Lessons from the Trenches: A Transdisciplinary Approach to the Great War

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THE CENTENNIAL of the First World War has offered instructors across the humanities an exciting opportunity to enhance students' disciplinary expertise while reflecting on the significance of an event that continues to shape the world today. For historians, the study of World War I invites reflection on the history of modern Europe, imperialism, and globalization, and inspires historiographical debate through questions over the war's origins and legacies. For literary scholars, the war exposes students to influential twentieth-century works by authors such as Henri Barbusse, Erich Maria Remarque, and Vera Brittain while illustrating the development of literary memory across a wealth of wartime and postwar literature. Language and art instructors can also find in the Great War myriad opportunities to examine the politics of rhetoric and aesthetics by exploring wartime propaganda and culture and postwar memorials and monuments. Indeed, for instructors committed to helping students understand and empathize with the modern human condition, the First World War is an essential topic.

Unlike previous anniversaries of the war, however, the centennial occurred at a time of increased calls for both interdisciplinarity

and transdisciplinarity within and beyond the humanities.[1] In part a response to employer demands for greater cognitive flexibility among college graduates, such calls also reflect the growing willingness of administrators and faculty to challenge the nineteenth-century model of disciplinary specialization that continues to inform American higher education today. Among the more recent examples of such innovation was the first-ever joint meeting of the Modern Language Association and the American Historical Association, which took place in Chicago in 2019 and featured shared panel presentations and interdisciplinary roundtable discussions.[2] Echoing the ideas found in the growing literature on the benefits of interdisciplinarity, the kind of collaborative spirit witnessed in Chicago is now inspiring faculty throughout the academy to develop new courses and programs that extend student learning across one or more disciplinary boundaries.

Of course, for faculty who teach the First World War, the exploration of multiple disciplinary perspectives is not a new endeavor. Indeed, interdisciplinarity has informed scholarship on the war for decades, harkening back to Paul Fussell's 1975 groundbreaking study *The Great War and Modern Memory*, which challenged established notions of the war as a subject best left to historians and made consideration of wartime literature, poetry, and letters required additions to any serious scholar's bibliography.[3] If, however, scholarship on the war has long-since embraced interdisciplinarity, pedagogical approaches to the conflict have done so only recently. Combined with the growing interest in interdisciplinary pedagogy generally, current calls to equip students with broader, global perspectives are only now facilitating the development of an interdisciplinary approach to Great War pedagogy specifically, still embracing the well-established tradition of Great War scholarship. To be sure, translating such complex scholarship into meaningful classroom experiences is not easy. As Debra Rae Cohen and Douglas Higbee observe:

> These expansions and remappings of the field, drawing on postcolonial perspectives, revisionist historiography, feminist rediscovery, media theory, and new understandings of modernism and modernity—along with a wealth of newly developed material and virtual resources for study—have only rendered more complex the task of teaching a dauntingly enormous subject.[4]

The enormity of the task aside, incorporating the diversity of sources and perspectives that have come to define Great War scholarship into innovative and experiential classroom experiences was precisely the goal that informed our pedagogical approach to the war's centennial.

Drawing on our established courses on the history and literature of the war, respectively, we designed a seminar that invited students to explore both the experience and the memory of the conflict from an interdisciplinary perspective. Eager to model the kind of collaborative exchange that we hoped to see among students, we elected to team-teach the course, attending and engaging in all class sessions and co-grading all major assignments produced by our twenty students. Moreover, we were mindful to maintain a balanced syllabus, alternating between lessons in history and literature in order to demonstrate how work in one field both complements and enhances work in the other. While our balancing act provided students with an invaluable learning opportunity, it created an unexpected one for us as well. In addition to delivering a course that challenged students to work at the intersection of English and history, we were surprised to observe how our attention to the incorporation of diverse sources and global voices also led students beyond our two fields and toward a transdisciplinary exploration that encompassed language, visual art, music, and archaeology. In the pages that follow, we will review the course design, assignments, and experiential learning components before sharing our reflections on this unexpected pedagogical outcome.

Course Design

After an opening discussion about the centennial of the war, we began with a four-day study of Pat Barker's 1991 novel *Regeneration*, which fictionalizes the lives of real soldiers, including war poets Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, grappling with the psychological consequences of the war at a shell shock hospital in Scotland. Offering an engaging introduction to the war for students, the novel raises questions about the ways in which WWI has been and is remembered today, in both literary and historical terms. Barker herself addresses the blurred disciplinary boundaries in the novel's afterword: "Fact and fiction are so interwoven in this book that it may help the reader to know what is historical and what is not."[5] Having introduced

students to the war through Barker's text, we then turned to history to consider the conflict's causes and outbreak. Lectures on Europe's *Belle Époque* and the decision for war in 1914 were combined with secondary historical readings and Susan Grayzel's excellent primary source collection, *The First World War: A Brief History with Documents* (2013),[6] to introduce students to the war's origins and the reasons why millions—including Barker's characters—elected to fight. The students also explored the important historiographical question regarding responsibility for the war's outbreak, evaluating and debating in class a variety of primary source documents penned by leading political and military leaders in each of the belligerent countries. Comparing the lamentations of the French War Minister concerning the "prideful folly that the Kaiser was going to loose on the world" with the regret of the Chief of the German General Staff that "Germany too will be forced to mobilize," the class grappled with the belief held by all belligerents that the war marked a defensive endeavor.[7] Following this discussion, students considered the ways in which these leaders compelled their publics to participate as they analyzed the rich collection of propaganda found in the Imperial War Museum's collection, *Posters of the First World War* (2014).[8]

Having examined the decision for war, the class then turned to the experience of the conflict itself. Through lectures and primary source readings, students became familiar with the diversity of challenges that informed the lives of soldiers. Illustrating the psychological hardships endured on the front, for example, a letter from a German lieutenant confronted students with the difficult conclusion reached by many soldiers that "hardness and indifference towards fate and death are necessary in the fierce battles to which trench-warfare leads."[9] Bearing in mind the insights offered by such letters, the class then further considered trench life by way of Erich Maria Remarque's classic, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929). Arguably the most iconic novel about the war, the work confronts students with the horrific realities of trench life while again engaging them in questions of memory. Written by a veteran in the interwar period, the novel says as much about the 1918-1929 period as it does about the war years themselves. Late in the novel, for instance, Remarque's narrator anxiously wonders about postwar possibilities for his lost generation: "What will happen afterwards? And what shall come out of us?"[10] With Remarque's work in mind, students next turned to

Henri Barbusse's wartime novel, *Under Fire* (1916), and explored the differences between wartime and postwar literature and memory. To illustrate, consider the words of a Barbusse character as he struggles to imagine the eventual resolution of the conflict:

> Oh, it'll end all right, don't worry. And everything will have to be remade. So we'll remake it. The house? All gone. The garden? Nowhere. Well, we'll remake the house, we'll remake the garden. The less there is, the more we'll remake. After all, that's life. We were made to remake, weren't we?[11]

But how to "remake" the war in fiction when, in 1916, the war's history had yet to be written? And, by 1929, how to "remake" the war novel when official histories already filled the shelves—and otherwise silenced veterans confronted the limits of language to convey the horrors of war? While Remarque's narrator questions "what shall come out of us?" from the fraught vantage point of late-1920s Germany, Barbusse's wartime narrator despairingly notes, "it all gets worn away inside you and goes, you can't tell how or where, leaving you only with the names, the words for things, like in a dispatch."[12]

From soldiers on the battlefield, students shifted their attention to civilians on the home front. After studying the history of wartime culture, censorship, and home life, the class considered Rebecca West's novel, *The Return of the Soldier* (1918), which depicts the emotional suffering of spouses and family members separated from their loved ones by the war.[13] The novel's plot involves the loss of memory in a shell-shocked soldier and his eventual "cure"—returning students to Barker's thematic focus in *Regeneration* and elaborating upon our semester-long inquiry into the ways that WWI itself has been both forgotten and remembered in the century since the war's end. Alongside the mobilization of European civilians, students explored the wartime experiences of Americans and their nation's transition from bystander to belligerent power. Reading President Woodrow Wilson's April 1917 address to Congress in which he cast the war as an opportunity for Americans to defend "the principles that gave her birth and happiness," students engaged important questions about both the war and the origins of modern American foreign policy.[14] A field trip to nearby Washington, D.C. and a tour of the city's WWI monuments enhanced the study of the American experience and returned the discussion again to the memory of the war and the diverse ways in which countries have commemorated—or forgotten—it.

The final section of the course explored the history of the war's end and its political, economic, and cultural legacy through the 1930s. Returning to historiography, an exploration of the so-called "Thirty Years' War thesis" described by P. M. H. Bell in *The Origins of the Second World War in Europe* (originally published in 1986) challenged students to evaluate popular assumptions that the First World War made the Second inevitable. More specifically, it invited them to explore the "advent of Hitler," which popular memory traditionally locates in the German defeat of 1918.[15] Building on such questions of legacy and memory, the class explored the final novel, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night* (1934).[16] Published in the interwar period and written by an American, the novel connected well with earlier discussions of both the war's memory and its meaning for the United States. The course then ended by inviting students to consider the war's influence on their local community. On the last day of class, we visited our local WWI memorial and worked with students to compare its design and message to those of the various novels and monuments explored throughout the semester. The excursion proved both a fitting and exciting end to a course marking the war's centennial.

Assignments

While progressing along our interdisciplinary journey through the history and literature of the Great War, students completed three major types of assignments. Like the schedule of readings and daily topics, the specific nature of these assignments emerged from our respective past syllabi and our efforts to negotiate balance between the disciplines. Moreover, our decisions reflected the heavy reading load produced by our commitment to include as much historical and literary content as possible. Coupled with an awareness of the challenges that attend working beyond one's area of expertise, the heavier reading assignments (which included five novels and several hundred pages of primary and secondary historical readings) convinced us not to assign the kinds of external research papers to which we are accustomed in our traditional discipline-specific courses. Instead, we elected to design a series of assignments that would enhance students' understanding of the assigned texts while empowering them to engage the campus community as producers (rather than consumers) of knowledge.

With these broader considerations in mind, our first set of assignments comprised a series of quizzes and short writing activities. In light of our commitment to modeling and encouraging interdisciplinary exchange, informed participation in class discussions and lectures comprised an important and sizeable portion (i.e., one-quarter) of the grade. To help students prepare for such exchange, we encouraged the completion of readings through short quizzes and reflection on key historical arguments and primary sources through a series of brief (one- to two-page) written assignments. These assignments served the added purpose of ensuring that students received feedback on their writing from instructors in both disciplines before submitting the larger written assignments for co-grading.

The second set of assignments comprised two reflection essays in which students reflected on the meaning of the war for soldiers and civilians, respectively. Following our initial study of the war's causes and outbreak, along with the process of mobilization and the novels by Barker and Remarque, students submitted a short (four- to five-page) essay on the meaning of war for soldiers. To assess their analytical abilities, we offered few parameters concerning the direction of the papers and asked the students to define key terms and analytical boundaries as they felt necessary. While free to develop their own argument, students were required to support their claims with direct evidence from at least five of the readings assigned for the first eight weeks of the course. With this requirement, we sought to encourage students to engage in the kind of re-reading and reflection that traditional syllabi often discourage when combined with the additional demands of an external research project. At the same time, our decision in favor of a broad question about *meaning* emerged from our desire to draw students' attention to similarities among the kinds of questions that engage scholars across the humanities.

As for our grading process as instructors, we both read each paper independently, took notes concerning strengths and weaknesses, and decided on a provisional grade. Next, we conferenced together to discuss grades. Although we did occasionally need to negotiate, we were encouraged to find that our assessments generally proved to be very close to one another's—an alignment that might be attributed to our co-designing of the essay assignment itself, as well as the grading parameters. While conferencing about each paper, we also generated shared feedback to return to our students. Commenting on both the

argument and incorporation of course readings in the first essay, we hoped also to guide students' work on a second paper concerning the meaning of the war for civilians. Coinciding with the civilian focus of the second half of the course, the second paper carried more weight so as to encourage and reward improvement relative to the first paper.

Complementing the individual reflection required by the two essays, a third set of assignments invited students to collaborate in their exploration of course themes. For the first of two collaborative projects, we assigned interdisciplinary student pairs and asked them to select two posters from the required Imperial War Museum text, *Posters of the First World War*, to analyze and present to the class. In a fifteen-minute presentation, we asked the pairs to explain their posters in terms of their textual and contextual specifics, reflecting on their messages and potential contributions to the various mobilization campaigns. By uniting students across disciplinary boundaries, the assignment empowered students to approach the posters with a diverse set of analytical tools and to practice the kind of interdisciplinary collaboration on which the course was based. Modeled in part on the first collaborative project, the second collaborative project asked students to engage not each other, but the broader campus community. Invited to select their own partners, students next chose a popular artifact of the war—such as the tank, poppy, or trench—as the subject for a display board to be shared with the campus community. In addition to providing a brief historical analysis of the artifacts' origins and place within popular consciousness, each board had to provide a literary analysis of the artifacts' appearance in the literature, poetry, or music of the war years. Unlike the poster presentations, which students prepared for an academic audience of their colleagues, the display board required students to share their expertise with a wider, non-specialist audience. Amid ongoing debates over the relevance of the humanities in an increasingly STEM-focused society, we are convinced that this is an important skill for students in all disciplines to develop.

Experiential Learning

We also decided early on in our syllabus design that field trips would be a required element that would serve to extend the boundaries of the classroom out into the world, while managing also

to promote the interdisciplinary ethos of the course. In keeping with our emphasis in the class on the "total war" nature of the conflict, we strove to emphasize via each of the planned excursions the extent to which WWI left its indelible impression on American collective memories and landscapes in the interwar period—and how the war continues to shape the world that we all inhabit today. As mentioned earlier, we undertook two different trips: one to Washington, D.C. (about an hour away by bus from our campus) in Week 13 of the syllabus, and a second to Frederick's Memorial Park (about a ten-minute walk from our campus) in Week 15 on the last day of class. We scheduled our D.C. trip not only to coincide with our approach to the history and literature of America's involvement in WWI, but also to provide memorial "bookends" for the last few weeks of our course. We wanted the trips to reinforce themes about individual and collective remembering and forgetting of WWI, as well as to provoke in our students new and unanticipated questions about the conflict then and now.

Our D.C. trip began in Arlington National Cemetery, which is not only the burial ground for nearly 5,000 "doughboys," but also the site of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, first dedicated in 1921.[17] In many ways, the Tomb is the symbolic center of American WWI remembrance of the conflict, although students and visitors today might not immediately perceive the connections to the past, especially considering its palimpsestic mandate to honor "unknowns" from World War II and the Korean War. The highly ritualized performances of the changing of the guard ceremonies inspire awe and reverence, but also prevent visitors from approaching the Tomb itself. In a way, for all of its symbolic, enshrining power, the ceremony manages also to screen off—to enshroud—the memory of World War I. As G. Kurt Piehler notes, the notion of a guard at all for the Tomb was only instituted in 1926, after the American Legion had for years complained that visitors all too often "failed to show proper respect at the grave, and in some cases they dishonored it by using it as a bench or picnic table."[18] We watched the changing of the guard ceremony and then gathered together at the side of the amphitheater to discuss what we witnessed, ask/answer questions, and connect the experience to our course materials. As we made our way back to the visitor center, our progress was stopped by an Arlington funeral service, which included a horse-drawn caisson

and accompanying honor guard. We noted that while some at the site stood quietly watching the funeral procession, other Arlington patrons rushed to take pictures of the spectacle. In our post-field trip class discussion the following week, students returned to the tension they perceived between Arlington as a national locus of pilgrimage and mourning and Arlington as just another stop on the tourist circuit in our nation's capital.

Of course, Fitzgerald's characters in *Tender Is the Night*, a novel which we chose precisely because of its attention to both history and memory, find themselves navigating very similar waters as they encounter Newfoundland Memorial Park in Beaumont Hamel, France. Initially set in 1925, Fitzgerald's novel explores the fragmented and anxiety-riddled lives of expatriate Americans and their European associates living in the "broken universe of the war's ending."[19] While at Beaumont Hamel, a cemetery site unique for having been left largely as-is after the war—and which remains marked to this day by zigzagging trenches, shell holes, and unexploded ordnance—the main characters carry with them battlefield guidebooks and struggle to understand what took place there on July 1, 1916, the first day of the Battle of the Somme. The novel's main character, Dr. Richard Diver, tries to explain the events to his companions in a series of oft-quoted phrases:

> See that little stream—we could walk to it in two minutes. It took the British a month to walk to it—a whole empire walking very slowly, dying in front and pushing forward behind. And another empire walked very slowly backward a few inches a day, leaving the dead like a million bloody rugs.[20]

Only moments later, however, the romanticized and reverential tones of the scene dissolve away amidst a frivolous burst of trench horseplay: "You're dead—don't you know the rules? That was a grenade."[21] Another character, Abe North, a combat veteran whose postwar struggles with alcoholism end later in the novel with his murder in a New York speakeasy, punctures the tidy solemnities of the pilgrimage with his "touristic" impulse to shatter and unsettle the gentle pieties of Diver's battlefield narrative. The profound mood of unease that Fitzgerald articulates in the scene—as well as his novel's sincere emphasis on the importance of making uneasy visits to WWI's battlefields and cemeteries—telescopes forward to Arlington today. To borrow from historian Jay Winter, our students

experienced firsthand the distinction between—and the conjunction of—a "site of mourning" and a "site of memory."[22] They watched as a soldier's tour of duty culminated in a full-service burial with military honors and family members in mourning; then, they headed back to the bus for the next stop on our historical tour.

In Pershing Park, a dilapidated memorial space near the White House devoted to General John J. Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Force in WWI, we discussed its planned transformation into a national WWI memorial. Although the site traces its origins back to the 1930s, it was dedicated only in 1981. In anticipation of the war's centenary, Congress authorized the park's redevelopment in 2013, and the winning design shifts away from the great-man-of-history approach that currently characterizes the site. Instead, the park's redesign seeks not only to narrate a collective struggle that involved millions of Americans, but also to make the memory of American service in WWI more visible and viable. As our students stood in Pershing Park, and then soon afterward as we toured the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the World War II Memorial on the National Mall, we considered the extent to which World War I remains a relatively forgotten war in the American consciousness. Though a small, marble pavilion on the Mall memorializes those from the District of Columbia who served in World War I, our students were surprised to learn that the only current national WWI memorial is in Kansas City, Missouri.[23]

Our final stop on the D.C. trip was the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History, whose permanent exhibit, "The Price of Freedom: Americans at War," rather inadvertently emphasized—in its physical design and layout—the peripheral place of WWI in American memories of warfare. In our post-field trip class discussion, one of our students perceptively observed that the Smithsonian reduced the entire WWI section of the exhibit to a small elbow-shaped hallway joining a substantial Civil War room to an even more substantial WWII room. While there were small WWI-themed exhibits (on propaganda posters and wartime medicine) elsewhere in the museum, timed to coincide with the centenary of the war, it was striking to encounter the conflict—a world-changing global cataclysm—receiving about the same amount of museum space as the nearby display devoted to the much shorter Spanish-American War.

We concluded our course with a local field trip that helped students to see in person that even if the war has largely receded from American viewpoints, institutional and otherwise, the lingering presence of WWI nevertheless remains to cast its shadow in parks and civic spaces around the country. Frederick's memorial to those who served in the First World War debuted to four thousand citizens on Armistice Day in 1924.[24] Despite its illustrious beginning, this beautiful and complicated memorial—designed by Italian sculptor Giuseppe Moretti—lingers today in relative obscurity, hidden in plain sight in the center of downtown Frederick. As our students quickly discovered, close scrutiny of the memorial yields a number of surprises. For instance, the list of county residents who served includes the names of women—a gender-inclusive policy that most WWI memorials in the United States do not embrace. At the same time, however, the memorial also segregates African American soldiers into a separate bronze panel for "Colored Soldiers," and thereby functions as a disturbing Jim Crow-era time capsule. By looking carefully at Frederick's WWI memorial, our students considered together the conflicted ways that Americans chose to remember the "Great War for Civilization," not to mention our present relationship with the past. Although our local war memorial visit was clearly enhanced by our earlier trip to D.C., we believe that students visiting any local WWI memorial—and they exist in just about every American town and city—will encounter history well worth revisiting, confront complex questions about processes of collective remembering and forgetting, and engage in fruitful aesthetic debates about the manner by which war memorials communicate the past into the present.[25]

Beyond the semester, our course prepared the way for several additional WWI-themed experiential learning opportunities. For instance, our team-teaching experiences in the WWI course led us to partner with Mount Olivet Cemetery in Frederick to collaborate on a panel discussion that explored the history and literature of WWI, particularly as they pertain to Frederick, Maryland. Student display board projects were curated together on our campus as a means of consciousness-raising about the war and its legacies. We also planned a week-long study abroad trip to France, based in Paris, with visits to Versailles as well as Newfoundland Memorial Park in the Somme region. As we tour the palace where the peace

was finalized, as we walk through the "silent cities" that mark the former battlefields of the Western Front, we confront Erich Maria Remarque's fear—shared widely by veterans of the interwar years—that "the war will be forgotten."[26]

Reflections

In addition to the practical realities of connecting the study of history and literature and the benefits and challenges of team-teaching, our experiences yielded lessons about the variety of ways to encourage student learning across the disciplines. When first designing the course, we thought of it as an interdisciplinary endeavor. We understood this to mean the application of multiple disciplinary lenses to gain deeper insight into a particular topic while enhancing students' training in their respective fields. Approaching our collaboration through our past experiences teaching discipline-specific courses on the Great War, we began with the assumption that students of history and students of literature could improve their understanding of the conflict and their respective fields through work with colleagues in other disciplines. Knowledge of the ways in which historians approach and seek to understand specific time periods would help English majors contextualize literary texts, while an awareness of the tools used by literary scholars to evaluate prose and poetry would enhance history majors' engagement with the primary sources on which their work is based. Although lessons on historical analysis and literary criticism did produce such benefits, the course also challenged students to understand the experience and memory of the Great War across a variety of fields and through a diverse set of sources and perspectives. With an issue-oriented approach, then, the course revealed itself to be not only interdisciplinary, but also transdisciplinary in nature.

This unexpected, albeit welcome quality of the course owed to two factors. The first were the negotiations between our established disciplinary syllabi. Accepting the sacrifices required by a shared syllabus, our focus shifted to the course topic itself and the identification of those historical developments and literary texts that would most enhance students' understanding of the war, regardless of their major. Discovering our shared interest in helping students to empathize with those who fought in and lived through

the Great War helped us to dwell less on the loss of certain history and literature lessons and more on the benefits to students that our collaborative syllabus provided. A second factor reinforced this issue-centric approach: our unique enrollment. Contrary to our expectations of a classroom filled with history and English majors, we were delighted to teach students also majoring in art, foreign language, and sociology. Such diversity reinforced our focus on the war rather than disciplinary training and enriched both the class discussions and the students' group projects.

Beyond the immediate returns in the classroom, the transdisciplinary nature of the course offered students longer-term benefits as well. By engaging them in the study of a shared topic across multiple disciplinary boundaries, the course provided precisely the kind of experience that employers increasingly demand from college graduates. Success in today's globalized marketplace often requires collaboration among specialists from multiple industries across political, cultural, and social boundaries in pursuit of complex research, innovation, and production goals. It is indeed not surprising that the 2016 World Economic Forum survey of global employers ranked "cognitive flexibility" and "coordinating with others" among the ten most important skills needed for employment beyond 2020.[27] Connecting students from five different disciplines to assess the meaning of the First World War across national, class, race, and gender lines, our course design offered invaluable practice in both these skills. For readers interested in providing similar experiences for their students, their history classrooms offer countless opportunities to do so. As Peter Charles Hoffer's recent defense of "Clio among the muses" reminds us, history, more than any other field, both requires and is enriched by collaboration with the other humanities and social science disciplines.[28]

If history lends itself well to the "tearing down of silos" for students, it can do the same for faculty and their campus communities. Extending beyond the classroom to inspire panel discussions, new community partnerships, a short-term study abroad trip, and a federal grant application, our transdisciplinary collaboration has yielded a series of unexpected benefits both for us and our campus.[29] By electing to team teach, rather than share or divide a course, we committed ourselves to a regular schedule of focused dialogue. While most of our conversations began in reference to the course,

they often turned to broader questions about the war or pedagogy and research. Sharing reading suggestions from our respective disciplinary canons, past experiences with designing and assessing student work, and plans for future Great War-related scholarship, we learned much from our meetings. Reflecting on semesters prior to our collaboration, we noted how rare the opportunities for such dialogue are. To be sure, exchanges with colleagues in our respective disciplines are no less valuable. Given the demands of a semester, however, such interactions are often infrequent and brief and can focus more on administrative matters than our content fields. Moreover, the institutionalized norms of individualized teaching and scholarship often render us the lone departmental experts on our respective topics. Although conferences and publications provide invaluable connections to other experts in our fields, they do so too infrequently. For this reason alone, the regular exchanges required by our transdisciplinary course proved a welcome benefit.

Of course, we are not the first to discover the yields of transdisciplinary collaboration for faculty and institutions. Perhaps most famously, Clark Kerr developed a vision for the University of California, Santa Cruz in the 1960s in which topics rather than disciplines informed the shape of the curriculum and the organization of the faculty.[30] More recently, the University of Southern California removed the distinction "independent" from its tenure and promotion policies governing scholarship in an effort to incentivize collaboration among faculty.[31] While the ongoing debates in academia over whether and how to collaborate between disciplines lie beyond the scope of this paper, our course and experience affirmed the value of collaboration that Kerr and others have long emphasized. Underlying such arguments, and our experience, is an understanding that quality teaching and scholarship begin with time for reflection and collegial exchange.[32] As the corporate pressures of life in academia make it increasingly difficult to justify such temporal luxuries, our transdisciplinary teaching experience revealed a way to incorporate them amid the rigors and rhythms of the semester. Without having to invest energy in time-consuming (though important) battles over teaching loads and tenure requirements, we were delighted to discover an alternative path along which to reflect and collaborate, enriching our teaching and scholarship while practicing the very kind of cognitive flexibility that we hope to see in our students.

In many ways, the lessons gleaned from our experience teaching the Great War are relevant to instructors interested in team-teaching in many fields. Whether to provide students with the skills that they increasingly need or to foster new faculty partnerships that can enrich scholarship and campus-community relations, transdisciplinary team-teaching merits consideration by instructors throughout the academy. More than their colleagues in and beyond the humanities, perhaps, historians enjoy a wealth of opportunities to undertake such endeavors. As the study of how the human present came to be, history encompasses all disciplines and includes all communities. Taking advantage of this rich collaborative potential at a time of increased calls for academic collaboration and ongoing questions about the value of the humanities, historians should seize the opportunity to provide leadership among the disciplines and enhance both their own work and that of their students along the way.

Notes

1. On the broader conversation about interdisciplinarity, see Harvey J. Graff, *Undisciplining Knowledge: Interdisciplinarity in the Twentieth Century* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015); John H. Aldrich, *Interdisciplinarity: Its Role in a Disciplined-Based Academy* (London, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2014); Myra H. Strober, *Interdisciplinary Conversations: Challenging Habits of Thought* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010); Robert Frodeman, Julie Thompson Klein, and Roberto Carlos Dos Santos Pacheco, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity* (London, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2017); Patricia Leavy, *Essentials of Transdisciplinary Research: Using Problem-Centered Methodologies* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2011), 21-23; Diana Rhoten, Veronica Boix Mansilla, Marc Chun, and Julie Thompson Klein, "Interdisciplinary Education at Liberal Arts Institutions," Teagle Foundation White Paper (2006); Julie Thompson Klein and William H. Newell, "Advancing Interdisciplinary Studies," in *Handbook of the Undergraduate Curriculum: A Comprehensive Guide to Purposes, Structures, Practices, and Change*, ed. Jerry G. Gaff and James L. Ratcliff (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 393-415. For a discussion of the emphasis on issues over disciplines inherent in transdisciplinarity, see Leavy, *Essentials of Transdisciplinary Research*, 9.

2. See the conference websites: Modern Language Association, "2019 Convention," <https://www.mla.org/Convention/Convention-History/Past-Conventions/2019-Convention>; American Historical Association, "2019 Annual Meeting," <https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/annual-meeting/past-meetings/2019-annual-meeting>.

3. Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

4. Debra Rae Cohen and Douglas Higbee, "Introduction," in *Teaching Representations of the First World War*, ed. Debra Rae Cohen and Douglas Higbee (New York: Modern Language Association, 2017), 4.

5. Pat Barker, *Regeneration* (New York: Penguin, 1991), 251.

6. Susan R. Grayzel, ed., *The First World War: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2013).

7. Adolphe Messimy, "Memoirs, 1937," in *July 1914: Soldiers, Statesmen, and the Coming of the Great War: A Brief Documentary History*, ed. Samuel R. Williamson Jr. and Russel Van Wyk (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003), 204; Helmuth von Moltke, "Memorandum to Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, July 29, 1914," in *July 1914: Soldiers, Statesmen and the Coming of the Great War: A Brief Documentary History*, ed. Samuel R. Williamson Jr. and Russel Van Wyk (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003), 105.

8. Richard Slocombe, *Posters of the First World War* (London, United Kingdom: Imperial War Museum, 2014).

9. Hugo Müller, "Letter from a German Soldier on the Western Front, October 17, 1915," *The First World War: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Susan R. Grayzel (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2013), 68.

10. Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (New York: Ballantine, 1982), 264.
11. Henri Barbusse, *Under Fire*, trans. Robin Buss (New York: Penguin 2003), 148.
12. Barbusse, *Under Fire*, 304-305.
13. Rebecca West, *The Return of the Soldier* (New York: Penguin, 2014).
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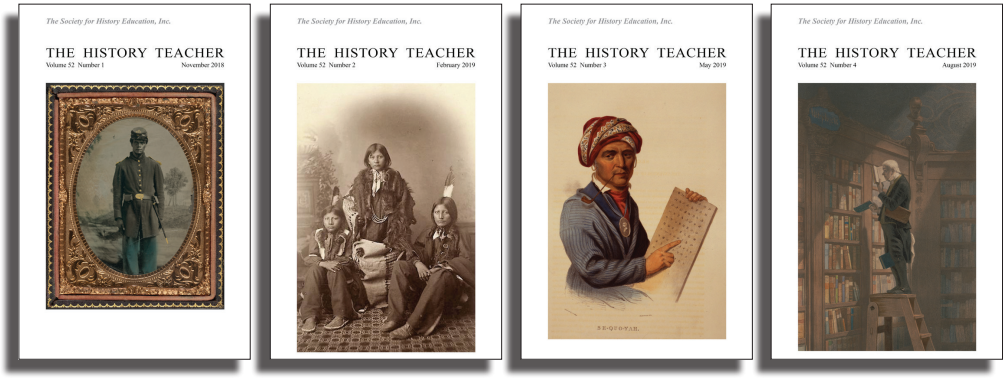

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