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TEACHING DOSSIER

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I. Introduction and Summary

I begin every course by telling my students that, “this is our class, and we can teach it however we want.” This statement subtly introduces the student to the central tenets of my teaching philosophy; specifically that I am **inclusive, transparent, and promote active learning**. This announcement shows that I am caring enough to take their wishes into account and value their input into the course, which also highlights my attempts to build an inclusive classroom environment. Furthermore, this introduction communicates to the student that I will be transparent with the classroom assignments, and they have the opportunity to take an active role in determining the direction of the course. I have found that beginning each course in this way helps build a small sense of community and inclusiveness in the classroom and while also promoting active learning.

Although I only earned my doctorate this year, I have **over three years of teaching experience**, and during this time I have developed several different exercises to implement my teaching philosophy. Two of the most successful approaches have involved my **use of primary sources** and having **students develop their own tests**. I utilize a variety of primary source analysis in nearly every single class I teach. I firmly believe that this helps the students develop critical thinking skills while also introducing them to the distinctive and seemingly foreign ways in which past societies structured their modes of thought. The individuals who constructed the primary sources were not modern day individuals wearing funny hats, but rather a historical actor with a completely unique approach to understanding the world around them. To help students appreciate this reality, I use an active learning approach, having them examine the source first by themselves or in a group, then as a class. These are often complex sources with a central message but also offer the possibility of different interpretations. This “learning by doing” approach helps students develop their critical thinking skills and promotes a participatory and inclusive classroom environment. This level of engagement is beneficial when the students develop their tests, and further demonstrate my transparent approach. After a brief review of the material which will be on the upcoming test, I have the students generate questions for the short essay and the long essay. I inform them that the premise of the exercise is simple: I want them to create questions that are easy enough where they already know the answer, yet are difficult enough that I want to use them on the exam. This requires that the students actively and critically reflect on the course material and approach it from a different perspective. From this pool of questions I select the most appropriate ones, add it to the study guide, and use it on the exam.

I have developed my teaching philosophy over the course of my three years as a Part Time Professor at Sheridan College. Here, I have had the opportunity to teach a number of different courses both online and in person, such as Early Modern Europe, Modern Europe, Modern Warfare, Humanities and Western Civilization, and the History of Chocolate. While the syllabi for these courses are pre-set, I still have the opportunity to **take “ownership” of the course** and design all the teaching materials and assignments from scratch. The success of my teaching methods are validated with my noteworthy student evaluations, where I consistently score in the top percentile of Sheridan faculty.

II. Teaching Responsibilities

The majority of my teaching experience comes from my three years as a Part-Time Professor at Sheridan College. Before this position I worked for four years as a Teaching Assistant the University of North Dakota and Louisiana State University. At Sheridan my responsibilities involve delivering the course curriculum via lecture and in-class activities, developing course assignments and tests, tutoring students, and grading all the course material. While my duties do not involve course development, I have considerable latitude in terms of the way I teach the course. The syllabus only indicates which topics and assignments the course must include, but I **take “ownership” of the course** and develop all the teaching materials from scratch and design the assignments in such a way that reflects my teaching philosophy. The majority of the courses I taught had 20-30 students and met once a week for a three hour block.

a. List of Courses Currently Taught

HIST 13921GD – Modern Europe: From the French Revolution to World War Two

Students examine the political, social, and cultural forces that have shaped European history from the French Revolution to the end of World War Two. They identify how and why the Modern era developed and evolved, and how it has contributed to the contemporary world. Students explore the nature and development of the French Revolution and its impact on the development of modern Western civilization. In addition to the French Revolution, they analyze the major themes and events of the Restoration, Industrial Revolution, Revolutions of 1848, European Imperialism, and the Era of the World Wars. Through a combination of group activities, discussions and debates, individual and collaborative research, and interactive lectures, students also examine the roots and development of modern statehood, representative government, nationalism, liberalism, and industrialism.

HIST 14998G – Modern War: A Global History

Students critically examine the history of modern global warfare from the 18th century to the present. In addition to identifying the central features and military aspects of modern war, they also analyze its broader social, cultural, political and economic contexts. Through a combination of group activities, discussions, individual and collaborative research, and interactive lectures, students investigate the wars associated with 18th century revolutionary France and America, Napoleon Bonaparte, the national unifications of 19th century Europe, imperialism, the World Wars, decolonization and the Cold War, as well as some of the principle military developments of the previous last quarter century.

HIST 14310G – History of Chocolate

Students survey the 4000-year-old history of chocolate: from its ancient Mesoamerican origins as a bitter drink of ritual and medicine, to the growth of a modern "chocolate culture" and its place as a mass-produced globalized product of the twentieth century. Students investigate how chocolate came to be imported into Europe by the Spanish during the sixteenth century and transformed into a sugary drink of the nobility, as well as its later importance to colonization, the slave trade and the Industrial Revolution. Students explore, through six module videos with integrated reading assignments, podcasts and other media, current academic research on the topic and encounter a wide range of primary sources including art, literature and the economic and administrative documents of daily life. Students also have the opportunity to analyze several primary sources (historical documents, paintings, photographs and maps) relevant to the study of chocolate's cultural history.

HIST 17370GD – Early Modern Europe: From the Renaissance to the French Revolution

Students examine the political, social, and cultural forces that have shaped European history from the Renaissance to the outbreak of the French Revolution. They identify how and why the Early Modern era developed and evolved, and how it has shaped the modern world. Students explore how the Renaissance departed from the culture and worldview of the Middle Ages and initiated the development of modern Western civilization. In addition to the Renaissance, they analyze the major themes and events of the Reformation, Age of Exploration, Scientific Revolution, Enlightenment, and French Revolution. Through a combination of group activities, discussions and debates, individual and collaborative research, and interactive lectures, students examine the roots and development of modern statehood, representative government, secularism, science, free market capitalism and industrialism.

HUMN 18823 – Humanities and Western Civilization

Students examine the political, social, and cultural forces that have governed Western Civilization from the earliest societies to the end of the Second World War. They analyze the significance of key themes and events of the Ancient Greek and Roman, Medieval, Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, and Modern periods of Western history. Students identify how and why Western Civilization developed and evolved, and how it continues to shape contemporary society. They explore the roots and development of modern statehood, liberal democracy, nationalism, capitalism and industrialism. Through a combination of group activities, discussion and debate, individual and collaborative research, and interactive lectures, students also examine the origins and evolution of humanities disciplines such as history, art, literature, philosophy, and religion. This knowledge provides students with insights into the complexities of the human experience and forms the foundation for further study-and success-in post-secondary humanities courses.

b. Teaching Assistant Positions

Louisiana State University:

HIST 1001: Western Civilization to 1500, HIST 1003: Western Civilization Since 1500

University of North Dakota:

HIST 101: Western Civilization I, HIST 103: United States to 1877, HIST 210: United States Military History

III. Teaching Philosophy

The three core tenets of my teaching philosophy are inclusivity, active learning, and transparency. I structure the courses that I teach to reflect these values through my lectures, in class activities, assignments, and other classroom practices. I believe this approach serves to encourage communication and fosters a positive student-teacher relationship. Many times the student-teacher relationship can become oppositional, as teachers require that the students do work, while students want to do the least amount of work possible since they are balancing assignments in other courses, extracurricular activities, and issues outside the walls of academia. My teaching philosophy allows students to become invested in the course and take an active role in setting the agenda for the way the course is taught and how they, and their fellow classmates, are evaluated.

The foundation for building an **inclusive** classroom environment rests on making the students feel comfortable and at ease. Learning cannot take place if a student feels unwelcome or unwanted. I employ a couple strategies to foster an inclusive classroom. First, I always take roll call, not for grading or participation purposes, but rather to learn my student's names. Second, I often utilize role playing or thought experiment activities, where students take on different historical roles. For example, to help teach the consensus style rule of medieval kingship I randomly select one student to act as king along with several noble vassals. We then work through a historical crisis, usual mobilizing for war, in which the king has to gain support by building consensus and bartering away privileges and other favors. For the remainder of the semester, this student is the king as we examine the ways in which kingship changed over time. This makes students feel like they have a role in the class, albeit fictional, but it helps them become invested. Third, and lastly, I have a caring personality and am genuinely interested in my student's success, and I do my best to show that.

Once the students are comfortable in the course, it is easier to engage them with **active learning** exercises. In addition to the role-playing activities listed above, I have found that the intensive use of primary sources is one of the most effective active learning exercises. These sources have a central message, but they are often times complex images and readings, which convey lots of information and can be interpreted in multiple ways. The complexity of these sources encourages students to read them carefully and allows them to develop their own conclusions and interpretations of the source beyond the central message of the source. Furthermore, the complexity of these readings helps students develop an appreciation of the foreignness, or strangeness, of historical ways of thinking. Once students have worked through the source, they discuss it in small groups with directed questions, and then we talk about the source as a class. These primary source activities, not only promote active learning, but also help the student develop their critical thinking skills and ability to formulate and defend an argument. During the in-class discussion I consistently ask the students how they reached their conclusions and require them to use specific examples from the source. This practice helps them with the exams and essays in my course, but is also a useful skill outside of the classroom as well.

The complexity of the primary sources also allows me to demonstrate my **transparency** by being forthright about the parts of the source with which I am unfamiliar. I believe it's important for students to realize that, although I am subject matter expert, I do not know everything, and that is okay. In fact, not knowing is a great place to begin the learning process. I try to be explicit, forthright, and transparent with all of my expectations in the course. For instance, I tell my students that for the short answer portion of the exam, if they list five relevant facts in support of their answer they will receive full credit. This sets the expectation, and the student knows what is expected of them. Similarly, with the group presentations on primary sources, I tell the students that if they find a quality primary source to present upon, then I will use that source in future semesters. This demonstrates my transparency by informing the student why I designed the project the way I did, and also lets them know they can influence the way the course is taught in the future.

Having **students develop their own test** is a great example of how I create synergy between my three core teaching values. First, simply informing the students that they will take part in the creation of the exams signals my inclusive approach to teaching. This activity demonstrates that I value their thoughts, ideas, and opinions and take them into consideration when developing course materials. Second, I am transparent in with my expectations, and how they can “game the system.” The students are split into groups and instructed to develop questions for the short answer and essay portions of the exam. I tell the students that ideally they should create questions easy enough that they already know the answer, but challenging enough that I want to use them on the exam. Third, this activity promotes active learning in a variety of ways. This activity forces the student to approach the classroom material from a different perspective. Not only are they developing the questions, they are actively considering their answers as they work through exercise. They are both teaching and learning at the same time.

I wholeheartedly believe in the effectiveness of these teaching methods. Over the course of my three years as a Part Time Professor I have been constantly trying to improve on how I promote and demonstrate my teaching values, but my philosophy has not changed. My favorable student evaluations validate the effectiveness of my practices, and suggest that my approach resonates with my students.

IV. Teaching Evaluations

a. Summary and explanation

Sheridan scores their professors on a percentile scale of 1-100, with 100 being the best. The chart below shows my scores, followed by the average score for other Sheridan faculty in parentheses. During several semesters I taught multiple sections of the same course, my scores for these semesters are separated by commas. Also, several sections of my courses, such as military history, were taught online, and Sheridan did not conduct student evaluations for these courses until Fall 2016. I would like to draw your attention to the three sections of Modern Europe in Winter 2015, where I earned a 99% rating from my students. A more detailed assessment of these evaluations can be provided upon request.

b. Chart of Teaching Evaluations

	Early Modern Europe	Modern Europe	Military History	Humanities and Western Civilization	History of Chocolate
Fall 2016			Awaiting scores		Awaiting scores
Summer 2016			N/A, N/A		
Fall 2015	96(89)			96(89)	
Summer 2015			N/A, N/A, N/A		
Winter 2015		90, 92, 99 (88)			
Fall 2014				94(88)	
Summer 2014	96 (88)				
Fall 2013	N/A				

* For courses with an N/A, Sheridan did not conduct student evaluations.