

HISTORY 577: PEDAGOGY SEMINAR

(Fall, 2007)

Instructor: Richard J. Smith
Office hours: TuTh 8:30-11:30 a.m., 1:30-2:15 p.m.,
4:00-4:30 p.m. and by appointment

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I. Course description

This seminar has been designed to achieve two related goals. One, of course, is to prepare graduate students in history for teaching careers. The other is to prepare them for the possibility of teaching a course at Rice while they are still graduate students. The opportunity to offer such a course cannot be guaranteed; factors such as the availability of departmental funds will influence decisions of this sort. But in order to be eligible to teach a course as a graduate student, the pedagogy seminar must be successfully completed. So what are we going to learn this semester that might contribute to the attainment of these goals? My own view of pedagogy is that the best way to learn how to teach is simply to teach. Some things about teaching can be learned in a classroom, but ultimately I believe that success as a teacher rests in finding ways to exploit one's own distinctive talents and experiences to the best possible effect. Thus, this seminar will provide a number of opportunities for pedagogical experimentation, collegial critiques and earnest self-reflection. To be sure, we will read some "theoretical" and "practical" material, for what is a course without assigned readings (an interesting question, actually!)? And we will observe some stellar history teachers in their native habitat for both instruction and inspiration. We will also discuss different approaches to pedagogy (lectures, discussions, audio-visual materials, web-based learning, simulation techniques, collaborative exercises, research projects and papers, oral presentations, written examinations, etc.), and we will think critically about how ways to evaluate not only our students but also ourselves. In addition, we will spend some time talking about a number of large and significant questions such as: (1) what exactly do we want our students to learn and why? (2) what is the relationship between our own views of history and the views and needs of our students; (3) how do we reconcile the demands of group learning with the need to recognize the divergent talents, interests, social backgrounds and experiences of our individual students?; and (4) how can we most effectively address issues of "difference" (ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, class, age, etc.) in the classroom? But in the end, our primary goal will be to help each other to figure out how to join our innate gifts with what we learn from reading, observing and actually teaching, and to use that unique combination to maximum effect.

NB: Reading assignments will be handed out in class and/or made available on Owlspace. See section V. below.

II. Eligibility

This pedagogy seminar is open to all graduate students who have completed the requirements for candidacy. The course is designed primarily for those in their fourth year or beyond, but third-year graduate students may also enroll.

III. Meeting times

Wednesdays from 1:00-4:00 p.m., Herring Hall 126. In addition, there will be a few self-scheduled visits to courses as indicated above.

Sessions:

September 5: Introduction
September 19: Developing a syllabus
October 3: Crafting lectures
October 24: Discussion strategies
November 7: Working the web
November 28: Issues of evaluation

IV. General requirements

Members of the pedagogy seminar must: (1) attend all class sessions (the only excuse for absence will be a medical one), (2) write "reviews" of all teachers they have observed during the semester; (3) create various short teaching units and assignments for presentation and/or critique; and (4) produce, by the end of the semester, a polished syllabus for a course they would like (and might actually) teach.

V. Our Owlspace

Remember that anything you produce that needs to be circulated to the group BEFORE a given class session (a draft syllabus, an outline, a "lesson plan," or even a powerpoint), should be downloaded into the "Posted materials for . . . [date]" subsection of our HIST 577 Owlspace under "Resources" (for details, see below). You may also bring sets of photocopied materials to class, of course.

AFTER any given class, it would be ideal if each of you would post the assigned written work that you have done for that particular session. This is not a requirement; it is simply a request. But I would remind you that we are all in this together, and that the work of each person should have value for everyone else. Pedagogy is like scholarship in several respects, not the least of which is that it develops best in an environment of collegial cooperation as well as constructive criticism.

The main folder names under "Resources" are:

1. Assigned readings
2. Recommended readings
3. Powerpoints
4. Posted materials for 9-5-07
5. Posted materials for 9-19-07
6. Posted materials for 10-3-07
7. Posted materials for 10-24-07
8. Posted materials for 11-7-07
9. Posted materials for 11-28-07

So, for example, I would appreciate it (let's put the matter this way) if you would post on our Owlspace (under "Resources" in the subsection titled "4. Posted materials for 9-5-07") your combined review of the "Report by the Committee on the Rice Undergraduate Program" and my chapter on pedagogy.

VI. Specific assignments

September 5: Introduction

Assignments for class:

Under the "Resources" section of our Owlspace for Hist 577 **I have placed a couple of documents that I would like you to read and evaluate before our first meeting on September 5:**

The first is a recently-released (August '07) document titled "**The Education of Rice Undergraduates: A Report by the Committee on the Rice Undergraduate Program.**" Please read and critique pages 2-8 of this report (see below). What, in your view are the strengths and weaknesses of this document? What, in particular, do you find interesting or useful about it? Does anything in it sound dubious or wrong-headed? Do you feel that there are any significant omissions?

The second document is a **chapter on pedagogy that I wrote a few years ago for a volume titled *Teaching about Japan in Japan* (2001).** Although the subject matter may seem a bit far from your primary research fields and probably from your teaching interests as well, I would like to think that it might still have some value. Again, I would ask: What, in your view are its strengths and weaknesses (be candid, I can take it)? What, if anything, do you find interesting or useful about it? Is there anything dumb or dubious about it (from the standpoint of "theory," methodology, common sense, etc.)? Does it contain any significant omissions?

Your basic task, then, will be to think critically about how these two documents might be compared and contrasted, and how a "joint reading" of them can (or cannot) shed light on the tricky business of teaching. Above all, you should ask yourself, "What are the most important things to keep in mind as a college-level instructor?"

The specific assignment is this: In outline or essay form (c. 5 double-spaced typed pages or less), share your ideas on what sorts of things, large and small, an undergraduate teacher should constantly think about.

Please come to our first class prepared to do two things: (A) discuss as a group your evolving thoughts about the challenges and possibilities of college-level teaching based on your initial writing assignment; (B) say a few words about your own background (family, regional, cultural, etc.--whatever feels comfortable), your academic training, your interests (both personal and academic), and what you think your strengths and weaknesses as a teacher might be at this point in time. In the spirit of fairness and sharing, I will do the same.

September 19: Developing a syllabus

Assignments for class:

A. On the basis of the materials we have read (and the issues we have discussed) so far, as well as your own experience as an undergraduate student and any other classroom experience you may have had, **write individual "reviews" (c. two typed, double spaced pages each) of two of History course syllabi that I distributed in class on September 5.** Your "review" should consider carefully the assumed student-clientele for the course, and address the following features of the syllabus: (1) the title of the course (is it interesting, alluring, boring, imprecise, etc.? Can you propose a better one?); (2) The course description (does it do a good job of describing what the course is actually about--esp. what the instructor wants the students to get out of it; does it provide an adequate sense of the methodological approach of the instructor?; would you suggest improving the description, and if so, why?); (3) overall course requirements (are they clear, reasonable, etc.) (4) the readings (do they seem reasonable in terms of length, accessibility, relevance, etc.?); (5) texts, papers and other assignments (are they specified?; do they seem reasonable, etc.? Your work on this preliminary task ("A") should make assignment "B" an easier one.

B. Develop in a page or two (type-written, double-spaced) the basic idea for the syllabus of a course you might reasonably expect to teach at Rice. Give particular attention to the course description and the possible subdivisions of the course contents. Be prepared to discuss why you want to teach this course and what you expect your students to get out of it. It is not too early to be thinking in a general way about how you might actually teach it.

C. In outline or essay form, in 5 double-spaced typed pages or less (but not too many less), review collectively the articles by (1) Palmer ("Good Talk about Good Teaching"), (2) Eimers ("Background and Experiences of New Faculty") and (3) McKeachie ("Countdown for Course Preparation") listed on Professor Wildenthal's "Readings for Today" under "Session 1: Introductions"). These materials are available for photocopying in the History Department mailroom in a huge blue binder. In writing this review, your focus

should be on the following question: Given the person you are and the students you envision teaching, what points in these articles seem to be of greatest value to you? Why? Do you disagree with any of the authors, and if so, on what grounds?

For this last assignment you should keep in mind at least some of the major issues highlighted briefly in our last session, including:

- Teaching as learning and learning as teaching
- What do we want our students to learn and why?
- How do our own views of history influence how we teach
- What do our students want out of us?
- Issues of "difference:" Does race matter? What about gender, class, age, religion, etc.?
- Multiple intelligences (how do we reconcile the demands of group learning with the need to recognize the divergent talents, interests, social backgrounds and experiences of our individual students?)
- Different approaches to pedagogy (lectures, discussions, audio-visual materials, web-based learning, simulation techniques, collaborative exercises, research projects and papers, oral presentations, written examinations, etc.)
- Evaluating our students and ourselves
- The place of classroom technologies

October 3: Crafting lectures

Assigned readings:

- (1) Palmer, "The Art of Lecturing: A Few Simple Ideas"
- (2) Frederick, "The Lively Lecture--Eight Variations"
- (3) Aronson, "Six Keys to Effective Instruction in Large Classes"

All of these readings (and several more as well) are listed on Professor Wildenthal's "Readings for Today" (under Session 3: "Discussions and a Democratic Classroom") and contained in the big blue binder in the History Department mailroom.

Also, take a look at <http://cts.rice.edu> under "Tools and Technologies" and "Resources" and <http://www.educause.edu> under "Learn" ("Teaching and Learning"), to be revisited later in the course.

Assignment for class:

Taking into account your assigned readings and any other materials you may choose to investigate, produce a 15-minute introductory lecture for delivery today in class. Assume that it is the first meeting of a fairly large (more than 25 students) undergraduate course that you might teach at Rice (this "course" need not be the one for which you will eventually create a "final" syllabus, although it could be). Your goal in this lecture is **not** to explain the nuts and bolts of the course; it is to "hook" the students by giving them a taste of the subject matter and especially a sense of your approach to it. Consider

carefully your imagined audience (not your actual one), your time constraints, and what you want to achieve (in terms of both the course and the lecture). At some point, either in the lecture itself or in a preliminary statement to the group, indicate the relationship you see between this lecture and the rest of the imagined course.

October 24: Discussion strategies

Assigned readings:

- (1) Frederick, "The Dreaded Discussion: Ten Ways to Start"
- (2) Davis, "Diversity and Complexity in the Classroom: Considerations of Race , Ethnicity and Gender"
- (3) Cashin and MacKnight, "Improving Discussions"

Recommended reading:

- (1) Kraft, "Group-Inquiry Turns Passive Students Active"

All of these readings (and several more as well) are listed on Professor Wildenthal's "Readings for Today" (under Session 3: "Discussions and a Democratic Classroom") and contained in the big blue binder in the History Department mailroom.

Assignment for class:

Taking into account your assigned readings and any other materials you may choose to investigate, organize a 15-minute discussion on pedagogy that you will lead in class today. Each discussion should probably (but not necessarily) be based on some sort of a short reading assignment (perhaps an excerpt--not more than three or four pages long--since there will be at least a half-dozen separate discussions today), which should be made available by one means or another to the members of the class at least three days prior to our meeting. Your general goal in this exercise is to encourage engagement on the part of the members of the "class." Prior to your session, you should indicate your specific objective(s). You may want to distribute questions ahead of time, depending on what sort of discussion you wish to engender. You might also want to allow members of the class to choose from a menu of reading options (remember that there is an extremely wide range of material in the big blue book under various section headings, all conveniently listed at the outset by Professor Wildenthal). **Above all, remember that there are many different kinds of discussions and many different ways to conduct each kind;** if they are all the same today we shall collectively die of boredom.

November 7: Working the web

Assigned readings:

- (1) Moore, et al., "Active Learning and Technology" [**On our Owlspace under "Resources," "Posted materials for 11-7-07"**]

(2) Lombardi "Approaches that Work: How Authentic Learning is Transforming Higher Education" [**On our Owlspace under "Resources," "Posted materials for 11-7-07"**]

(3) Benjamin, "Active Learning: Here's What You Should Know" or Benjamin, "Active Learning Outline"

Recommended reading:

(1) Walvoord, "Audiovisual Aids"

The readings by Benjamin and Walvoord (and several more useful articles as well) are listed on Professor Wildenthal's "Readings for Today" (under Session 2: "Teaching Does Not Equal Learning") and contained in the big blue binder in the History Department mailroom.

Again, take a look at <http://cts.rice.edu> under "Tools and Technologies" and "Resources" and <http://www.educause.edu> under "Learn" ("Teaching and Learning").

Assignment for class:

Taking into account your assigned readings and any other materials you may choose to investigate, introduce in the usual 15-minute time period some sort of on-line, off-campus assignment for the group. We will not have time to undertake it, of course, but your task will be to explain the assignment clearly, using the web to illustrate your approach the resource(s) to be exploited, and the goal of the exercise. Once again assume an undergraduate course that you might teach at Rice

November 28: Issues of evaluation

Assigned readings:

(1) Elbow, "Using Writing to Teach Something Else"

(2) Walvoord, "Considering Goals and Options for Writing in Your Course"

Recommended reading:

(3) Excerpts from Storey, *Writing History: A Guide for Students*

All of these readings (and several more as well) are listed on Professor Wildenthal's "Readings for Today" (under Session 5: "Writing") and contained in the big blue binder in the History Department mailroom.

Assignment for class:

On the assumption that (A) by now you know just about everything you need to know about teaching (humor me here), and (B) your "final syllabus" is well on its way to completion, your task for the final day is to put together four (yes, 4) "evaluation instruments" for your course--a midterm exam, a final paper, and **two assignments that**

do not involve writing--even though you might not use all four of these "instruments" in one semester. In the usual 15-minutes or so, explain to the group the pedagogical value of these assignments, relating them explicitly to the goals and strategies for effective teaching that we discussed in our first two sessions, including attention to issues of difference (ethnicity, gender, class, etc.), "multiple intelligences," and so forth. Again, assume that your course is comprised of Rice undergraduates.