

Teaching Portfolio
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*Original course evaluations available upon request

I. Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Since my initial appointment at UNCG in 1994, I have been responsible for teaching American history courses from the introductory through the graduate level. Though the complexity of the subject matter and my expectations of the students vary depending on the level of the course, I employ the same teaching philosophy and comparable instructional techniques in all my courses. Students learn more when they are actively engaged in the course. Thus my philosophy of teaching may be summed up in the idea that students learn by “doing history.” Learning goals in all of my courses combine the idea that history is a practice as well as a subject matter. Rather than creating courses organized according to a traditional lecture format, I design courses as history workshops where students master knowledge through practice and application of the historian’s craft. They may not remember exactly when Andrew Jackson was president five years (or even two days) after they finish the course, but they will still be employing the critical thinking and problem solving skills they learned by mastering the historical method. This goal seems to come across to students from the introductory through the graduate level: a senior French major who took my introductory survey explained, “I learned how to think as a historian instead of a student learning about history”; and a graduate student who took my advanced research seminar said “She has taught me how to think like a historian.”

II. Translating Teaching Philosophy into Teaching Practice: The U.S.

History Survey

I have worked particularly hard to put philosophy into practice in the American history survey, and I have probably learned more about the fundamentals of teaching students to “do history” from the survey than from any other course. The students in this introductory survey tend to be fulfilling a college requirement rather than exploring a personal interest in history, and they often enter the course with dread. Their past experience with history has taught them that it is boring and irrelevant to their lives—a tiring routine of memorizing the names and dates of dead people and long forgotten events. One junior education major expressed fears shared by many who enter the survey: “I truly despised history and was frightened [sic] to learn history.” Student attitudes, and the wide range of skill levels they bring to the course, thus make the survey one of the greatest teaching challenges in the history professor’s repertoire. Add to this the fact that it is a course I teach every semester, along with its importance as a vehicle for attracting new history majors, and the survey stands as one of the most consequential courses I teach.

If the survey is a history workshop for the students, it has also been a teaching laboratory for me. “Doing history” in the introductory survey means that I use the kinds of materials that actual historians use in their own work. Instead of reading a traditional textbook, students work with two types of sources—primary sources in a variety of formats from the colonial period and the nineteenth century and interpretive essays presenting arguments written by historians. They learn how to evaluate critically the information in both types of sources.

I certainly do not expect to entice all of the students in the survey to become history majors. I count my teaching effective when students master useful thinking and writing skills, and when they leave the course with a new understanding of the interesting complexities history presents and of the methods for solving or evaluating historical problems. Students often feel a personal sense of mastery and achievement by the end of the semester. According to one freshman, “I absolutely hated all of the work Pro. Tolbert made us do but her class is the one I learned the most material in I didn’t like the books either but I used them more than all of my other

classes. She takes a lot of info. that is not interesting and teaches so you learn it and appreciate it." Even the junior education major who "despised history" when she entered the course admitted at the end, "I now have a greater respect for history. I can truly say I earned, learned and remembered many vital skills needed to expand my skills in other classes."

III. General Teaching Goals

My courses specify key content and skill goals at the beginning of each syllabus [see Appendix A. Sample Course Syllabi]. I always include a set of goals related to mastery of historical knowledge and a set related to mastery of critical thinking and problem solving skills. In general, I expect that students should be able to perform the following historical knowledge skills:

- evaluate the processes of change in the development of American society and culture;
- understand how such factors as race, ethnic origin, class, gender, ideas, and regional variation have affected those processes;
- assess the impact of ordinary citizens as well as famous individuals on the making of history.

In general, I expect that students should be able to perform the following critical thinking and problem solving skills:

- recognize the difference between facts and interpretations;
- analyze a variety of primary sources and evaluate them in a larger historical context;
- identify key arguments and uses of evidence in scholarly secondary sources;
- assess differing interpretations of the same event or issue and develop their own conclusions;
- use evidence to develop a clear and compelling argument;
- write clearly and effectively in a variety of historiographical formats;
- employ a wide variety of finding aids and research tools.

IV. Teaching Methods

A. Lecturing

Because my classes emphasize active learning, I tend to minimize the time I spend lecturing. This has been one of the major changes over time in my teaching. When I first started teaching, I sent the students conflicting messages because my learning goals stressed active learning but I spent a considerable amount of class time lecturing, which put students in a more passive learning posture as listeners. My goal of conveying history content seemed in conflict with my goal of teaching critical thinking and problem solving skills. I discovered that the idea of "doing history" helped me resolve this apparent conflict. Students could learn *about* history by *doing* some of the things historians do. This philosophy also helped to clarify when lecturing was the best teaching strategy. I still present mini-lectures to provide background, context, or connections between readings. I develop each lesson plan by asking what information or concepts are essential for me to explain and what is most important for students to discover through interactive learning. I also vary the timing of the mini-lecture depending on the goals of the lesson. It may be appropriate to begin class with a short lecture with slides or maps, and then have students focus on a problem raised in the

reading. Or it may be more useful to have students evaluate evidence in response to a specific question, then discuss their responses as a whole class and end the period with a short explanation of key issues or historical debates raised by the evidence. Varying the rhythm and format of the class also keeps students more engaged in the classroom over the course of a long semester, and it keeps me fresh as a teacher.

B. Collaborative Learning

This has become one of the core teaching strategies I employ both in the classroom and in collaborative student projects outside the classroom. I have developed a wide variety of assignments or lesson plans that involve some form of collaborative learning, ranging from such simple strategies as breaking students into small discussion groups in class to more elaborate team research projects. I use group work in different ways depending on the level of the course and the goals of a particular assignment. While some students find group work frustrating, I have found properly structured assignments to be extremely effective tools for accommodating different learning styles and for encouraging active student involvement in the course. Students find working in groups most valuable when the project or activity makes more sense completed by a team than by an individual and when it is clearly related to larger course goals.

Through practice and experimentation I have learned that this approach to student learning affects the entire dynamic of a course. It has changed not only my teaching style—the ways I interact with students in the classroom—but also the fundamental content of the courses I teach. Above all, I have learned that group work takes time, that the rhythm of the work changes during the course of a semester as students become better trained, and that unpredictable things happen in classes where collaborative learning is a major emphasis. It is more time-consuming than generating a set of reusable lectures, but it is also more effective than lecturing as a method for teaching critical thinking and problem solving skills because the emphasis is on application rather than memorization.

1. In-class Work Groups

In the introductory survey, I have found small groups to be particularly useful for taking advantage of the wide variety of skills and academic experience students bring to the class. The key to successful group work in class is designing a focused task. Student groups in the survey complete worksheets during class that require discussion and evaluation of specific primary source evidence. The questions are designed to break down the critical thinking process and tend to ask students to begin by describing what the evidence says and end by asking a question that requires a more complicated explanation of reasoning about what the evidence means. [see Appendix B. Sample Group Worksheets]). One student, the scribe, records the key evidence and analysis discussed in their particular group. Because the scribe role rotates from one class period to the next, each member of the group shares the responsibility for recording the discussion and gets some note-taking experience. Having one student take official notes frees the others to search for appropriate evidence in the sources and concentrate on discussion. I use the results of group worksheets during the next class period to explain the strengths and weaknesses of their use of evidence. The handouts that result from their group labors also provide study

guides for tests. Test questions are based directly on issues raised in the group worksheets. This system has also helped me identify the information that students find most confusing and helps to shape my lectures and review. I do a great deal of coaching in class to help groups achieve effective discussion results.

Because group work is integral to the overall goals and expectations of the course, students have typically viewed it as a valuable learning experience. Indeed, I have noticed that group members form study groups outside of class—an unexpected outcome that I have begun to encourage by suggesting students exchange phone numbers with their group members. According to one student, “The days that I walked away feeling the most comfortable with the material were the ones where we worked in groups.” Of course some students find group work more valuable than others; nevertheless, it has been a particularly effective strategy for addressing the wide variety of learning styles students bring to the history survey.

2. Graduate Peer Review

Collaborative learning has also been an effective tool in my upper level courses. In particular I have found that teaching students to use peer review as part of the research process to be particularly valuable in teaching the graduate research seminar and helping students develop meaningful original research projects in other courses at the graduate level. Though their topics vary widely, the common problems they encounter as historical researchers form the core content of the research seminar. All students in the course are required to read the research exercises that mark stages of development toward the final research paper. This creates a more collaborative environment during the semester because students become knowledgeable about all of the projects underway. Thus, everyone participates in the formative phase of designing and carrying out the research project. In the summative phase each student writes a formal review of two research papers and during a final workshop reviewers and authors discuss their assessments in class. I have found that the integration of peer review throughout the course makes students better reviewers in the end. They get steady practice being constructive reviewers. They trust each other more because everybody has some knowledge of each project. Most importantly, the final reviews are more helpful to authors because they are less timid and more substantive than those written by untrained reviewers. Students in the research seminar have generally approached the peer review process as a valuable tool for improving their thinking and writing skills. According to one student, “Certainly, the peer review process was one of the class’s strongest points. This class greatly benefited my writing ability and my ability to reach clarity in my argument.”

3. Team Research Projects

I have developed collaborative research projects in several different courses. One of the most successful assignments helped me solve an instructional problem I was having with a core text. In HIS 327: American Cultural History students read *In Small Things Forgotten*, by James Deetz. Though the book is one of the most accessible introductions to using historical artifacts as historical

evidence, students consistently find it difficult to understand. I developed slide lectures and handouts to help explain key points, but the book still was not working as effectively as I had hoped to excite students about using objects as historical sources. During the spring semester 1999, I decided to get the students more actively involved in deciphering the book. Students signed up for a topic of their choice and worked in research teams to illustrate the book. The assignment combined elements of team collaboration in collecting and organizing their illustrations, with individual responsibility for writing meaningful captions. I conducted a writing workshop to teach students how to write effective illustration captions. Since the project came at the beginning of the semester, the group work helped create a class spirit and identity that enhanced the rest of our work together in the course. Above all, students became more actively involved in the text through the direct application of key arguments presented in the book to particular objects selected by the students. [See Appendix C. Sample Research Assignments]

C. Sequencing Learning and Skill Development

Students have to learn the difference between primary sources and secondary sources before they can learn to put evidence in historical context. They have to learn that primary sources combine factual information with opinion before they can evaluate how particular points of view shape historical interpretations. These aspects of historical knowledge are essential for students to understand before they can grasp the ultimate significance of skepticism and critical thinking for the historical method. These skills and concepts are also counterintuitive for students who have typically internalized the idea that doing history is a matter of memorizing the one "right" fill-in-the-blank answer their teacher is looking for.

In the survey, I have developed a set of strategies for addressing the problem of sequencing skill development so that students learn by moving from fundamental historical skills to more complex critical thinking problems. Helping students learn step-by-step is a challenge since they encounter new material throughout the semester and most history texts expect the same level of analysis in chapter one as in chapter twelve. I design in-class writing worksheets that require students to use specific evidence in a systematic way by moving from descriptive questions toward more analytical ones. Tests at the beginning of the semester tend to ask students to use one source at a time in short answer questions that emphasize paragraph development. By the end of the semester students write short essays that require them to compare and synthesize several sources. This learning sequence from description to application and interpretation helps students go beyond rote memorization to critical thinking. Because they practice these skills repeatedly throughout the semester, they improve their ability to evaluate evidence through collaborative learning. One freshman in the survey grasped the system particularly clearly, "I was able to retain more information in her class than some other history courses I have taken. I believe this is due to the fact that she gave us reading assignments, and worksheets to do, then the information was cemented in our brains by a discussion group, the next class period."

In my graduate research seminar, I sequence assignments by breaking down the research and writing process into manageable steps. Students produce several written

assignments including a research plan, a research bibliography, and a primary source analysis before they write the first draft of their essay [see Appendix C. Sample Research Assignments]. Students learn that writing is integral to the research process.

D. Research Workshops

One of the outcomes of program assessment in the history department has been the discovery that undergraduates come unprepared to do research in the 500-level capstone course. As a result of this departmental concern, I have added research exercises to every course I teach—particularly at the 200- and 300-level. These assignments focus on specific research methods: using particular finding aids and library resources, developing useful research bibliographies, assessing the difference between popular and scholarly sources, developing meaningful and interesting research topics, learning effective search techniques for the web, using published book reviews to evaluate sources. I have worked with the staff at the library to develop web pages and workshops in the library (including special collections) for particular course assignments. I typically spend some class time in advance to prepare students for active involvement in workshops at the library.

E. Writing Workshops

All of the classes I teach require students to write in a variety of formal or informal formats—including completing reading worksheets, taking essay tests, writing essays or research papers, producing annotated bibliographies or book reviews. I have also developed writing intensive versions of all of the classes I teach. In courses with writing intensive designation, I conduct a variety of writing workshops which include both formative and summative evaluations of assignments and typically involve some kind of peer review of student writing.

Formative workshops usually take only part of a class period and focus on problems students may be encountering in completing an assignment. Summative workshops generally take up an entire class period evaluating drafts of essays and practicing peer review. One format for this kind of workshop that I learned as a team teacher in the Writing Across the Curriculum program at UNC-CH involves soliciting student volunteers to turn in drafts a day or two in advance of class. Three different essays are ideal for comparative purposes so that students can discuss different approaches to answering a particular question. I distribute unmarked copies of the drafts in class and use them to discuss writing strengths and target improvements. We talk about the qualities of a good introduction, effective paragraph development, the difference between description and analysis, and issues of presentation such as when to use block quotations and how to cite sources. Having particular drafts to work with helps make these issues more concrete because they are directly related to the assignment at hand. After thorough discussion of the writing issues highlighted by the sample drafts, students exchange drafts, targeting the issues raised in the previous discussion. I explain to them the importance of mastering peer review as a skill for diagnosing and improving their own writing.

F. Evaluating Student Performance

In each course I use a variety of mechanisms, specified in the course guide, to evaluate student performance. Because of my emphasis on collaborative learning, I require

attendance and grade student participation (defined in broader terms than contributing to class discussion). I frequently use informal, graded and ungraded, writing assignments to evaluate student mastery of course materials and issues. I identify the specific criteria I will be using to evaluate formal writing assignments. I design team assignments so that individual contributions to the final product can be clearly documented. This enables me to evaluate both team and individual performance.

I think carefully about designing measurement instruments that will evaluate not only the topics and issues we have been working on in particular units, but also the skills we have practiced. For example, in my Spring 1999 writing intensive cultural history course, students completed three major writing assignments of varying types and lengths: a team research portfolio in which students wrote short but substantive illustration captions explaining the connection between a key argument in the book we were reading and an illustration selected by the student; a ten-page synthetic essay comparing and contrasting arguments in three selected readings; and a focused analysis of a particular case study.

One of the greatest improvements in teaching the survey has been my development of a test format that more accurately measures the types of skills students are learning in the course. I had been consistently disappointed by student performance on timed essay tests and I tended to write short answer questions that actually required essay-length responses. Students struggled to sort out and analyze information within the time allotted for completing the test. As my approach to teaching the course based on the theme of “doing history” evolved, I developed a strategy for asking very focused questions that concentrate on particular skills we practice in class—restating thesis statements in essays written by historians, explaining the connection between a specific piece of evidence from a primary source and a particular thesis, critically evaluating primary sources. Students can successfully answer these questions in three sentences or less. I have also developed an approach to asking objective questions that can be effective for open book tests. For example, true/false questions can be designed to evaluate whether students understand the advantages and disadvantages of working with particular types of primary source evidence. [see Appendix D: Sample History 211 Tests]

V. Curriculum Development

Curriculum development in cultural history has been one of my foremost responsibilities since I became a member of the history faculty at UNCG. When I arrived in the History Department in 1994 there were no existing cultural history courses in either the undergraduate or the graduate curriculum. In addition to my responsibility for developing new courses in my field, I have also played a central role in substantially revising the Public History curriculum.

A. Cultural History

As the first faculty member to hold the position in American cultural history in the UNCG History Department, I have developed new graduate and undergraduate curricula in cultural history that are heavily influenced by my training in material culture studies and architectural history. My overall goal in curriculum development has been to train students to understand the field of cultural history. In contrast to the seemingly fast

pace of change in political history, when each new election can install a new regime, cultural history tends to result in broader, more gradual patterns of change over time. In order to teach students to compare and contrast key periods of cultural change over time, my courses tend to cover a broad time frame. These courses also emphasize the idea that history is a practice as well as a subject matter and introduce students to alternative sources for doing history, including architecture, objects, art, and film, as well as various interpretive strategies for evaluating such historical evidence. For example, my undergraduate courses in cultural history have included a foundational survey that takes students from the colonial period to the twentieth century and three courses that focus on particular topics and methodologies in cultural history. One course explores the frontier as a place and a symbol in American culture; another concentrates on the history of the American home; and the third is methodologically based, teaching students how to use photographs as historical evidence.

B. Public History

The UNCG History Department substantially revised its Public History curriculum in the academic year 1999/2000 by adding two new graduate concentrations, one in Museum Studies and the other in Historic Preservation. These concentrations forged an interdisciplinary partnership between the History Department and the Interior Architecture Department. All courses in the program are cross-listed in both departments and graduate students apply for degree candidacy in either department. The curriculum revision package, developed by Jo Leimenstoll (Graduate Director of the Interior Architecture Department) and myself, included eight new courses. I wrote four new course proposals including required core courses in both concentrations, along with the overall plan for program revision. Focused programmatic content has proven to be one of our best recruitment tools. For the past few years, more than half of the graduate students in the History Department have been enrolled in one of the Public History concentrations.

My goal in shaping the History Department component of the Public History curriculum was to develop courses that emphasize the connections between the academic practice of history and the practical aspects of presenting the past to a broad public. I currently teach one of the required core courses in the Historic Preservation concentration and have revised the graduate-level cultural history courses I teach to complement the Public History concentrations. In particular, I try to incorporate methods for interpreting evidence and presenting analysis and research findings that go beyond traditional paper formats to include those appropriate to museum and preservation contexts. For example, I developed an advanced research seminar called *Doing History in the Dining Room* that I taught in cooperation with staff at the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA). Students conducted research on objects related to foodways in the museum collection and developed interpretive brochures in research teams that the museum could use in public programming.

VI. Courses Taught at UNCG

HIS 211: American History to 1865

Critical thinking approach to the survey of American history from the Colonial era to the Civil War. Students focus on primary source analysis.

HIS 324: Frontier in American Culture

Explores the meanings of the frontier as a symbol in the development of a distinctive American culture and evaluate different types of historical evidence documenting the American frontier including maps, paintings, films, documents, folklore, and such popular cultural inventions as the wild west show.

HIS 325: History of the American Home

Focuses on the history of housing and house types as historical evidence of social change from the colonial period through the twentieth century. Rather than a descriptive focus on stylistic or aesthetic changes in American house design, emphasis is on analysis of the home as an idea and houses as physical and material spaces. Topics include the symbolism and politics of domesticity, the evolving functions of particular rooms and spaces, new technologies that reshaped houses, and the diversity of American homes based on region, ethnicity, and class.

HIS 326: Using Photographs as Historical Evidence

Case study approach using photographs as historical evidence from the Civil War to the Great Depression. Topics include Civil War photography, private and public portraits, social documentaries of the Progressive Era and New Deal.

HIS 327: American Cultural History

Explores the development of American culture from the colonial period through the early twentieth century. Students practice analysis of a variety of non-traditional historical sources, including paintings, gravestones, houses, amusement parks, folk tales, fashion, and music.

HIS 343: The Old South

The themes of place and people constitute the core organizing principles of this course focusing on the history of the American South from the colonial era to the emergence of the cotton kingdom in the nineteenth century. Explores the diverse people and landscapes that composed the region—the stark contrast, for example between the colonial societies of the lowcountry and the backcountry; the difference between the urban South and the rural South of the nineteenth century.

HIS 511: Research and Writing Seminar: Doing History in the Dining Room

Students develop research projects in a museum context related to the history of foodways. Topics include the invention of the dining room to the social politics of tea drinking and the archaeology of African American cooking. Students developed a newspaper database documenting the history of foodways in the urban South, completed research projects on objects in the collection at the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts [MESDA], and worked in teams to develop illustrated brochures interpreting objects related to foodways in the MESDA collection.

HIS 546: American Cultural History: Selected Topics

Topics:

Surveying the Field: Problems and Methods in Cultural History

Advanced reading seminar focusing on the critical perspectives and methods of historians who study American cultural history. The course is designed with two basic goals in mind: 1. To introduce students to the interdisciplinary practice of cultural history, and 2. To explore key periods in the development of American culture from the colonial era to the early twentieth century.

Thinking Visually about History

Advanced reading seminar focusing on the critical perspectives and methods of historians who use some form of visual evidence in their work, from pre-industrial to mass-produced objects, and from art to photographs.

Antebellum American Culture

Advanced reading seminar organized into three topical units. The first concentrates on some of the ingredients and processes at work in the construction of a national identity and evaluates the problem of American exceptionalism. The second explores historians' debates over the formation of a middle and a working class in the nineteenth century. The third unit addresses the lives of a select group of "other Americans"—Cherokees, African-American Muslims, evangelical Southerners—and evaluates the dynamic between those at the margins and those at the center of cultural influence in nineteenth-century America.

HIS 624: History of American Landscapes and Architecture

Advanced reading seminar in the history of American landscapes and architecture that introduces students to the variety of methods developed by architectural and cultural historians to interpret buildings and landscapes as cultural artifacts with historically specific meanings that must be understood in particular context over time. Assignments require students to apply specific scholars' arguments and methodologies to their own analysis of particular buildings and landscapes.

VII. Advising

I have extensive experience in advising both graduate and undergraduate students at all levels and in all areas of study. I regularly advise undergraduates seeking history degrees or minoring in history. On the graduate level, I advise on coursework and have also served on many thesis committees in both the History Department and the Interior Architecture Department.

Theses directed:

James Broomall, *Backcountry Landscape and the North Carolina Regulator Movement*, (in progress)

Matisha Wiggs, *Family Graveyards in Eastern North Carolina: An Exploration of Culture and Preservation* (in progress)

Glenn Perkins, *Accommodating Strangers: Places for Boarding and Lodging in Nineteenth-Century North Carolina Port Cities*, completed August 2004.

Susannah Franklin, *Bright-Leaf Tobacco Curing Barns in the Old Bright Belt of North Carolina, 1870-1945*, completed December 2002.

Kristin Hill, *Shrinking Doors and Painted Ghosts: The Siewers Cabinet Shop and Cultural Change in Nineteenth Century Salem, North Carolina*, completed December 2002.

Thesis committees:

Bogdana Frunza, (Interior Architecture) *Boundaries of Identity: Ethnic Retail in New York Chinatown and Little Italy as a Measure of Cultural Negotiation*, in progress.

Mary Bennett Sharpe, (Interior Architecture) *The Significance of Aesthetics and Function of the Public Domain Surrounding the Grove Arcade in Asheville, North Carolina*, in progress.

Heather Wagner, (Interior Architecture) *The Physical Evolution of the Indiana Court Square as a Response to Cultural Changes Related to Transportation and Continuities of Value and Symbolism*, in progress.

Cristi Wolfe (Interior Architecture), *Retaining Architectural Character: The Non-regulated Interior of the Mississippi Planter's Cottage*, completed August 2003.

Steve Hickman (Interior Architecture), *Chinese Fretwork Staircases in Maryland, North Carolina, and Virginia, 1750-1806*, completed December 2002.

VIII. Teaching and Service

I have worked to make institutional contributions beyond the History Department to enhance the quality of instruction at UNCG by focusing much of my service activity on committees that have a direct influence on issues related to teaching at both the College and the University level. Perhaps the most important service role I have played to date was as Chair of the Undergraduate Programs Committee for the SACS accreditation review of UNCG. In that capacity I was responsible for leading the research efforts on undergraduate programming across the university and writing the chapter on undergraduate programs for the self-study. My service activities related to teaching include the following committees:

Member, Historical Perspectives General Education Core Committee, UNCG	2004-2007
Member, Expanded Steering Committee, SACS accreditation review, UNCG	2000-2003
Chair, Undergraduate Programs Committee, SACS accreditation review, UNCG	2000-2003
Member, Teaching and Learning Center Committee, UNCG.....	1999-2001
Member, Women's Studies Curriculum Review Committee, UNCG	1997-1998
Member, Curriculum and Teaching Committee of the College Council, UNCG	1996-1997