

## Statement of Teaching Philosophy

I believe a good university history teacher is someone who can transmit deep interest in the discipline, and who has the ability to engage students with the material and encourage them to develop their own questions about the past. When I enter the classroom, my aim is not to evaluate whether students can memorize dates and facts, but rather whether they can use factual information to understand historical events and ask questions about their origins and significance. My ultimate goal is to help them develop a critical mind. History is an on-going process and students need to recognize its patterns, its similarities and its differences. I strive to connect the past with the present, prompting them to understand current events from a historical perspective. One example that immediately strikes contemporary students, given the importance of religious-inspired conflict in today's world, is the religious wars that occurred in the sixteenth century. Religious violence is not new, nor easily understood, and a close analysis of historical occurrences like the Wars of Religion can offer insights into other times and places.

In the classroom, I try to find the right balance between traditional lectures enlivened with visual and audio imagery and discussion sections. The use of a variety of media seems a given with today's undergraduates, and the wired classroom offers various opportunities for the use of web-based resources, including video, podcasts and pictures. Therefore, students can have a multi-sensory appreciation of historical material, which brings it more to life. I always make sure that complementary material is available on Blackboard, encouraging interactivity in the classroom and leading to more fruitful discussion sessions. Connecting the classroom to the Internet also encourages individualized learning by sending students on their own historical inquiries. This venture can be meaningfully expanded by use of social networks such as Twitter.

The use of primary sources is essential in my courses. I believe that decoding the variety of evidence left from the past gives students a keener appreciation of the evidence that surrounds them in their daily lives. Class discussions based on the reading of primary sources encourage the circulation of arguments and ideas. These discussions also help students reinforce their argumentation skills and improve their logic. In discussion sessions, students working collaboratively in smaller groups can explore subjects more deeply than they can by listening to lectures. Students derive satisfaction from working through a problem rather than being told about it, and they can effectively teach themselves. Like all university teachers, I am concerned that students should understand the importance of distinguishing their own work from that of others. I insist on intellectual integrity, and I impose high standards of argumentative clarity, focus, and organization. I work with students to develop their writing skills whether in class or private meetings. My lectures are organized with a central thesis supported by different arguments, and I encourage students to do the same in their writing. Good writing requires the formulation of a clear thesis, the gathering and organizing of evidence, thinking logically and critically, and often comparing and contrasting. It should stimulate good thinking, and my objective as a teacher is to produce students who can do both well.

I have never seriously considered any career other than teaching, and I have never been disappointed in my choice. Planning and conducting courses has been an energizing challenge and it is an on-going process. I am always ready to improve my teaching methods through feedback from students and colleagues. During the past several years, for example, I attended workshops organized by the Center of Excellence in Education at Purdue on innovative pedagogical methods, read recent literature about history and pedagogy, and participated in various teaching workshops that culminated in my receiving the Purdue Graduate Student Teaching Certificate. I will never stop learning how to be a better teacher.