading an essay never can.

* Lecture/Discussion is another option that can be very effective. It helps students learn to question material. It has the potential, however, to lead to long digressions that can make it difficult to cover all of the necessary material.

Tips on Writing Lectures

* Think about where your lecture fits into the curriculum or syllabus for the class. Be sure students understand the relationship between this lecture and previous lectures by using explicit signposting. You might remind them, for instance, that the last lecture ended with the Dawes Act and this lecture will discuss the effects that the Dawes Act had on Native American communities.

* When creating a lecture, consider the categories of information you need to include. These "genres" of information might include main themes, historical arguments and debates, obligatory facts, and interesting anecdotes.

* Since students will be writing down the information they hear in the lecture, consider the ways that you can structure your narrative to facilitate coherent, organized note taking. You might accomplish this through aggressive signposting, explicitly identifying the main sections of the lecture with verbal cues, or by supplementing your lecture with a written outline (on the chalkboard or in a handout).

* Remember entertaining students is crucial to keeping them engaged with the lecture material. Begin each lecture with an interesting anecdote or quote that draws them into the narrative. Try to weave jokes, quotes, or anecdotes throughout the lecture to maintain students' attention. A

good rule of thumb for keeping your audience awake is to deploy "cool stuff" at least every ten minutes.

* For a lecture to be satisfying to the audience, it must feel whole. Always make sure that your lecture has a beginning, middle, and end. To make the lecture feel like a unified whole, you might want to consider the following strategies:

1) Structure the lecture as a journey. If the lecture is on a topic like Lewis and Clark, begin with a discussion of the reasons for sending the expedition, trace the expedition's route step-by-step, and conclude with an assessment of its significance.

2) Structure the lecture as a riddle. Ask a question at beginning, and make the rest of the lecture answer that question. It is particularly useful to begin with a paradox. For example: "In popular thought, the West is a place of rugged, self-sufficient individualists. But throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, western development depended almost entirely on aid from the federal government. Why was this so?" Make sure your conclusion revisits the problem and explicitly states the "solution."

3) Structure the lecture as a jigsaw puzzle in which many small pieces of information can be drawn together to create a unified whole. You might, for instance, write a lecture on rural life that discusses frontier gender roles, land use, and agricultural practices in great detail. Little by little these details add up to create a whole, cohesive "portrait" of farm life.

* Consider ways to give your lecture a powerful, evocative ending. Never jettison your conclusion. A lecture will only feel satisfying to your audience if it ends with an enlightening or thought-provoking "summing up." Though a lecture does not always have to end with a provocative "aha!" you should at least try to repeat your main ideas.

* You might want to end the lecture with an interesting anecdote that illustrates your main points. If you split a lecture topic into two parts, end the first half with a "cliffhanger" anecdote that gestures toward a solution in the next class session.

<u>Tips on Lecture Delivery</u>

* Repetition is an essential part of oral delivery. To emphasize key points, “say it, illustrate it, and say it again.”

* We can control many things about the room we are using; we can adjust heat, lines of sight, etc. We can also use a microphone in large halls, avoid “tunnel” rooms, and use a podium effectively to enhance the learning experience.

* Good lecturers use their voices well. Volume, pitch, and speed can be varied to keep hearers’ attention. Modulation also can signal transitions or provide emphasis.

* Eye contact and body language also communicate information. We should be aware of verbal silences, repetitive phrases or words (like “um”). Videotaping or recording one’s own lectures can be valuable ways to evaluate good/bad habits. Humor can add human warmth to the presentation. * We should help listeners engage our

lecture material by signaling what is purely anecdotal or illustrative, and what are major points. We can also use the board to vary our presentation and to provide emphasis or explanation.

* For those who are uncomfortable with audience eye-contact during a lecture, a focus point near the back of the room can be an effective alternative if it is not overused or conspicuous. We should be aware, though, that eye-contact is the basis for a human connection with the audience. The students will provide clues to which points are unclear, understood, or ignored.

* Reacting inappropriately to “newspaper readers” or “talkers” can compromise our effectiveness in the classroom. An angry response is usually the least effective. Simply standing next to offending parties or the use of humor are better options. Perhaps most effective of all, though, are clear boundaries set out at the beginning of course that emphasize the problems these activities pose to a learning environment.

LEADING DISCUSSIONS

Being an effective discussion leader is not an easy job. Like other aspects of teaching, however, with practice and a commitment to personal improvement it is a role that one can learn to enjoy and perform well. While some folks may be gregarious and outgoing by nature, that does not mean that they necessarily have a leg up on others who might describe themselves as "silent types."

Thus, the tips that follow are designed to speak to issues that all discussion leaders should keep in mind as they go about their work. We have organized these ideas around four broad themes: pre-planning, the role of the discussion leader, encouraging interactive discussions and argument, and ideas on how to teach listening. Any topic as vast as "speaking, listening, and discussion in the classroom" will certainly render any tip sheet woefully incomplete; we certainly do not claim to have written the last word on any of these topics. What follows, though, should provide some important ideas and questions to think about as you attempt to become a better discussion leader.

Pre-planning

Preparation is crucial to the success of the discussion, for students and teachers alike. Here's a checklist of things you should consider before you lead a discussion.

Thought-work:

*Do the reading well, of course

*Establish objectives of the class session

*Think through the ways that this particular class might fit into the overall themes of the course

*Prepare questions--be specific and prepare enough to have some in reserve

*Anticipate possible answers

*Organization; think abut moving from lower order to higher order concerns (from factual/ basic toward interpretive/abstract) building interpretations. Moving this way allows students to feel knowledgeable

*Think about possible transitions between parts of the class. This is especially useful if you opt for a groups-of-ideas approach (Bill calls this "islands") instead of a narrative progression of ideas. Identify three or four major islands to work through during the class, and be prepared for getting at each of these from different angles.

*Prepare a synopsis of the readings/arguments for yourself, and perhaps ask them to do so, either in class or before class

*Think about some possible ice breakers or other ways to instigate discussion.

*Review the dynamics of past classes (power alleys, frequent talkers, etc.)

*Think of questions to assign for the next class, as well. This is a way to get the non-talkers "warmed up" for discussion. You might have them just think about those issues, respond over email, do a freewrite in class, set up a debate, etc.

Tasks:

Prepare any gadgets/gimmicks/audio/video, or other visuals. Do a trial run on unfamiliar equipment.

*Set up the room in advance to prepare it for discussion

*Practice names

*Move your seat (catch them off guard!) in order to change the flow of discussion, etc.

The Role of the Discussion Leader

So you've got things set up well for a lively discussion, now it's showtime! Here are some things to keep in mind while you're in the act.

Establish a comfortable learning environment.

* Emphasize learning names.

* Set ground rules of what conduct is appropriate in the classroom.

* Make sure the spatial arrangement of the classroom enables discussion. [Include everyone in the circle/horseshoe arrangement; Consider changing your physical placement in the classroom to change the spatial dynamic of the room.]

Give students reason to speak.

*Always keep the purpose and goals of the lesson, and of the class in mind.

*Ask provocative questions that might spark disagreement.

*Don't ask very leading questions or "what's in my head" sorts of questions.

*Find the fun of the topic and focus on that.

*Discussion should be playful, but not silly.

* If you use small groups, make sure they are preparatory for something else. Establish

goals for the report-back section of the course.

Get them talking.

*Instigate by playing devil's advocate--make yourself a target to get them talking

*Remember that people process at different rates; people might be thinking about what they want to say

*Encourage personal relationships

*Link to written assignments along the way....discussion and written assignment in parallel; in context with rest of class

*Call on students based on what they said in their paper

*Have a common goal or a brainstorming strategy; a common cause

Be an attentive facilitator.

*Take peripheral concerns or tangential comments seriously; be comfortable with meandering a bit from your planned discussion path.

*Give students ownership of their statements. [Signpost significant comments in the conversation, or refer to ideas from students' written work.]

*Know the rhythm of the class; strive to get to students from their perspective.

* Notice when people appear to want to get involved, and then call on them, especially if they aren't good at breaking in.

*Think of your role as discussion leader as the "keeper of the commons" You should:

1. Lay out the ground rules for civility; manage the commons in everyone's interest

2. Monitor conversation; it is important that no one dominate discussion or talk too much

In other words, it's your role to set expectations and manage the discussion for the common interest/good.

Problem solving techniques:

To deal with factually erroneous or illogical comments:

*Get questions to people ahead of time

*Reframe the student's answer to pull out most salient features

*Change nature of discussion as a class; push discussion to the next level

*Ground the discussion in specific reading or passage; what part of the reading tells you this?

*Bracket the tangents, say that we will discuss them later...

To prevent students from jumping to the big answer at the start of discussion, or to reign in a meandering discussion:

*Don't adopt a sequential, linear pattern of discussion. Instead, have a variety of loci of conversation or map of "islands" without a specific order, and be able to negotiate several different transitions between the loci. This way, you can follow the discussion as it goes, but yet always find a way to get meandering statements back to the center.

To improve the rigor of the group as a whole:

*If things aren't at the level you anticipated, one idea is to ask the group as a whole to step discussion up a notch. This emphasizes the common goal of a good discussion. Rather than pinpointing a few individuals' weak statements, it demands that the entire class take responsibility for the discussion.

<u>Encouraging Interactive Discussions and Argument</u>

Even though you're the one directing the discussion, it's the students' interaction with one another that really counts. Here's a long list of ways to get students engaged with the material and with one another.

Freewrite at the beginning of class to force the students to have an opinion

Have something to talk about that doesn't include the reading--cartoon, photograph

Let them rehearse their answer--talk to a partner first, or email the question early

Pre-class assignments to force them to engage the material before class:

*Frame questions for discussion

*Ask them to come up with their own questions, things they don't understand

*Have students email questions to one another, and give each other 1 paragraph answers

Ask for opinion analysis, not lists or facts

*For example, which was most important factor? In your opinion..., or Who was right?

*Don't ask questions just to see if they have done the reading.

*Don't ask questions with one word answers.

Choose/highlight incendiary material

*Readings that focus on controversial topics like race, gender

*Video clips or advertising to prompt discussions that don't rely on the reading

*Highlight the most polar viewpoints--most conservative and radical

*Find emotional material to draw a reaction, if not an argument

*Instructors could choose an extreme position to stimulate the students to argue

Small groups/small group work

*Ways to form groups: geographical? numbering off? Break up friends? Jigsaw

*Directed small group discussion

*Debates (set up the week before with assignment)

*Role playing

*Other things to consider:

--Who forms the groups? Who assigns topics?

--Students sometimes feel they need to perform for a teacher;

--Some students hate being in groups because they can't perform for teacher

--Assigning roles in groups helps make things go smoothly

--Teacher isn't in group--; teacher needs to move between groups

*The report back

Problems: It's like a lecture. It needs to have a purpose; not just dictation

Think about what is the goal of report back, in order to evaluate its usefulness

--Pick a couple of items, not a laundry list

--Rotate groups during report out

--Don't have them all report on the same thing

--Or if the groups have the same topic, they should report back in dialogue with each other

--Debate as a form of report out solves these problems.

Teach disagreement as a form of interactive discussion

*The discussion leader needs to create a climate where students can disagree well

*The best way to do this is to remind them at the beginning of a potentially argumentative lecture that they need to accept other viewpoints, agree to argue well, not deride other points of view, etc.

*Work on listening skills

Things to Avoid:

*You don't want only a contentious classroom--you need to find some middle ground, too

*Not every discussion needs to be argumentative, other responses (such as emotion) are valuable, too

*Students don't like to feel manipulated (when the instructor chooses sides, for example, or if only the polar points of view are available for discussion)

Teaching Listening

Good discussions demand not only good commentary from the professor and students, but good listening, too.

Make the classroom climate conducive to good listening:

*Generally, you need to build community in ways to hold students accountable to teach and encourage listening

*Be clear about what you expect in the classroom. For example, include a line in your syllabus that says something like: "Good listening includes . . . "

*Set up your room to facilitate listening. Circles and horseshoes are better than rows.

Provide students with clues and opportunities to learn to listen:

*Ask students to re-cap what another student has shared with the class.

*When one student offers a general comment or concept, ask another student to elaborate it with concrete examples.

*Direct discussion so that later discussions build off prior ones.

*Communicate to students your desire to get them responding to each other rather than having the conversation transmitted through you. In other words, when appropriate, deflect student questions or comments back to the entire class to consider.

*Using formal debates forces people to listen given that they will need to hear and understand their opponent's viewpoint in order to provide persuasive counter-arguments.

Model good listening with your involvement in the classroom:

*As a teacher, be sure you use good listening skills (i.e.: re-state what students say to make sure you understand it; eye contact with a student who is speaking; body language to indicate that you see the point or might be having trouble understanding)

*Diagnosing a listening "problem" may not be easy. A student who appears to be lost in the conversation or a daydream may simply be nervous about participating and get off track while rehearsing a possible answer to a previous question. In short, good listening may not be the problem, but a more general hesitancy to participate.

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CREATING THE CLASSROOM COMMUNITY

What is classroom community? Why is it important?

It's the way that people interact with each other inside and outside the classroom to foster an active learning environment. We want to create positive and supportive communities in our classrooms because they create environments where people can exchange ideas with each other, feel comfortable taking risks, and form intellectual friendships. We want our students to learn in collaboration with one another, and this is only possible in a classroom with a positive community.

But sometimes, there will be problems in our classrooms. Here are three questions to consider when approaching a problem situation in the classroom:

1. Why is this a problem for the classroom community?
2. How does this situation arise?
3. How can the situation be addressed in the short term and in the long term?

Two common problem situations and ways to think about approaching them:

1. A student in your class is behaving aggressively toward other students or to you as the instructor.

a) Why is this a problem?

- It hurts students in the class and causes them to fear each other.
- Hinders discussion—people won't take risks if they fear that they are going to be attacked or mocked.
- If you are constantly challenged in an aggressive and unproductive way, it can undermine your authority.
- Remember that there are different types of classroom aggression—some people might be vocally aggressive, others will roll their eyes at their peers or at you, others will sit in the back of the class and scowl. Think about the ways that all of these forms of aggression may affect the community differently, and just because the aggression isn't overt doesn't mean that it's not a problem.

b) How does this situation arise?

- Ground rules weren't clear to everyone from the first day of class, and people began to dominate from the first discussion.

- The space of the classroom is inappropriate—because people can sit in the back corners, it's easier for them to separate themselves from the group.

- Students are frustrated, they don't feel like you are hearing them, and they are trying to get your attention in a negative way.

- Tensions between students or tensions between you and the student have been building—they were not addressed earlier and they are coming out in the classroom.

- Students are trying to show that they are smarter than you or than the other students.

- Students are frustrated with the material and the discussion—they don't know what they could say that is productive.

- Students are bored and can't express that productively.

- Students may be trying to get attention from you.

- Students may have an emotional reaction to controversial material.

- Students don't respect you as the instructor, or they feel like you don't respect them as students.

- There are various reasons why people may not respect an instructor that are based on prejudices—age, race, gender, perceived sexuality, size, perceived political viewpoint may affect whether some of our students respect us from the beginning.

- Personal problems may also come out through aggressive behavior in the classroom.

c) How do we handle the situation in the short term and in the long term?

- Problems need to be addressed quickly before they escalate, set a negative precedent—you need to reestablish your authority as an instructor.

- Redirect the situation quickly—focus it on the process and on the material in the classroom.

- If your authority is challenged, make it clear that you understand what is going on and reassert that you are in charge of the classroom.

- Show your authority through your knowledge of the topic—also show that you have learned how to think about framing questions around issues and speak with confidence.

- Never forget to use humor in aggressive situations.
- Physically change the situation—get up and go to the board, do something different, stand close to the student who is causing the problem.
- Refer back to the ground rules and tell the student that you need them to behave differently to help the discussion—remind them that everyone is an adult.
- Approach the student, send them an email, do something to ask them if everything is ok.
- Try to help people find more productive ways of expressing their ideas if they are open to receiving help and want to use better tactics for talking in class.
- When you pull people aside, balance your criticism with telling them that you are really happy with their involvement in the class.
- If the problem is ongoing, ask the class what they want you to do to make the experience better and how everyone can work together to improve the class.
- Try different teaching tactics in the future—small groups, debates where people argue against their opinions, or anything that changes the dynamics of the classroom
- Encourage people to empathize, see how other people may have a different point of view.
- Remember that you are the keeper of the commons—you have to keep the class under some control
- Try to win the aggressive students over—stroke their ego.

2. A student makes a comment that is bigoted, either to another student or in general.

a) Why is this a problem?

- It sets a precedent in the classroom that people should be valued differently, and even if there is no one who identifies with the group that is being disparaged, that dynamic affects all students.
- Anyone who does identify with the group under attack feels silenced.
- And, other people who also feel like they identify with oppressed groups is silenced by extension—they may fear that their group will be attacked too.
- Risks taking the discussion away from the material and on to personal issues—it interferes with people discussing the material and suggests that only one opinion can be correct.

- The class may get derailed if it becomes an angry debate about a controversial issue.

b) How does the situation arise?

- The students and the instructor bring their prejudices and opinions into the classroom.
- It can be intentional or unintentional—people can attack other people or they may just be unaware that what they are saying is inappropriate.
- Students may not have been exposed to people with different backgrounds.
- Some material may bring out bigoted comments more than others—if you are teaching western history and have a class on the Mormons, you may confront people with anti-Mormon prejudice. Be aware of the issues that your material may raise.

c) How do you address the situation in the long-term and in the short-term?

- Always assume the best—give people the benefit of the doubt that they don't mean their comment to be offensive—try to do anything to deescalate the situation and give the student who made the comment an escape route.
- Depersonalize the comment from the student—try to make it an academic issue, not a comment that emerged from one person in the class.
- Remove the controversy from the classroom—show it in another context or portray it as a subject for study.
- Watch your boundaries—don't be tempted to get into an argument with the student.
- Respect that your students can think for themselves.
- Maybe focus on how the comment was said, not what was said—possibly talk to the student about presenting views in a more appropriate way.
- Try to figure out what is really going on—are they doing this to be bigoted? Are they trying to challenge your authority? Are there interpersonal problems between the students in the classroom?

General Important Thoughts

- Remember that you are the “keeper of the commons.” Set ground rules from the beginning and stick with them.
- Encourage and model risk taking, mutual support, and empathy.
- Have a clear sense of purpose in the classroom—know your goals and try to keep the class on track.
- Empower students to see themselves as people who create the community—help them to understand that they are a critical part of the classroom.
- Draw on common experiences with the class or create common experiences—a breakfast, a field trip—anything that lets people get to know each other and see their peers as people, not only students.
- Employ good discussion leading skills—frame the discussion thoughtfully and clearly so that people understand what they are expected to bring to the class
- Don’t show that a particular student is getting to you!
- If things aren’t working, it’s probably your fault—look at what you are doing, what you can change to make it better.
- The job of the teacher: allow people to share differences with respect—don’t silence your students, because everyone should be able to say what they want to in the classroom while honoring respect.

CREATING WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

Written assignments fall into two categories—examinations and papers. Here are some things to consider in the process of drafting, teaching, and evaluating the success of written assignments.

The class discussion on this topic was based on the following questions:

1. What is the purpose of assignments?

2. How is this purpose expressed in the creation and communication of an assignment?

3. How can teachers facilitate the writing or test-taking process?

4. How can we evaluate the success of the assignment?

The resulting suggestions for successful written assignments follow below.

<u>What is the purpose of written assignments?</u>

*To form a dialogue between the teacher and the student.

*To encourage analysis and/or synthesis of the material.

*To assess how well students are meeting your goals for the class, or their goals for the class.

*To refine students' writing skills.

*To give students a chance to show what they know.

*To allows students to bring their creativity to bear in the classroom.

*To provide milestones for students during the course of the semester, and helps to further communicate the expectations of the class.

*To provide a means for assessment (GRADES!).

*To allow instructors to comment directly to individual students.

*To give students a chance to become deeply and personally involved with the topic at hand.

*To stimulate interest in the subject.

*To reinforce course material.

*To require students to take an active role in learning.

<u>Guidelines for Creating Paper Assignments:</u>

Clarify the purpose of the assignment.

*State the question as clearly and concisely as possible.

*Indicate appropriate approaches, but avoid leading questions.

*Consider limitations—time allowed, level of familiarity with subject, skill level.

*Consider how the assignment fulfills course requirements and course goals.

Communicate your expectations clearly.

*Tell students how you will evaluate the assignment, and how it will be weighted.

    *Is the emphasis on grammar, style, content, analysis, etc.?

*If the assignment has a specific purpose, let students know.

*Clarify what sources (or kinds of sources) students should use.

    *Is experiential knowledge appropriate? Electronic/print/other sources? Primary or secondary sources?

Be fair.

*Don't require students to have knowledge of the topic beyond what's been covered in the course; OR provide resources for students' reference.

*Yet, don't exclude students' previous knowledge or outside experiences.

*Gear assignments to students' success.

*Find ways to tie students' experiences to their written work.

<u>Guidelines for Facilitating Paper Assignments:</u>

State explicitly how the assignment fits into the goals for the class.

Allow opportunities for practice and revision.

*Give ungraded assignments early in the semester, to give students a clear understanding of course expectations.

*Give students chances to improve their work.

    *Give a similar assignment more than once over the course of the semester.

    *Allow revisions of the same work.

*Offer models of student writing to establish a common understanding of successful responses.

*Safest to use examples by former students, rather than current students.

*Ask authors for permission in advance, and collect a file of model papers as you go.

*Refine your expectations as you get to know the students and their skill levels.

Guidelines for Creating Examinations:

Consider structural limitations.

*How much time will students need to respond successfully?

*A complex essay question will require more time than a content-based identification or short answer.

Clearly communicate the expectations of the exam.

*Be clear about how the exam will be evaluated.

*How will the sections be weighted?

*The questions should reflect the level of detail and analysis expected in the response.

*A broadly phrased question will generate a generalized answer.

*If you want a detailed answer, indicate this in the phrasing of the question.

*For a question requiring synthesis, suggest specific texts to consider or give students a particular text (like a quotation) and ask them to relate it to other course material.

Consider different test format options: take-home exam; in-class exam with take-home questions; in-class exam.

*Consider fairness issues.

*Will a particular format privilege a certain group of students? For example, all students may not have equal time to devote to a take-home exam. On the other hand, some students experience more test anxiety than others.

*Avoid trick questions.

*Recognize the relationship between test format, study strategies, and student responses.

*If you give out exam questions before the test, you can expect more focused studying, more rigorous assimilation of course material, and better arguments. *However, students are less likely to study material not directly related to the question.

*If students come into the examination "cold," they are required to study a broader range of material.

*Cramming may not lead to long-term memory retention or well-crafted arguments, but is a skill related to extensive reading.

Helping Students Prepare for Exams:

*Pop quizzes (graded or ungraded) can help a teacher gauge students' reading and comprehension. They give students a chance to practice their test-taking skills.

*Assign sample exam questions in class, so students can practice the desired format. Give students feedback on a simple scale (e.g., check-plus/ check/check-minus).

*Review sessions can help students to identify broad themes of course material, and give them a framework for understanding facts.

For both papers and exams, continually model the critical thought process and the desired result in lectures and discussion.

About Cheating:

*Creating unusual assignments can help prevent students from recycling old work, using other students' work, or plagiarizing work from the Internet.

*Ask students to draw on personal experience in synthesis.

*Require students to use a specific document bank.

*Use unconventional sources (e.g. local histories or untapped primary documents instead of canonized works).

*Know the kind of work a particular student produces; notice dramatic changes in style and form.

*Promote trust in the classroom. Assume the best unless proven otherwise. Convey that you respect and care about your students.

*Emphasize the goals of the course and the processes of skill-building. Evaluate students based on improvement as well as by objective standards to emphasize the *process* of written assignments.

Evaluating the Success of the Assignment

*If the majority of student responses falls below your expectations, reevaluate the assignment. Apologize to the students.

*Consider ways to elicit student feedback about the assignment(s).

    *Course Improvement Form.

    *Informally poll students who visit you during office hours.

    *Ask fellow instructors (TAs/professor) for feedback.

*Model critical dialogue as a craft skill, including giving and receiving feedback openly, without rancor or vengeance.

In general, exams are good for teaching students to study and synthesize large amounts of information. Writing assignments help students learn to interpret information on a particular topic, and to hone their research skills.

Keep respect and fairness as foremost principles.

TEACHING WRITING

I: Why Teach Writing in a History Course?

The following list offers reasons and justifications for teaching writing in a history course. If you do design a course with a large writing component, you very likely will have students complain that such an emphasis is better suited for the English Department–so you should be prepared to defend your decision to include writing. There are many different reasons to teach writing in a history course, and the assignments you choose will likely reflect the reasons that you are emphasizing writing in the first place.

Some answers to the question, Why teach writing?:

* writing allows you to express your view clearly

* you need to learn *how* to make an argument

* presents the opportunity to deepen the analysis of a specific subject

* writing is an essential skill for a historian

* "if you can't write, you can't think"; with good writing, you can show other people that you know the material at hand

* writing offers the teacher another form of evaluation

* thinking about writing helps you understand the reading material, and the choices made by a specific author

* frequent writing helps overcome the fear of writing

* history is a discipline where good writing is rewarded–we should be sure to include well-written work in the syllabus to demonstrate this

* writing is important for organizing your thinking

* writing forces your to form your ideas and to use evidence

* there is a specific way of writing for history; you need to convince the students that historical writing is a good type of writing

* teaching different genres of writing; recognize that different techniques are necessary for different situations, and that good writers wear many different hats

II: Grading and Commenting as Tools for Teaching Writing

Specific techniques

*Rewriting. This gives the students opportunities to improve and tackle the writing weaknesses identified by the teacher.

*Similar assignments. If assignments are similar, the student can more easily apply the comments from an earlier assignment to the next assignment.

*Ask the students to attach the first paper with teacher's comments to the second paper. This can be an effective strategy for ensuring that students read and respond to the comments on the first paper. It also allows the teacher to give continuity to the criticisms.

*Save copies of papers and/or comments. This is another method to enable the teacher to provide continuity. It also allows the teacher to better target their comments to the students and avoid focusing on different aspects in every paper. Alternatively, it prevents the teacher from repeating the same stock phrases which can lose meaning if applied uniformly to all assignments.

*Ask the students to summarize the two major weaknesses of their first paper and put these at the top of their next paper. This would ideally focus students' attentions on these problem areas.

*Another variation on this theme is to ask students to identify the areas of their writing that they think are weakest so the teacher can concentrate on addressing these issues.

*Short, ungraded assignments. These type of assignments allow the teacher to establish the criteria and expectations, while simultaneously giving the students room to maneuver in a low-stakes situation. A weekly, ungraded journal is an example of this type.

*Assign multiple types of assignments over the course of the semester. This can be a stepped process which allows students to feel progression and change in their writing skills.

*NEVER assign only one paper per course. A single paper does not allow for any change or improvement in the students.

<u>Other methods that allow the student to examine their own writing in creative ways</u>

*"Workshop" the papers--All of the students share their own work with others. Each student provides criticism of another's work and receives criticism of his/her own work. This can be a powerful tool for students in the recognition of writing flaws and applying these understandings to their own writing. This method must, however, be conducted in an appropriately friendly and open classroom. A good way to ensure that spite and nastiness do not occur is for teacher "supervision" of the commenting and making it clear that the teacher will be participating in the process.

*Assign a paper to be done in pairs--This method forces the students to actively argue and discuss the choices behind their particular choices in writing.

Using Comments to Communicate

*Tension between the grade and the comment--In this manner, the teacher can signal areas for improvement or praise while also communicating a specific grade that may send a different message to the student.

*Attempt to meet the student on their own terms, "where they are." This approach allows the teacher to give different attentions and different emphases to different students. The teacher should also balance these concerns with more general comments that perhaps indicate how the student is doing relative to his or her larger needs and goals.

*Offer different grades in different categories. Breaking up the grade into specific areas such as structure, style, content, etc. can communicate particular areas for the student to focus attention on. This can culminate in an aggregate grade.

*Hierarchy of Comments. Establish a hierarchy of concerns that coincide with the particular student. For certain students, it may be more appropriate for the teacher to respond to more basic issues of grammar, structure, or argumentation than to issues of style.

A focus on style may also be appropriate only in certain situations and with certain students. Style concerns perhaps communicate only the individual teacher's stylistic preferences.

It may also be helpful to stress that "lower-level" problems are usually the result of higher-level concerns and that improvement of basic skills can fundamentally improve higher-order writing issues.

III: Writing: conventions that students should master, and typology of possible assignments

Convention: Starting at the *very* beginning. Students don't understand the idea of the **thesis**.

> Often reading can be part of a writing assignment which addresses this problem. Have students read an argumentative essay - or a newspaper editorial, for that matter - and have them outline the argument, identify three main points, and two pieces of evidence for each. Or, outline their own argument, and go through the same process. Think of an assignment which asks students to find evidence - short of asking them to write a paper, of course - and show how it supports a particular point.

Convention: Organization/structure of logic: **paragraph/topic sentence problems**.

One effective technique is to take a completed paper (or a draft) and ask students to go back and summarize each paragraph in a single sentence. If they can't, they can see that they have problems with topic sentences. For larger structural problems with the flow of an argument, use the same technique to have students outline a paper using the topic sentences. Does it make sense?

Convention: History requires skills in reading and **document analysis**.

Assign students a handful of primary documents. Give them an assignment which asks them to synthesize two of these, and analyze their relationship to the topic of the documents.

Convention: Problems with fundamental organizing skills. The **"apparatus"** of writing.

This refers to citations, annotation, etc. These kinds of issues should hopefully be tought in 102 - and taught over again. An upper level undergraduate seminar may be the appropriate place to introduce students to the *Chicago Manual of Style*. One great assignment proves the point to students about the importance of citations: give them a monograph, and have them check all the sources cited for errors. They will be shocked at how many there are. Have your students cite lecture notes in their papers to reinforce the point that lecture is not "the answer," but a perspective on a topic. Try to think of assignments which will emphasize that students need not have absolutely original ideas, but an "original relationship with the world [of ideas]."

Convention: Providing **evidence**.

There are many strategies of argumentation - generalization, statistical inference, appeal to an expert among these - think about how to incorporate different strategies into assignments. Have students write an argument from a different experience / perspective than you think they ordinarily would.

Convention: Developing **narrative** skills.

Narrative is among the more powerful forms of argumentation for historians. Useful exercises to reinforce this point, and develop narrative skills include: writing an account of a historical event from a particular perspective (e.g., a KKK lynching from a klansman and a potential victim) versus writing a straight, journalistic account of a past event of finite duration; write an account of an event entirely in passive voice, which makes the point far more effectively than just explaining what it is.

TIPS ON EVALUATING STUDENT WORK

Collected by Stacey Smith and Katie Burns

Before you begin the grading process, you might want to consider some broad conceptual questions…

What is good about grades in the university system?

* Grades are forms of feedback for both students and teachers. They tell students where they stand in the course and they let teachers know which students need additional attention.

* They can also let teachers know if they are doing their job effectively: if all of your students are failing, it is likely that your expectations are unreasonable or unclear. Adjust the course requirements—or your teaching style—to match the skill level of your students.

* Grades can be motivational tools. They encourage students to work harder and to seek assistance from the teacher when they are having trouble.

* They are the only standardized criteria that allow teachers and administrators to compare students with one another.

Why are grades bad?

* Students sometimes become so obsessed with grades that the point breakdowns become the sole focus of the class. They begin to see the course as a means to a grade rather than as a learning process.

* Badly designed grading systems—particularly grading on a curve—treat students unfairly and discourage some from trying to improve.

* Students tend to ignore information for which they will not be held accountable. When students ask questions like “Will this be on the test?” they assume that anything they are not graded on is not worth knowing.

General Grading Strategies

* Make sure that students understanding your grading policies. Clearly set forth your point breakdowns, rewrite guidelines, and contested grade philosophy in your syllabus.

* Show respect for your students by grading carefully and thoroughly. Acknowledge the hard work they put into assignments by giving them your full time and attention.

* Consider giving students a written midterm evaluation that lets them know where they stand in the class. Meet with each student individually to discuss the evaluation and

formulate an improvement plan for the rest of the semester. To minimize anxiety, make the evaluation a set of written comments rather than a recorded grade.

* Encourage improvement by grading students against themselves. If some students are struggling, help them to create goals for the next assignment. If they work hard and achieve those goals, consider raising their grade even if their work is not quite on par with the work of other students. You might also consider allowing struggling students to rewrite assignments.

* Remind students that grades are comments on their work, not on their souls. Discourage them from internalizing criticisms.

Commenting on Student Work

* Always provide written comments along with the letter grade. In addition to margin comments and stylistic suggestions, include a longer concluding commentary that summarizes the student's main strengths and weaknesses.

* Comment more on early papers and exams than on those late in the semester. By the time finals come around there is usually less opportunity for large-scale improvement and few students pick up their final assignments.

* Use comments strategically to effect improvement in student work. Give "C" students incentive to work harder by praising their work, encourage "A" students to refine their work even further by giving them more critical comments.

Techniques for Ensuring Fair Grading

* Before you start grading an essay examination, draft a sample response outlining the answers you expect to receive. Comparing each student's response to your "ideal" answer will help you maintain objectivity and consistency.

* Consider reading exams "blind"—that is, grade without looking at the students' names. This may help you grade more objectively, eliminating any personal biases against the student or any preconceptions about the quality of their work. Recognize, however, that students often have distinct writing styles or handwriting that makes it impossible to read completely blind.

* Reading exams "blind" can also be an unfair grading technique. Sometimes, especially with struggling class members, the most effective grading strategy is to evaluate students against themselves. You compare the quality of their present work with their past work, rewarding them for progressive improvement. By reading exams blind, you ignore students' personal histories, basing their grades on how well they "match up" against the other students in the class, rather than crediting them for new improvements.

Addressing Dissatisfaction with your Grading

* Always allow students an opportunity to air their grievances. By admitting that you can make mistakes, you show students that you are fair and that you have a sincere concern for their opinions and feelings.

* Recognize that students invest grades with a great deal of emotion and some will argue over a grade simply because they "feel" they deserve better. To minimize heated (and sometimes irrational) confrontations, tell students that you will not hear grievances until at least twenty-four hours after they get their papers back.

* When grievances become overly emotional, try to determine if there is larger problem underlying the student's reaction. Make sure that students realize that poor grades and criticisms are evaluations of their work, not indictments of them as people.

* Deter students who do not have legitimate grievances from protesting their grades. You might warn them, for instance, that you can lower their grades if you find more mistakes. You might also require them to put their grievances in writing, forcing them to justify explicitly why they think they should receive a higher grade.

“Beyond the Classroom” authored by Jeremy and Paul

A. Specific examples of memorable field trips

--planting different species of trees

--visiting Emily Dickinson's grave or Frederick Jackson Turner's sundial at a Madison cemetery

--walking through the neighborhood

--traveling to a sewage plant

B. Types of field trips

--museum or historic site

-- "Private” field trips where you require students to go into the community and see a speaker, watch a local government meeting, or visit a museum on their own can be a good alternative to whole-class affairs, especially when the size of the class is so large that it would be logistically difficult to plan a meaningful trip with everyone. A potential problem with this type of field trip is that separate experiences at different places might not foster a discussion.

-- a “wander the neighborhood” type field trip.

C. Advantages of a "wander the neighborhood" type field trip

--cheap

--does not require lots of organization

--does not need to be a grand deal or take an entire day

--can take advantage of historic towns

--history means much more when you see it first hand

--use of local resources

--can build strong ties with local community or neighborhood

D. Why do field trips?

--done early in the semester it can help to bond the class together; at the same time, though, a later semester trip could be even more enjoyable if students already know each other pretty well

--good change of pace

--an attempt to recharge one's batteries

--makes history "real"

--appeals to a range of learning styles

--teaches students to read artifacts and architecture, not just books or articles

--helps to bridge the gap between academia and the community

--can be multidisciplinary and therefore help to bridge gaps between academic fields and subfields

--helps make the past come alive

E. Logistics of field trip

--prepare students for potential weather conditions. You might want to stuff in your backpack an extra pair of gloves and a hat for a forgetful student.

--departure and return time

--itinerary

--food available at the site for carnivores and herbivores

--supplies to bring (binoculars, cameras, etc..)

--prepare students for potentially disturbing material (pig slaughtering)

--how much money to bring

F. Assessment

--key question in assessment of field trips: How to do it without stifling creative interest in the trip itself?

--Assessment must be included in all facets of the field trip (pre-trip, trip, and post-trip).

G. Pre-Trip Assessment

--Pre-trip framing can help you to focus the students' attention on particular aspects of the trip, something that you can then follow up on (in class discussion, exams, or future papers, perhaps) when you return.

--Preparation before hand is crucial in order for you to situate the trip into the broader context of the course.

--Do the preparation for the trip before arriving at the site and not the day of arrival. That creates more time to view the site itself and shows the students that you really anticipate a valuable experience because you think it important enough to devote class time to preparation.

H. Assessment during the Trip

--As a teacher, make sure that you attend the field trip with your students! And no puffing on your Marlboros by the school bus while the students explore the site you are visiting. That kind of inattentiveness tells the students that the day is not important. It is also disrespectful of their time. If you are asking them to take a day (or afternoon) to join the group for a field trip, you should demonstrate your own interest as well.

--Avoid having lots of structure—i.e.: note taking, listening to lectures—at the field trip site itself. Remember, one reason to take a trip is to break from the patterns that we usually fall into in class.

--If students are required to take extensive notes it can lead them to become so focused on that that they fail to get the most of the experience of having the visit.

--Be sure to assess the field trip while it is in progress. Ask students what they are finding interesting. Eavesdrop on student conversation and reactions. Note moments of silence.

--Check your boredom.

--Look for the usual indices of people having fun: smiles, laughter.

I. Post Assessment

--Be sure when you plan a field trip that you take time to debrief it when you return to class. Otherwise, the students will be asking themselves: "What's the point?"

--Hopefully the field trip will be so engaging that you will not need to hold a grade over the students' heads to get them interested. The coercive element of a grade should not be needed if the trip is well done.

--If you do build a concrete assignment out of a field trip, be sure to build lots of flexibility into it. You never know what will click with students as they peruse an historical site or museum.

--It might be tricky to include field trip experiences on an exam if not all students are able to participate. Be sure to have alternative questions or assignments for students who were not able to make it.

--Telling students that information from the trip will show up on future exams might create a level of anxiety among the students and prevent them from really enjoying the trip.

--Effective assignments should build on the engagement that students had with the site.

--Work hard to develop creative assignments (i.e. role-playing exercise).

J. Miscellaneous Items

--Be mindful of the financial costs to students of taking a field trip. Admission prices to museums, and the opportunity cost of lost wages (if you do the trip on a weekend) can be quite hefty for students with limited financial resources. Consider dropping a book from your syllabus to help soften the financial blow of a field trip if you think it might be a little steep.

Jill, Stasia, Tol

Advising/Mentoring

1. Why advise?

- There are three genres of teaching: lectures, small seminar/discussions, and the one-on-one interactions of advising.
- Advising can build a bridge between a course and a student's larger goals.
- It can be a way to incorporate non-class, non-school issues. It can connect academics to the rest of life.
- Personal connections are especially important at a large university. One of the issues at a big state university is that advising has become professionalized. There are paid staff who advise students by explaining the rules and regulations. In a sense this is necessary because at a large university there can be so many rules that a professor may not be able to adequately explain them. The down side to separating the role of advisor is that it can lead to professors thinking they are not responsible for the parts of advising that aren't addressed by the professional staff. It essentially disempowers the professor and students.
- At a small college this isn't a concern because the faculty are the advisors.
- As professors who are passionate about our work we can inspire students. Students may want to know if they can become professors like us.
- It can be a very negative experience if you are searching for a mentor. Professors who don't support you or brush you aside can make you feel terrible.

3. **What are some of the most frequent issues that advisors should expect from students?**

- Students are concerned with the future: jobs, internships, graduate school. What's next after school? If I know what my goals are, how do I reach them?
- I would add to this list: letters of recommendation, personal issues, problems or concerns with your course or a specific grade.
- If students come to you to get advice about whether they should attend graduate school it's important to be honest about the potential risks and rewards. You should tell them about the job market, the level of commitment that is necessary, etc. But you should not tell someone that they should not go to graduate school. Ultimately that is a personal decision for the student to make. Obviously, the type of advice you offer will depend on your prior relationship with that student. If you have just meet them don't hit them with all the negatives, be encouraging. If you have a student who

feels supported by you then it may be more appropriate to bring up the costs of graduate school.

- You need to remember the amount of power you have as an advisor. Perhaps think of how you would want your children to be treated by a professor. A lot of emotions are on the line for the student.

3. There are two types of advising: Problem solving and motivation.

Motivation

- As teachers we need to help discouraged students feel less discouraged. We need to channel enthusiasm.
- We need to help people who are discouraged with a specific piece of work remember that they are not failures. We can do that by helping them separate themselves from their work. Emphasize to students that they just need to learn new skills and they can improve – it's not a matter of being a genius.
- As a teacher when they come to talk to us we need to make sure that we know what the course objectives are, where is the class moving. This will help us explain to students why we assign the work that we do.
- We need to offer salvation and resurrection: you can improve, you can retrieve yourself.
- We can share our own experiences of failure.
- Remind them that life is bigger than this one class.
- Be concerned about students' tendencies to compare themselves with other students. This can be a trap. We need to grow as individuals.
- Be flexible. If a student needs to do extra credit or a different assignment, be open to that possibility.
- Point out that college is different than high school. Student's shouldn't necessarily have the same expectations. The terrain of the game has changed.
- Let students vent and just listen. Pay attention to their body language. Try to see why the student is upset, what is the real issue?
- Perform active listening – listen and verbally acknowledge that you have been listening. Restate what people say. Even if you can't solve the problem you can be a good listener.

- Jumping in too soon makes people defensive. Listen before trying to solve problems. When you've been teaching for a while you have a tendency to think you've heard it all before and jump ahead of the student to your own conclusions about the nature of the problem. Even if you have heard it before respect the student enough to listen.

Problem-Solving

- Point out successes, not just failures.
- When a student comes to you for comments on a rough draft you may want to first ask them what they thought of their work. Let them identify the problem. This empowers the student and allows you to give the student appropriate criticisms.
- Always ask questions. This allows students to think through issues themselves. It gives students ownership and empowers them.
- Help students learn to signpost.
- If you want to talk about life issues it can be helpful to leave the office and go for a walk outside. A new setting can be refreshing.
- One type of problem-solving that is common is helping students come up with a paper topic. Start by asking them questions about their interests. Ask them where they have looked to find ideas, and perhaps point them to some good sources. Two different strategies are to start with a broad interest or question and make it smaller or to start with a small, narrow question and broaden it so it will have larger implications. You can also give students a pile of documents to sort through for paper topic ideas.
- Beware of the perfectionists impulse in students. It can immobilize them.

Why do we need boundaries?

- We have a bizarre situation in the university where, on one level, the self-centered, time-driven teachers get rewarded for not advising or reaching out to students. They have more time to work on their own materials which is rewarded by the system. On the other hand, the teachers who are available have their time consumed. But we all agree that this can be one of the best ways to spend your time!
- But it is important to set some boundaries or you will have time for nothing else. You need to find that balance.
- Setting boundaries depends on your prior relationship with the student. You can't suddenly be their friend if there is no basis to that relationship.

- If a student who you are moderately connected to comes to see you and looks upset what should you do? First, don't assume anything. Second, reach out in some way to let them know you're available to listen. Sometimes just knowing that you're not alone is powerful.

- If students come to office hours about a specific assignment or question you can try and chat with them about other things to build a sense that you are a human who is interested in them as a fellow human.

- Some people need to be needed and get involved in mentor relationships for themselves. Beware! Make sure you are not involved with students because of some need or emptiness of your own. You don't want to create a dependency on the part of your students. Our job is to help them become independent.

- Remember that many of these students are going through the transition from teenagers to adults or other similar rites of passage.

How do you draw boundaries?

- One approach is not to give students your home phone number.

- In the classroom if a student flaunts that they have a special relationship with you gently let them know either directly (i.e. you are making other students uncomfortable) or indirectly (i.e. ignore them) that this is not appropriate.

- Make sure to manage your physical space in the office. If you share an office and are having a personal conversation be aware of that.

What do you do if you fear a student is contemplating suicide?

- Remember that you are not qualified to solve this problem. You need to listen, but then you need to get them appropriate help. Help them understand that there are people who are qualified to get them through this period.

- Walk them over to the counselor or call and help them schedule an appointment; don't simply give them a phone number and dismiss them. Tell them you would be happy to meet with them again.

- You have to make the case for counseling/therapy. It's not a sign of weakness or failure.

- Ask them if there is anyone else they are talking to about their feelings. If there is, and they say it is all right, contact that person directly to discuss the situation.

- Know the sources of help on campus.

- Some suggest physical contact such as a hug, but remember in our society that is a very delicate issue. While the human gesture is important you have to protect the student and yourself.

- Give students permission to cry. Hand them a box of Kleenex to signal that it is ok to cry.

How do you deal with crushes?

- If a student has a crush on you ignore it. Don't verbalize it, don't acknowledge it. "Go Victorian."

- You may want to make sure that you never meet that student alone, have others around.

- Reinforce the professional aspects of the relationship.

- Be vague when they ask you personal questions.

- Sometimes, however, you can use the erotica of the classroom to your advantage. You can use that energy to infuse the subject with passion. Be careful though, this may not work for everyone!

- Remember that there is an aspect of love to the student/teacher relationship. It is a love that is asexual, like family love. You can model affection without sexuality. Some may call this friendship.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Part I: How do we balance the demands of a professional academic career?

- Remember that there are three things on which you are evaluated for tenure and you need to know what weight your department places on these aspects.

  They are: Research, Teaching, and Service.

- It is often useful to learn how to balance these demands by example; for instance, some people place too much weight on research and are not good teachers. Others spend too much time teaching and do not produce enough published material for tenure.

- How might different departments weight these three demands?
  (1) Community College – much more emphasis on teaching, heavier teaching load, no time for your own research.

  (2) Research University – lighter teaching load, more time for your own research.

  (3) Liberal Arts College – more emphasis on teaching than a university, but also allows time for research.

- The definition of "service to the community" depends on type of institution:

  (1) Research University – means serving on committees.

  (2) Liberal Arts College – means getting involved in the lives of your students.

- How do you prioritize service?

  (1) As a young professor, you are often protected from service to work on getting tenure.

  (2) When you do serve on a committee, it is important to first serve inside your department, and later move to larger, campus-wide committees.

- The question of politics within a university is complicated:

  (1) If you are in a stronger department within the university, you will have an easier time getting support and benefits.

  (2) Interdisciplinary programs are in an awkward situation because they depend on other departments for their hiring – ie someone is hired in both Native American Studies and History.

- Much of this all comes down to time management:

  (1) Know yourself and your habits, as well as your strengths and weaknesses.

  (2) Be REALLY good at two of the three things you will be judged on for tenure.

  (3) Give yourself time to relax after the inevitable crunches that occur when you are teaching.

Part II: Evaluations, Resources, and Conflict

Abby started the discussion in part two of our look at professional development, narrowing the focus to elaborate on more concrete ways that we can improve ourselves as teachers.

Question: What are the roles of evaluations, how do we use them, and what can we learn from them?

- There are two types of evaluations, each with a different role:

  (1) those that ask simply if the teacher is doing their job

  (2) those that make suggestions about how the course might grow and change for the better

- We need to be open to the suggestions that we get on evaluations. We need to be honest with ourselves and to be willing to make changes based on the returns. In other words, stubbornness or self-centeredness are not character traits that lend themselves to course improvement.

- If the returns from an evaluation are less than favorable, consider including TA's or senior students who have already taken the course in the review and revamping process. Ask them what could make the course work better.

- Be aware of what you are being evaluated on before teaching a course.

- Finally, consider using evaluations early on in the semester, and consider including the class's students in the review process earlier on in the semester if things are not going well.

Question: What are some outside resources that we can use to improve our teaching?

- We can use observations either by our colleagues or by videotape.

- We can sit in on other people's classes, or at this point in our student careers, watch the teaching techniques of our current professors carefully.

- Collect all the material you can get—such as sample syllabi, assignments, and tests.

- Attend workshops.

- Keep company with, or create settings with, people who enjoy talking about teaching techniques in an informal setting.

Question: What do you do when you find yourself in friction with the administration.

- Bill suggested that the best way to deal with this is to prevent it from ever happening. Consider yourself a political actor in whatever department you inhabit. As such, you need to figure out ways that you can contribute constructively to the growth and improvement of the department. Define yourself not as a figure in opposition to the order of the department, but as a productive member of a collective unit that's trying to accomplish common goals: the improvement of the department and the advancement of education.