Aligning History Taught at Community Colleges and Universities:
Pedagogical Suggestions Prepared by Rich Slatta,
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Good history teaching is as varied and exciting as well-written and well-researched history. Please think of the ideas below as conversation-starters, not as rigid prescriptions on what every history teacher must do. The ideas and resources listed below are not end-all, be-all solutions to our teaching challenges but rather models and approaches that we might consider and try, thoughtfully and critically. Most important is to move beyond a vision of history as memorized and repeated facts to a vision of the critical analysis and interpretation of sources, primary and scholarly.

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Guiding principle for teachers and students: “The road to success is always under construction.”—Lily Tomlin.

**Advantages of Active Listening to Promote Active Learning:**

- Helps students deal with and "defuse" strong feelings.
- Helps students understand their own emotions.
- Facilitates problem solving.
- Keeps the responsibility with the student.
- Makes students more willing to listen to others.
- Promotes a closer, more meaningful relationship between instructor and student.
Develop a Teaching Philosophy (Here are the basics of Rich Slatta’s)

1. Employ active-learning activities, using IGL, Inquiry-Guided Instruction. Inquiry, jointly constructed knowledge, should predominate.
2. Teach the students you have, not the ones you imagine should be there.
3. Model inquiry. Show that students can teach one another and you and show that you continue to love learning.
4. Provide opportunities for students to exercise the core skills involved in historical and critical thinking.
5. Equip students with "real-world" employment skills for the information economy: research, analysis and communication (written and oral).
6. Demonstrate links between the classroom and the "real world," between historical events and processes and a student's life and experiences.
7. Teach to a variety of learning styles to encourage student participation and inclusiveness.
8. Permit, indeed encourage, non-catastrophic failure. No one does anything worthwhile perfectly the first time.

Excerpts from A “Teacher’s Dozen”

Fourteen General, Research-Based Principles for Improving Higher Learning in Our Classrooms by Thomas Anthony Angelo

http://aitt.acadiau.ca/research/Best_Teaching/teachersdozen1.pdf

Original article was published in AAHE Bulletin, April 1993, 3-13.

1. Active learning is more effective than passive learning.
   What I hear, I forget; what I see, I remember; what I do, I understand. --Chinese proverb
   Let the main object of this, our Didactic, be as follows: To seek and find a method by which teachers may teach less, but learners learn more. --John Amos Comenius
   As these quotations suggest, teachers have long known what researchers have only recently confirmed about the value of active learning: Students do learn more and better by becoming actively involved.

2. Learning requires focused attention, and awareness of the importance of what is to be learned.
   The true art of memory is the art of attention. --Samuel Johnson
   One of the most difficult tasks for novice learners in a field, whatever their age, is to figure out what to pay attention to and what to ignore.

3. Learning is more effective and efficient when learners have explicit, reasonable, positive goals, and when their goals fit well with the teacher's goals.
   If you don't know where you are going, you will probably end up somewhere else. --Laurence J. Peter and Raymond Hull
   When learners know what their educational goals are and figure out how they can best achieve them, they usually become much more efficient and effective.
4. To be remembered, new information must be meaningfully connected to prior knowledge, and it must first be remembered in order to be learned. Thinking means connecting things, and stops if they cannot be connected. --G. K. Chesterton

The more meaningful and appropriate connections students make between what they know and what they are learning, the more permanently they will anchor new information in long-term memory and the easier it will be for them to access that information when it's needed.

5. Unlearning what is already “known” is often more difficult than learning new information. It is what we think we know already that often prevents us from learning. --Claude Bernard

6. Information organized in personally meaningful ways is more likely to be retained, learned, and used. Much goes an in the mind of the learner. Students interpret. They overinterpret. They actively struggle to impose meaning and structure upon new material being presented. --Donald A. Norman

7. Learners need feedback on their learning, early and often, to learn well; to become independent, they need to learn how to give themselves feedback. Supposing is good, but finding out is better. --Mark Twain

8. The ways in which learners are assessed and evaluated powerfully affect the ways they study and learn. Let the tutor demand an account not only of the words of his lesson, but of their meaning and substance. . . Let [the learner] show what he has just learned from a hundred points of view, and adapt it to as many different subjects, to see if he has rightly taken in it and made it his own. --Michel de Montaigne

Whether faculty "teach to the test" or not, most students are going to try to "study to the test."

9. Mastering a skill or body of knowledge takes great amounts of time and effort. There are some things that cannot be learned quickly, and time, which is all we have, must be paid heavily for their acquiring. --Ernest Hemingway

10. Learning to transfer, to apply previous knowledge and skills to new contexts, requires a great deal of practice. Research on learning to transfer generally is depressing. Most learning is highly context-bound, and few students become skilled at applying what they've learned in one context to another similar a context.

11. High expectations encourage high achievement. For some time now, we've known that younger students tend to achieve more by working with teachers who expect more of them.

12. To be most effective, teachers need to balance levels of intellectual challenge and instructional support. . . . The weaker or smaller the student's foundation (preparation) in the subject, the stronger and larger the instructional scaffolding (structure and support) that is required. This is one of the many reasons that teaching a first-year course requires a different approach than teaching a third-year course in the same discipline.

13. Motivation to learn is alterable; it can be positively or negatively affected by the task, the environment, the teacher, and the learner. Though we tend to talk about students as being either "motivated" or "not motivated," most of our students are very motivated to learn certain things and not at all motivated to learn others.

14. Interaction between teachers and learners is one of the most powerful factors in promoting learning; interaction among learners is another. As with activity, it isn't interaction in and of itself that promotes academic learning, it's structured interaction focused on achieving meaningful, shared learning tasks.
How People Learn (and how we can help them)

*Brain, Mind, Experience, and School Committee on Developments in the Science of Learning*

http://www.newhorizons.org/neuro/neu_review_bransford.htm

The book highlights three key findings:

1. Students come to the classroom with preconceptions about how the world works. If their initial understanding is not engaged, they may fail to grasp the new concepts and information that are taught, or they may learn them for purposes of a test but revert to their preconceptions outside the classroom.

2. To develop competence in an area of inquiry, students must: (a) have a deep foundation of factual knowledge, (b) understand facts and ideas in the context of a conceptual framework, and (c) organize knowledge in ways that facilitate retrieval and application.

3. A "metacognitive" approach to instruction can help students learn to take control of their own learning by defining learning goals and monitoring their progress in achieving them.

The book notes that the foregoing principles have major implications for teaching and teacher preparation. For example:

1. Teachers must draw out and work with the preexisting understandings that their students bring with them.

2. Teachers must teach some subject matter in depth, providing many examples in which the same concept is at work and providing a firm foundation of factual knowledge.

3. The teaching of metacognitive skills should be integrated into the curriculum in a variety of subject areas.

In relation to designing classroom environments, the book suggests that:

1. Schools and classrooms must be learner centered.

2. To provide a knowledge-centered classroom environment, attention must be given to what is taught (information, subject matter), why it is taught (understanding), and what competence or mastery looks like.

3. In the assessment-centered classroom environment, formative assessments help both teachers and students monitor progress. Formative assessments permit the teacher to grasp the students' preconceptions, understand where the students are in the "developmental corridor" from information to formal thinking, and design instruction accordingly.

4. Learning is influenced in fundamental ways by the context in which it takes place. A community-centered approach requires the development of norms for the classroom and school, as well as connections to the outside world, that support core learning values.

*Reflections on Teaching by Peter Frederick, Wabash College*

http://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/frederick_intro.html

Lee Shulman of Stanford University has recently suggested six major ideas, or strategies involved in transforming university teaching:

1) We must make teaching public, not private.

2) We must focus on excellence, not adequacy.

3) We must view pedagogy as scholarship, not apart from scholarship.

4) We must change cultures, not techniques.
5) We must create change that comes from the departments up to the institution as a whole rather than from the institution down.
6) We must ultimately concern ourselves with learning, not teaching."


Inspired by Shulman, I'll venture to make three bold statements of current wisdom that I think are especially pertinent to the issues of theological (or any other kind of) teaching and learning. These next three points may be the most important ones in this report.

The most significant development in higher education is the paradigm shift "from teaching to learning." As Alan Guskin put it in the July/August 1994 issue of Change, "focusing on student learning turns our thinking about the future of our colleges and universities upside-down: from faculty productivity to student productivity, from faculty disciplinary interests to what students need to learn, from faculty teaching styles to student learning styles, from classroom teaching to student learning." (p. 25) See also the Barr & Tagg article cited below.

A second significant shift has been away from "generic" teaching and learning issues toward the importance of imbedding such discussions in departmental and institutional contexts and cultures. The epistemology of different disciplines and knowledge structures imply their own pedagogies; institutional culture and traditions are crucial to the development of an effective faculty development and learning improvement program.

Although Socratic gadflies are as necessary now as they were 2500 years ago, institutions are relying less on outside consultants for teaching workshops and more on the diverse expertise of their own faculty. As teaching and learning becomes more "community property, putting an end to pedagogical solitude," in Lee Shulman's words, faculty are discovering what rich resources they are for each other. In other words, rather than bringing in outside "experts" to lead workshops on generic topics, find out what exciting things are going on in the classrooms of one's colleagues!

Although traditional lecture/discussion still prevails in most institutions, collaborative learning, case studies and stories, problem-centered and experiential learning, and other forms of involving students more actively in their own learning are moving from the margins toward the center of academic life. We need to live comfortably with these diverse pedagogies and respect each other's differences.

*Let's try to address these basic questions*

“Someone else will say, ‘Yeah, it’s all bogus because you’ll forget 99 percent of the specifics in all those classes anyhow.’ So what’s the point? If one does forget the details of information from a semester ago, and if the technical material you learn in your major will likely be obsolete in five years, and if you will probably change careers several times in your lifetime anyhow, then what is worth learning?” [Rebekah Nathan, *My Freshman Year: What a Professor Learned by Becoming a Student*, 2005, p. 156.]
Use cynical comments about history to promote discussion of disciplinary basics

1. History: An account, mostly false, of events unimportant, which are brought about by rulers mostly knaves, and soldiers mostly fools. ~ Ambrose Bierce
2. History is something that never happened, written by a man who wasn't there. ~ Anon.
3. Might does not make right, it only makes history. ~ Jim Fiebig
4. What is history but a fable agreed upon? ~ Napoleon Bonaparte
5. History teaches us that men and nations behave wisely once they have exhausted all other alternatives. ~ Abba Eban
6. History is a confused heap of facts. ~ Lord Chesterfield
7. History is more or less bunk. ~ Henry Ford
8. Just as philosophy is the study of other people's misconceptions, so history is the study of other people's mistakes. ~ Phillip Guedalla
9. History repeats itself; historians repeat each other. ~ Phillip Guedalla
10. That men do not learn very much from the lessons of history is the most important of all the lessons that History has to teach. ~ Aldous Huxley
11. History is the study of lies, anyway, because no witness ever recalls events with total accuracy, not even eyewitnesses. ~ Nancy Pickard
12. Throughout history the world has been laid waste to ensure the triumph of conceptions that are now as dead as the men that died for them. ~ Henry de Montherlant
13. Historians are like deaf people who go on answering questions that no one has asked them. ~ Leo Tolstoy
14. The past is useless. That explains why it is past. ~ Wright Morris
15. History is nothing but a pack of tricks that we play upon the dead. ~ Voltaire
16. It is sometimes very hard to tell the difference between history and the smell of skunk. ~ Rebecca West

Move from Traditional Lecture to Constructivist Pedagogy

The following table contrasts a traditional, teacher-centered, lecture approach with a constructivist approach. Notice how the constructivist approach shifts much more of the focus, action, and responsibility for learning to the student. “Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.” ~John Dewey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRADITIONAL PEDAGOGY</th>
<th>CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum is presented part to whole, with emphasis on basic skills</td>
<td>Curriculum is presented whole to part with emphasis on big concepts and questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strict adherence to fixed curriculum is highly valued</td>
<td>Pursuits of students' questions is highly valued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curricular activities rely heavily on textbooks and workbooks</td>
<td>Curricular activities rely heavily on primary sources of data and manipulative materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are viewed as &quot;blank slates&quot; onto which the teacher etches information</td>
<td>Students are viewed as thinkers with emerging theories about the world</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teacher generally behaves in a didactic manner, disseminating authoritative information to students

Teachers generally behave in an interactive manner, facilitating discussions and mediating the environment

Teachers seek the correct answer to validate student learning

Teachers seek students’ points of view and understandings in order to develop subsequent lessons and questions

Assessment of student learning is separate from teaching and occurs almost entirely through “objective” testing

Assessment is interwoven with and reinforces teaching; it occurs through direct observations and multiple, varied assignments, oral and written

Students primarily work alone

Students often work and interact in various groups

Adapted from John Samsel and Darryl Wimberley, Writing for Interactive Media: The Complete Guide, p. 244. Fig. 17.8 & ”Teaching, Learning, and Reform in the Twenty-First Century Classroom Tech Forum: Year 2000-2003” by Mark E. Gabehart, 4/21/97.

### Sample Range of Teaching Activities and Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher-Centered</th>
<th>Mid-range</th>
<th>Student-Centered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lectures</td>
<td>Discussions</td>
<td>Case Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panels</td>
<td>Debates</td>
<td>Role Playing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video</td>
<td>Student Presentations</td>
<td>In-class Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Who Contributes What under Various Approaches?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who generates the...</th>
<th>Traditional Lecture</th>
<th>Structured</th>
<th>Inquiry-Guided</th>
<th>Student-Directed</th>
<th>Independent Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Teacher/Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Teacher/Student</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Student Student</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures/Design</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Teacher/Student</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results/Analysis</td>
<td>Teacher/Student</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“A teacher is one who makes himself progressively unnecessary.” ~ Thomas Carruthers

1. Embrace Student Centeredness: Easier for You; Better for Them! Students, not the instructor, are the focus of classroom activities. They are co-learners and co-teachers.

2. Encourage students to take more responsibility for their own learning. Toward the end of semester, we should have students working more autonomously than at the beginning.

3. Recognize and teach to a variety of learning styles. I know from years of buying clothes, that one size does not fit all. Provide range and variety in activities and assessments. [See Solomon/Felder inventory.]

4. Promote Active Learning. Why are many students disengaged? We often give them no reason for engagement. “The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery.” ~Mark Van Doren, American poet

5. Challenge students to uncover knowledge, not just to memorize facts. “I've learned that teaching children to think and wonder is more important than learning a list of facts.” ~Nancy Garrels, teacher from Duluth, GA

6. Set priorities: Find your special teaching interests and begin with them—if you work on what’s important to you, your students will respond. Develop activities that complement those interests.

7. Be incremental—“Rome wasn’t built in a day” I taught my first class, as a graduate student, in 1972. I’m still learning, changing, exploring—you don’t have to revise the entire course of tomorrow today.


9. Model being a learner—bring your research into the classroom; involve students, if possible; acknowledge openly and proudly when they teach you something; model inquiry not omniscience. “Who dares to teach must never cease to learn.” ~ John Cotton Dana

10. Be clear! Consider using rubrics or other clear, overt standards of assessment—students cannot perform well if they don’t understand our expectations and goals for them.

11. Get feedback! from students (class assessment and self-assessments) from colleagues (peer observations) from experts, create a teaching portfolio.

12. Allow students to fail. “Mistakes themselves are often the best teachers of all.” -- James Anthony Froude

13. Have fun! Not everyone gets to make history, and enthusiasm is contagious.

Slatta’s Sermon on Rubrics

1. Coming clean: Too much important stuff takes place in a black box. Professors perform magic tricks that dazzle students with “woo-woo-woo” and arcane knowledge. However, what about showing them where the magic comes from? What about learning how to evaluate good magic from bad? Rubrics make clear how a
discipline or a specific instructor evaluates the quality and presentation of analysis and information.

2. Fairness: Is it fair to judge students according to often arcane standards without telling them what those standards are? I don't think so.

3. Consistency: Related to fairness is evaluation consistency—applying the same criteria to all student work. Without rubrics, how can we fairly, accurately, and consistently judge what is A, B, C, or other work? Again, overt standards are far preferable to “woo-woo.”

4. Improved Feedback: By highlighting student performance strengths and weakness on behavioral criteria, we can better teach students how to improve in the future. Holistic evaluations often fail to pinpoint exactly where a student has excelled and where s/he needs further work.

5. Making the course make sense: By tying rubrics to both general course objectives and specific assignment requirements, we create a more logical, intelligible, cohesive learning environment. Students see and understand the big picture, specific activities, and how the two fit together.

6. Efficiency: If you’re fortunate enough to have a TA or if you team teach, a rubric helps “norm” grading. You don’t have to do all of it.

**Alternative Strategies and Instructional Methods**

- Inquiry Guided Learning
- Problem-Based Learning (aka Cases)
- Uncoverage vs coverage
- Active Learning
- Critical Thinking
- Service learning
- Internet and hybrid Courses
- Online discussions
- Pre- and post-tests
- Oral history
- Self-assessments and quizzes
- Peer assessments
- Research project in stages, with drafts
- Informal as well as formal writing and speaking
- Brainstorm
- Role playing
- Historical debates
- Thought Questions
- Mini-lectures
- Journaling
- Concept mapping
- Minute paper
- Think/Pair/Share/Repair
- Groups/Collaboration
- Informal writing

**Web Resources [as always some of these links are doubtless dead]**

American Historical Association “Resources for Teachers at all Levels”


Slatta’s resources: “So you want to study history”: extensive tutorials and links
http://faculty.chass.ncsu.edu/slatta/hi216/hi598/hi598tools.htm
Slatta’s Constructionist Approach to Teaching History:
http://faculty.chass.ncsu.edu/slatta/hi216/approach.htm
Slatta and Atkinson Teaching and Learning Links:
http://faculty.chass.ncsu.edu/slatta/hi216/teaching.htm
Slatta Resources for Teaching First Year Students:
http://faculty.chass.ncsu.edu/slatta/hi216/learning/fy_fac_resources.htm
Students and the Information Search Process: Zones of Intervention for Librarians by Carol
Collier Kuhlthau http://www.gslis.utexas.edu/~vlibrary/edres/theory/kuhlthau.html
Rich Felder’s Teaching & Learning Materials:
http://www4.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/users/f/felder/public/
University of Delaware Resources for Problem-Based Learning: http://www.udel.edu/pbl/
Slatta’s How and Why to Construct and Use Rubrics:
http://faculty.chass.ncsu.edu/slatta/RUBRICS/Rubrics1.htm
Online Teaching Goals Inventory: http://fm.iowa.uiowa.edu/fmi/xsl/tgi/data_entry.xsl?db=igi_data&-lay=Layout01&-view
Effective Assessment, including multiple-choice exams that demand critical thinking:
http://tep.uoregon.edu/resources/assessment/index.html
Teaching History at a Community College by Emily Sohmer Tai
http://www.historians.org/Perspectives/Issues/2004/0402/0402gra1.cfm
Interview with historian Charles Errico on community college teaching
http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6972
NC State Campus Writing and Speaking Program Resources:
http://www2.chass.ncsu.edu/CWSP/resources.html
The Nuts and Bolts College Writing Guide by Michael Harvey
http://www.nutsandboltsguide.com/
National Archives Resources for Teachers and Students:
http://www.archives.gov/education/index.html
Univ. of Washington Using Primary Sources on the Web:
http://www.alawg.org/ala/mgrps/divs/rusa/sections/history/resources/pubs/usingprimarys
ources/index.cfm

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Challenging and Supporting the First-Year Student : A Handbook for Improving the First
Boice, Robert. 2000. First-Order Principles for College Teachers: Ten Basic Ways to Improve
the Teaching Process. Bolton, MA Anker Pub Co.


