

## “None of My History Classes Were Like This”: An Experiment in Mastery Pedagogy

*I have never had a class where I've had to think this much, this often.<sup>1</sup>*

*It is up to us to read the articles and learn the material. It is up to us to grasp what we read and take ownership of it. This ownership has helped me succeed.<sup>2</sup>*

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FOR OVER A DECADE, I've been a pretty traditional college professor: I give lectures in introductory survey courses; sit on a desk and conduct discussions of various articles, books, and documents in upper-level electives; and have generally received gracious teaching evaluations from my students. While I don't see a tremendous number of History majors in my seats, I have a robust number of willing takers who fill their general education requirements with my courses. Recently, however, I've been concerned that my traditional style most likely left my students with little persistent knowledge beyond the semester itself, and that the students did not necessarily develop—or, more precisely, realize that they developed—a particular set of skills by taking history courses. Four problems emerged as the most salient to these concerns: 1) students learned some history, but did not act *as historians*; 2) students passively absorbed material and thus did not take an active role in their learning; 3) my courses did not necessarily foster student ownership of their own learning, and they thus did little in the way of making

meaning from their class experiences or content, or bonding in any kind of community; and 4) the learning often felt perfunctory rather than like mastery.

These four issues particularly gnawed at me, made worse by the inevitable presence of a few bored students, staring out the window, hardly invested in their education at all. Like many professors, I was frustrated when my students wouldn't engage, particularly when I knew from their writing that they had a good deal to say about the course content. The more passive students who squeaked by with minimal effort got very little out of the class, and their lack of effort impacted the other students who would complain that about the domination of the class by a few speakers or that the vast silence inhibited their own desire to talk. Additionally, in an era in which history is often lambasted as a less-than-useful field of study, it frustrated me that students often described their experiences in my class as relevant only to that class rather than more broadly applicable, and saw little skill development at all. Yet, I felt bound to my content, compelled to convey to my students a certain chronological breadth of knowledge at the expense, perhaps, of other possibilities. That my attachment to content seemed to foster perfunctory learning and staring off into space was an issue I needed to resolve.

In an effort to address and rectify my growing concerns, I decided to experiment by using a mastery-based pedagogy in my course. A mastery-based pedagogy is one in which students learn by doing, starting as apprentices to an experienced person (myself and my student content tutor in this scenario) but are then launched on their own. My presentation of information would be limited—no lectures, for example—and students would be tasked with digging through sources I'd provided, coming up with interpretations of those sources, and presenting their thoughts to the class, becoming "masters" of their information as well as of the practice of historical interpretation. In the Fall 2014 semester, I took one class—a mid-level elective, HIST 247: Women in American History—and rebuilt it completely so that students were compelled to take the helm of their educations, to demonstrably learn and apply a "history toolbox" of critical thinking skills that would translate to most every area of study as well as everyday life, and to have the ability to "fail forward"—that is, for students to take risks in a low-stakes environment so as

to prompt them to problem-solve. The results were both gratifying, encouraging, and, in some cases, disheartening, but the course rebuild serves as a case study in the power of active, social learning, and using a mastery-based pedagogy in the history classroom.

I do want to take a moment, though, and state that this paper is about process and progress, with the inevitable struggles concomitant with both. Teaching history is a craft, and my pedagogical experiment was about reworking my craft in order to achieve different results. It was overall a remarkably powerful experience, but not exactly a home run. The crafting process is ongoing.

### **It Could Be Better**

I'd taught my Women in American History class three times prior to Fall 2014 (in 2008, 2010, and 2012), and each incarnation followed roughly the same pedagogical pattern. That pattern involved minimal student ownership or action; the structure of the course enabled students to absorb content in their seats passively, write a little, and earn their credits. The class capped at twenty-two and usually contained at least eighteen young minds, many of them shy and content to let the more gregarious students answer me. The syllabus was organized chronologically, from the pre-colonial era through the late twentieth century. Students read some of the key texts in the field, such as Barbara Welter's "The Cult of True Womanhood" and Carrol Smith-Rosenberg's "The Female World of Love and Ritual," in addition to occasional monographs (or parts thereof) and a smattering of relevant but brief primary source documents. Their writing typically included several two-page précis of secondary sources, some kind of midterm essay, and a final project. The class got us from one chronological point to another, but the pedagogy can best be described as *professor*-centered, the course's pieces unconnected in any way save their chronological relationship. The class could see change over time, which is the historian's major emphasis, and course evaluations were positive, but marked growth in a student's ability to read, understand, and interpret—key elements of critical thinking and of historical work—was low and difficult to measure.<sup>3</sup>

The strongest part of the course was the final project, but even this could have been improved with better integration with a pedagogical mission. For the project, students conducted an oral history with a

woman they knew, and used that interview as their primary source for a short research paper of around eight pages. The idea was for them to write papers about, for example, women in the 1950s, using interviews with their grandmothers or whomever as their evidence. Students read documents over the term, but because they had not really trained as budding historians, knowing what to do with their interview stymied many of them. Most pulled through, but the project never quite felt like the capstone to the course I envisioned it to be.

In hindsight, I clearly lacked a concerted pedagogical plan for student engagement or end goals beyond those that were content-based or related to essay writing. I also tended to easily over-indulge in conversations about current events. In my efforts to develop links between past and present, especially on those dreaded quiet days, I would turn my question-and-answer session into much-longer-than-necessary digressions on women's issues in contemporary America. While I think much of what I covered was important and relevant, my way of talking about and engaging students in contemporary issues was lacking, and students let me know in their evaluations that they felt it distracted from the course.

### **Big Plans**

I brought my general angst about the course to a series of workshops that were part of a year of intensive faculty development. The University of Saint Joseph in West Hartford, Connecticut, where I teach, offers full-time professors a remarkable opportunity: faculty can participate in the campus Reasoning Across the Disciplines (RAD) group and spend a full year with a half-dozen colleagues, digging intensively into pedagogical theory. The Fall term is spent reading and debating various ideas, and Spring is spent revising a course and applying some of the theories. Facilitated by Dr. Steven Pearlman, who directs our Institute of Writing and Reasoning, and his colleague, David Carillo, the readings for the RAD group quickly made me aware of the limitations of my attachments to chronological content and traditional teaching, and opened my mind to alternative possibilities.

My goals for a revised Women in American History course were connected to the concept that students gain more out of a class when they find it meaningful, and that meaning is usually derived

from wrestling with the materials on their own. They also needed the ability to try different things—approaches, interpretations, and so forth—when it came to cultivating an understanding of material, and to be able to reinvent those approaches when their original efforts did not work so well. In so doing, students would resolve the problems of the earlier, less successful versions of the course: they would become historians, take ownership of their learning, actively participate, and do so in a mastery (rather than perfunctory) model.

This approach was inspired in particular by reading Chauncey Monte-Sano's work, "Beyond Reading Comprehension and Summary: Learning to Read and Write in History by Focusing on Evidence, Perspective, and Interpretation." While Monte-Sano looked at a high school class, his points really resonated with my students' experiences: students are skilled at "comprehension and summary of information," but lack the critical skills to get further; they doubt themselves when they try and are hesitant to draw attention to their efforts. When the "information" is a primary document, it comes with comprehension challenges before many can even get to interpretation, and few students wanted to admit their struggles. This issue became clear in one particular class early in my career, when students had to read excerpts from the acerbic if polite 1830s exchange between Angelina Grimke and Catherine Beecher. I expected them to be ready to discuss the reading, but they needed an entire class as a translation session so as to understand what the women were saying. Monte-Sano's study suggested a better approach was a document-rich class so that students learned to interpret with frequent experience.<sup>4</sup> They worked at historical thinking rather than simply at absorbing teacher-given content and analysis for repeating back on an exam. Thus, students would learn how to create historical knowledge on their own by working to critically read, argue, and write. This approach was the key to my revision.

The syllabus for my rebuilt Women in American History class (see **Appendix A**) had one listed learning objective that contained embedded solutions to the problems in my earlier classes: "To construct historical knowledge through historical inquiry and interpretation." The fifteen-week course began with a unit titled, "How to Think Like a Historian," and was followed by chronologically thematic weeks that covered my usual timespan, from pre-colonial years through women's liberation in the 1970s. Students would work in groups to

develop critical source interpretations each week and present them to their peers. The class would end with the same oral history final project and presentations during exam week as prior classes featured.

The early goal of the course was to immerse students in a *culture of doing history*. During weeks one through three, Tracie Romanik, my content tutor (an upper-class student and major who worked with peers at our Center for Academic Excellence) and I taught the class what it meant to “think like a historian” through discussions and activities. We watched the film version of *A Midwife’s Tale*, which does a beautiful job not just with the contents of Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s book, but also in exploring her process. Throughout the documentary, Ulrich demonstrates the details of working with the diary of Martha Ballard; she shows the index cards and maps she created to stay organized and find patterns and, ultimately, to interpret what she saw.<sup>5</sup> Romanik then led document workshops, guiding the students through the process of actively reading, questioning, and interpreting primary sources.

We continued the class acculturation to doing history in week two by reading challenging historical articles as a big group, introducing students to historical scholarship and the importance of approaching sources without using their own contemporary lenses. Carrol Smith-Rosenberg’s article “The Female World of Love and Ritual” was ideal for this task, as her analysis of women’s friendships in the nineteenth century demonstrates to our twenty-first-century students that what looks like one relationship to them (e.g., women’s overtures of love to each must indicate lesbianism) might be entirely another (a different culture of friendship in a very different era from theirs).<sup>6</sup>

The idea behind these initial forays into source work was to immerse students in some of the field’s norms, practices, and traditions—rather than solely chronological content—so as to prepare them to do such work on their own. Much like apprentices, the students observed “masters” working (Ulrich, Rosenberg, Romanik, and me) and then were required to try the work themselves. This was a means of learning by “cultural process,” according to scholar James Gee. What Gee means by a “cultural process” is that students, by *doing* actively, learn by participating in that culture’s practices.<sup>7</sup> Romanik and I, in coordination with the first two weeks of class’s content, provided just a bit of a manual, after which we set the students on their own. They would learn—become masters—by

doing, and thus better understand, retain, and apply the concepts they used—as well as the content they covered.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast to usual historical culture wherein the historian works alone, my pedagogy compelled the students to stay in self-selected groups all term. The reasons for this were manifold: on the one hand, none of these students had enough experience to fly solo on a weekly basis; plus, they would get through far more material and explore competing points of view and interpretation if they worked in groups. They would also have peers for feedback on their thoughts—feedback that most professional historians appreciate as well. More theoretically, however, having the students work in groups facilitated a “social theory of learning.”

A social theory of learning posits a substantive criticism of traditional pedagogy and offers a compelling way forward, which I implemented in my class. Etienne Wenger has argued, “Our institutions...are largely based on the assumption that learning is an individual process, that it has a beginning and an end, that it is best separated from the rest of our activities, and that it is the result of teaching.” An alternative is to have a “community of practice” as a means of demonstrating competence and developing “personally transformative learning.”<sup>9</sup> The groups in my class became communities of practice in which students were able to try, rethink, and try again, demonstrating competence in terms of my objectives and gaining competence in terms of overall skill building and content knowledge. Students in my class formed small communities among themselves, created identities in terms of responsibility for learning and presentation within those communities, and together formed one larger community. They bonded over both their uncertainties about the class and their growing sense of confidence in what they were doing as the weeks went by. They took ownership of their own learning, but within a constructed and safe community of practice.

Students quickly discovered what ownership of their own learning meant as they were tasked with developing historical interpretations on a weekly basis. After forming groups, which they gave quirky names (such as “Three Shades of Awesome,” “The Herstorians,” and “Nurse Power”), each group developed one guiding historical question for the term. Each week, the groups would answer their questions through the critical analysis of the primary documents and secondary sources I’d placed on our online classroom management

system, Blackboard (see **Appendix B** for a screenshot). They would retain this question all term, effectively compelling the class to unpack multiple perspectives on a weekly basis. Classmates vetted each team's historical question, prodding students to deepen and sharpen their thinking, and make their question distinct from the others. Any subsequent change to these guiding questions would have to be run by the class again. Questions included "How did power dynamics conform or conflict with this era's dominant narrative about women?"; "What patterns of self-definition for/by women arise through these documents?"; and "How did culture shape women's actions and reactions?" My goal with the questions was to get students to consider the ways we can develop and use frameworks for understanding history, getting into concepts like gender and race as social constructions that shaped, for example, how power works at any given time. Students then developed a rubric for each week's presentation with minimal guidance from me, using a critical-thinking tool crafted by the IWR that was in common usage on campus (see **Appendix C**).

The students took responsibility for creating a division of labor and a workflow within their groups—an important phenomenon. Our Blackboard shell's chronological folders contained numerous materials, more than the average for a mid-level course in any given week, especially considering what the students had to do with the material. Students divvied up the contents themselves; the dependence of each student on their peers for a grade led most to take their reading responsibilities very seriously. Students had to read and think in order to interpret and present; they needed to present in order to get feedback and grades; and they needed to do that several times before they had sufficient skill to pass the course.

A week's content included a substantial range of materials intended to give a broad overview and range of perspectives on a given era. In the unit titled, "Women of the 'Gilded' Age and 'Progressive' Era," primary documents included Zitkála-Šá's "The School Days of an Indian Girl," Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," Ida B. Wells's "Southern Horrors," Cornell University's online exhibit about the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, and a Library of Congress digital exhibit about women's suffrage. Secondary sources included Smith-Rosenberg's "Female World of Love and Ritual," Kathy Peiss's "Charity Girls and City Pleasures,"



Maureen Flanagan's "Gender and Urban Political Reform: The City Club and the Woman's City Club of Chicago in the Progressive Era," and Leslie A. Schwalm's "Sweet Dreams of Freedom: Freedwomen's Constructions of Life and Labor in the Low Country in South Carolina."<sup>10</sup> This material was in addition to a background chapter in Sara Evans's *Born for Liberty*, a good nuts-and-bolts reader in American women's history.<sup>11</sup> The load was thus fairly heavy and students often found that documents would offer contradictory viewpoints, a sharp departure from the way many learned history in high school—as a discrete series of events, without much interpretation. At first, many students thought they were reading "wrong" when they noticed such contradiction and found it deeply discomfiting, but over time discovered that the best wrestling—the hardest challenges—often came from such points.

Class time on Tuesdays was spent working on their interpretations, and students would call on Romanik or me with any questions about the content or their thinking as we circulated about the room. On Thursdays, student groups would present their interpretations to one another as a roundtable and offer each other feedback. For the first few weeks of these roundtables, Romanik and I said nothing at all, which compelled the students to offer each other support and criticism, as well as keep the class moving. Working without the predictable net of teacher response, the student community grew, along with their sense of ownership and responsibility not only of the material, but the class itself. The early interpretations were often lists ("here's how the sources each individually demonstrate this overall point") and only slowly evolved to more robust, interwoven arguments. For example, the group "Nurse Power," which struggled mightily for several weeks, questioned (often fuzzily, at least early on) about how women were empowered to take action. In the Gilded Age/Progressive Era week, they argued that empowerment was the ability to take action, and that women were empowered despite their gender. They then itemized various ways this was the case: Zitkala-Sá used her culture as a way to empowerment; sexual freedom could be empowering; Gilman's protagonist walking into the wallpaper is a metaphor for power; and so forth. The group "Blue Jays," which had the question noted above about power and dominant narratives, decided that the dominant narrative they had been talking about for weeks (essentially, that nineteenth-century

society was a patriarchy) would benefit from a discussion of an emerging counter-narrative in which the “separate spheres” were clearly much closer together despite rhetoric otherwise. The Blue Jays then integrated their sources in a thematic argument (i.e., looking at education across the sources rather than just Zitkála-Šá as an example of a point) about what that meant in terms of access to power with varying degrees of success.

It is worth discussing here a significant component of my course revision: what students did in the first ten weeks of this process literally did not count towards their grades, which gave them the opportunity to wrestle with material, try new interpretive slants, and fail spectacularly if necessary—it was preparatory work, helping them develop until the final two sessions, which counted towards their grades. Each week, I’d “grade” the presentations using the rubric and offer copious feedback, but these grades were just guideposts and indicators of progress until the end. This system was akin to the model of problem-based learning (PBL), a popular pedagogy in which students face challenging situations (“problems”) that they puzzle out either in short (say, a few classes) or long (a whole semester) periods. Problem-based learning features “an authentic problem of practice, without any prior preparation of learners, followed by a systematic student-centred inquiry process.”<sup>12</sup> Students gain skills in addition to content knowledge, and they figure out as they go what else they need to know to continue. Importantly, PBLs also encourage trial-and-error as students learn. Having grades that did not actually count fostered significant learning both in terms of content and in terms of *doing history*. Students could even take a week—or all of the weeks!—off if they so chose, but they knew their skill development and ultimate grades would suffer if they did so frequently. The process of attempt/feedback/new attempt helped students build their historical toolboxes, as well as their self-reliance and confidence. For many students, asking a conceptual historical question was so unfamiliar, they would simply describe what they’d read with little analysis beyond the very superficial, structured in a “women didn’t have power because they were women” kind of way. In my feedback, I’d gently caution them against providing a book report and I often included encouragement to ask “So what?” in order to provoke meaning in their observations, geared toward the conceptual part of their question. More than one group made “So

what?” an official part of their weekly presentation as a reminder to move beyond description and into analysis.

Over the weeks, most groups got progressively more skilled at building concept-based thematic arguments rather than simply offering a roster of facts taken from one source at a time. Other students found their initial questions did not work well at all, as they limited them to just making such lists and offered little in the way of interpretive framework. For example, Nurse Power’s question about empowerment and how it worked to facilitate action despite gender limitations was their second question. Their original question—“How did culture shape women’s actions and reactions?”—was, for starters, too close to another group’s question about women’s motivations and actions, which meant they often found themselves repeating what that group said. Unlike the other group, instead of offering analysis, they would often simply make a list: (e.g., Native American women did this because they had these particular cultural influences; white women did this for the same reason; and so forth). Their framework was always, in a nutshell, that culture was important, but they really struggled to make use of that as an analytical guiding principle as opposed to a statement, as they noted, of the obvious. Thus, they announced before class about three weeks in that they were changing their question in order to get at what they felt was a more evaluative perspective. With a great amount of effort on their part, it worked.

The practice gained in the weekly sessions built student confidence and scaffolded the final oral history project. This project was the same as I’d used before: students would “create” their own primary source by conducting an oral history, and then use that oral history as part of a larger research paper. By the end of the term, in theory, students would be more adept at reading and interpreting primary documents and secondary sources and could use those skills to develop their oral history questions, as well as implement that history in their writing. In a twist from the original project in earlier incarnations of the class, the thesis statement for these final papers (written individually) needed to address the question each student’s group had been using all semester. Thus, students would do on their own what they had done in groups across the term, bringing their skills to bear on a larger project. Fully acculturated, the students would have a chance to demonstrate their individual mastery as novice historians.

## Anxiety and Eagerness: Early Student Self-Perceptions

Student experience of the course varied tremendously. Overall, the course was a success in that it engaged students in the ways I'd hoped, moving them from the passive imbibing of information to rigorous and critical self-propelled learning. While many students began the course apprehensive and ended up feeling self-confident in their abilities, others were deeply resistant to the course methods and remained that way. As one wrote on her university course evaluation, "I did not pay to teach myself."

Student perceptions are, to a great extent, only anecdotal evidence, but they form the backbone of my analysis of the success of this, and indeed any, course. I administered three (formal/informal) surveys across the term—one early on, one in the middle, one near the end—that gauged each student's experience of the course (see **Appendix D**). Students used a 1-to-10 scale (1 as the lowest ranking, 10 as the highest) to answer a number of perception-based questions and provided comments to flesh out their rankings.

Students began the course with high anxiety. In a survey administered in the first week of group work, shortly after the "thinking like a historian" period, students reflectively ranked their apprehension at the course's start at an average of 6.75, with four out of twelve respondents selecting 10—the highest level of apprehension possible. When asked, "How apprehensive were you that the format wouldn't work when we began our class?," scores ranked about the same. Their fears had moderated some by the time the survey was given, approximately four weeks into the course, but their confidence that the format would work was still low.<sup>13</sup> "I was nervous for the class," one particularly uneasy student wrote, "and still am nervous and intimidated and feel I am not improving, that it is impossible to improve." A more auspicious comment stated, "I was terrified of this format," but "now realize how beneficial...[it] is and now enjoy it."<sup>14</sup>

Those with prior experience in history classes overwhelmingly found the work more difficult than their prior courses and significantly more difficult than other campus classes at the same course level; they also felt they were doing more work and perceived their efforts to be much higher than in other classes, a perception that was likely true in practice (average 7.83).<sup>15</sup> While the students did not find the course particularly rewarding compared to others, they tended to

perceive that they did more critical thinking in this class compared to similar-level classes (average 7.75).<sup>16</sup> The score suggested that some kind of educational transformation might be underway. While both educators and students often struggle to simply conceptualize what critical thinking actually is, importantly, students felt they were doing it.

Some of the most compelling evidence that the course was achieving my goals surfaced in response to the question, “How much ownership do you feel you have over your learning, relative to other classes of similar level?” The average score was 8.73. In comparison to their expectations of ownership of learning at the start, they felt they had significantly more (average 7.83). “What I choose to get out of the documents,” noted one participant, “is based on the effort I put in to analyze [them].” Further, when asked “How empowered do you feel to construct your own understanding of the world in this class, relative to other classes?”, even in the early weeks, students gave an average score of 7.58. Thus, at least from the students’ perspectives, the course was indeed doing what I hoped it would.<sup>17</sup>

Taken together, these scores suggest that students had begun to move steadily beyond perfunctory learning from me, the professor, to using the sources I provided them to direct their own learning. They were beginning to make meaning out of what they were reading. As scholars have demonstrated, students who learn, retain, and can apply concepts from their classes tend to be those for whom the content was, in some way, meaningful.<sup>18</sup> Meaning often comes from interacting with the material, wrestling with it, and creating one’s own interpretations rather than absorbing via lecture. Ann Berthoff, in her work on the act of writing, argues that “forming is how we make meaning,” and that “forming is the mind in action. It is what we do when we learn...discover...interpret.”<sup>19</sup> The problem with lecturing to students is that, regardless of the skill of the lecturer, students have the ability to opt out, to *not* wrestle with material, to *not* interpret, and thus to *not* make meaning of whatever it is the lecturer seeks to communicate. It is easy to accept the word of the lecturer as truth and thus limit any real stretching, any real forming, and any real meaning-making, as one passively listens.

Many of my students, however, are deeply accustomed to being passive learners and were resistant to a structure that compelled a deeper engagement. A survey sentiment that was repeatedly echoed

in class was that some were concerned that their efforts might be somehow “wrong.” This fear held them back from feeling they could take ownership of their own learning. “It’s kinda [sic] hard to self teach when the readings are very long,” a student wrote, “and the wording is difficult to understand...it would be nice to have a lecture once in a while so I know what I am reading and interpreting is correct.” Another echoed her thoughts: “I don’t feel too empowered because...I am not sure if I am reading the documents right or getting the same objective everyone else is.”<sup>20</sup> For several students, their previous experiences with history courses were the memorize-and-repeat variety of high school classes, and so they saw history as a sequence of pre-determined events not subject to interpretation.<sup>21</sup> Thus, their inability to feel empowered in their learning was grounded in discomfort with reading historical arguments, multiple perspectives, and learning as a process, as opposed to being told what they need to know as fact. A key part of building a sense of ownership in my students, then, was convincing them to “live in the gray,” as I often said—to accept that their work, and history more generally, was not a binary of right and wrong, but a process of argument development based on available evidence and critical thinking.

### **Many Weeks Later: Student Late-Term Perceptions**

Survey scores for categories related to ownership of learning and meaning-making generally rose over the term.<sup>22</sup> Student perceptions of their efforts compared to similar-level classes rose and compared to their expectations earlier in the term, both rose nearly a full point to 8.72. Perceptions of their own amount of critical thinking compared to similar-level courses and compared to expectations both rose well over 8, from original scores in the mid-7s. Perceptions of ownership were also generally high, especially in contrast to their initial expectations, with all scores in related categories well over 8. Perception of ability to engage in resources outside of class rose substantially, from 6.55 to 7.81, and the ability to create one’s own understanding of the world compared to other classes also grew from 7.58 to 8.53. Perception of engagement with reading stayed about the same, above 8.<sup>23</sup>

Beyond these quantitative results, the qualitative comments were testimony to the impact the course had made on students. Numerous students pointed to the rewarding nature of the class: “I think this is

one of the hardest courses I've ever taken...and that's why it's one of the best. It was demanding, challenging, and time-consuming, but it was extremely rewarding"; "I have learned so much and feel better analyzing texts"; "This class was the hardest, but also very rewarding looking back on all the progress my group made." Students also expressed meta-cognition about their own thinking: "I was not really a strong critical thinker, but this class has helped clarify what it means to be a critical thinker"; "I am able to find the limitations in my thoughts." Further, some began to conceptualize what they'd done in class as a relevant skill set beyond the classroom: "I now read articles with a skeptical mind and pose questions. I try to find answers to my questions, but also find the flaws in my answers"; "I feel much more comfortable and able to...engage other resources for my other classes...I am slowly finding my voice from having taken this class."<sup>24</sup>

Despite all that positive growth, and despite fearfulness and apprehension about format dropping to under 5, students were still lukewarm on the entire class. When asked "How do you prefer this format to a lecture-based class format?", the average answer by the twelve respondents was 5 in week one: four selected 7 (brave souls!), but the others arrayed lower on the scale. The score rose by only a half-point by the third survey. When asked to compare their preference for this format to a large-class discussion format (that is, where I'd sit on the desk and ask questions), results were only slightly higher—5.7 in survey one and 6.28 in survey three.<sup>25</sup> To some extent, this is unsurprising. Mastery-level learning is much harder work than passive absorption, and I heard students comment off and on about wanting a break from the constant labor—for them, lectures could be breathers, and they were missed. Students also flatteringly told me they liked my lecture style, and would prefer to sit and listen a while. For others, their dislike for the format (or other preference) rested on internal problems related to group dynamics. None of these reasons negated their growth as novice historians, however, which was undeniable.

### **Group Dynamics**

Group dynamics were clearly the variable I had the least control over in this course. I could pick compelling sources from a multitude



of perspectives, my assistant and I could offer feedback as students created interpretations, and I could respond to student criticism—early on, for example, they asked for me to model a presentation and I eagerly did so—but there was little I could do to facilitate groups that utterly broke down. Most groups worked well—“I have been putting quite a bit of effort in,” wrote one student in the final survey, “[and] I always make sure that I do my reading and I do my best to contribute.” The majority of students were heavily invested in their group’s performance, eager for increases in their weekly non-binding grades. I heard groups audibly cheer when they moved from Ds, which most got in the first week or two, to Cs. The ability to fail forward empowered them and bonded them, and they had a good balance, covering when a member was ill or otherwise out. But out of a half-dozen groups, two fell apart nearly completely when, predictably, some students did not do their share of the work.

I had a process in place to deal with this inevitability: the groups came in for mediation, presented their accounts of what happened, and I worked with them to write a contract for the rest of the term. Should either side break the contract, they’d have to put themselves up for adoption by other groups. Neither group came to that point, but the experience of the class—the growth most groups had, bonding—was severely limited for the members of the problem groups. It wasn’t until months later that one of my majors could even admit she’d gotten a great deal from the class, her experience having been bitter because the other members of her group made it a very difficult term for her. Problems involving group dynamics were rare, but extremely hard to solve.

Another problem also arose. Despite the scaffolding I thought I’d done for the final oral history project, many students found it daunting and feared it would quash their course grades. The project required them to create their own questions, take their own interview, and do the interpretive heavy lifting alone. Most students had gotten quite used to group work, regardless of its challenges, and saw the final project as an entirely different endeavor because of that solitude. Although they had done independent writing over the term, this project was, as students feared, the weakest part of many of their grades. Both this issue and the issue with group dynamics are fodder for further course revision. The final project issues point to the limits of independent work once students are deeply accustomed



to communities of practice, while the group dynamics showcase how hard it can be to create those communities in the first place. I'm not sure, yet, of the solutions.

### **Drawing Conclusions**

Overall, pedagogical research and my own experiences suggest that offering students the challenge of self-directed learning, when that challenge is well scaffolded with guidance and opportunities to try, fail, and try again, promotes student engagement, ownership of learning, the development of a skill set, and movement away from passive learning as part of a mastery pedagogy. Engaging in the process of self-directed learning is not without risk, however, as occasional students suffer from the negligence of their peers and others may well argue that they are not learning because their learning is less from overt instruction. By the time presentation grades actually counted, most of the groups had moved into B-grade and A-grade territory; their interrogations of documents got them into all kinds of interesting questions about power, gender, social constructions, and motivations. They began to draw parallels between what they did in class and what they did elsewhere, whether it was interrogating what they saw in the media or approaching their own work differently. One student, for example, eagerly told me that over the course of the term, her MCAT (the Medical College Admission Test) scores had gone up significantly, a change she attributed to having a better eye for reading and analyzing documents quickly. I was so thrilled by the general course results that I presented the revision and results both at my university and at the Conference for College Composition and Communication in Tampa Bay, Florida in March 2015.

Despite the many successes, however, the course wasn't a complete triumph. Particularly troubling to me were the experiences of students whose groups splintered, and the students' repeated insistence that they'd feel better about the experience at large if they could have occasional lectures or group discussions, so they'd all feel like they were on the same proverbial page to start. I attempted to tackle these problems in a revised course during the Spring semester immediately following my Fall experiment, but that course's results were confirmation of my original vision—not of changes.

In Spring 2015, I taught another mid-level course, American Civil Rights Movements, and I set it up akin to the Fall course, but with some significant differences. Units were no longer two days apiece, but three—day one, we’d do something as a large class; day two, the students would work on their presentations; and day three, they would present. Some of the students in the class had been there in HIST 247, and because my assistant, Tracie Romanik, was not free, another tutor who had taken the fall course, Betsy Marone, came in her stead.

Though it had its moments, the course was something of a bust. Part of this might have had to do with student chemistry; part of it might rest in rose-colored glasses when I looked back at the Fall, causing me to forget the challenges faced in that class; and part of it might have been the brutal New England winter that year that led to several cancelled classes, but it largely had to do with too much interference by me. Because of the three-day units—a beast to organize in a twice-a-week class, particularly with numerous snow days—the students once again looked principally to me as the giver of information and became less reliant on themselves and their peers. Every first day of a unit, I’d offer a lecture, show a video, or we would have a group discussion of an article or chapter; for many students, they saw this interference as getting the “right” information and struggled to get past the idea that history was more than a binary right/wrong dynamic, making them much more uncertain about their group efforts. To make matters worse, our whole-class discussions of sources were largely unsuccessful because their rarity allowed for little dynamic to build and their frequency minimized small- and large-group bonding outside of the professor’s influence.

One of the most delightful and terrifying elements of a student-based mastery pedagogy is that you as instructor control just the set-up—your control of subsequent variables is low. The reward in relinquishing that control, however, benefits everyone. Seeing students learn to wrestle with content, to apply a historical question, to look at primary documents and secondary sources with a critical eye, and to put the pieces together for a weekly presentation was a remarkable demonstration in how much students can accomplish when you challenge them with high expectations and a try-and-try-again format. The routine domination of the class by one or two students vanishes, and the quiet students find their voices, even if

they shake while doing it. As for me, I learned not just about new possibilities in teaching, but—as much as it sounds like a cliché—a great deal from my students, particularly in terms of resiliency. The tenacity of my “herstorians” is a lesson even professionals can use.

## Notes

The course transformation and this article would not be possible without the 2013-2014 Reasoning Across the Disciplines pedagogical study group, led by Dr. Steven Pearlman and Dave Carillo. Thanks to Carol Millard, Eric Chen, Jesse Lile, Doreen Szollosi, Kim Joerg, and especially fellow historian Meg Monaghan. Non-RADicals who have also helped with this project include Irene Reed, Benjamin Woodard, and Libby Bischof. Writing is much better when surrounded by friends.

1. Portions of this paper were presented at the Conference for College Composition and Communication, Tampa Bay, Florida, March 18-21, 2015. Quotes from Jennifer Cote, ““HIST 247 Evaluation #2,” University of Saint Joseph, West Hartford, Connecticut, Fall 2014.

2. Jennifer Cote, “HIST 247 Evaluation #3,” University of Saint Joseph, West Hartford, Connecticut, Fall 2014.

3. As an example of what I mean by professor-centered education: during class, I’d generally stay at the front of the room with students arrayed either in rows or a circle, depending on the space, and I’d ask questions intended to stimulate discussion. Quiet days were difficult, as the numbers alone couldn’t make up for hot weather, absent talkers, midterm season, or the inevitable weariness of the end of the term. There were always a few students who barely spoke at all, despite my nudges and direct questioning. We would occasionally have a robust conversation, but those days were more rare than simple question-and-answer sessions.

4. Chauncey Monte-Sano, “Beyond Reading Comprehension and Summary: Learning to Read and Write in History by Focusing on Evidence, Perspective, and Interpretation,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 41, no. 2 (March 2011): 212-249.

5. *The Midwife’s Tale*, dir. Richard P. Rogers, *The American Experience*, 88 mins. (1998; Alexandria, VA: PBS Home Video, 1998), DVD.

6. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Signs* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1975): 1-29.

7. James Paul Gee, *Situated Language and Learning: A Critique of Traditional Schooling* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 13.

8. Gee noted that “deep learning works better as a cultural process than as an instructed process.” Because “most humans are not, in fact, very good at learning via overt instruction,” he encourages thinking about fields of study much like a video game. Players rarely read the manual to learn how to play; they begin to play and learn organically as they go. Gee, 13.

9. Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (London, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 3-4.

10. Many of these items can be found online, but some were books or articles I originally sourced from databases like JSTOR. By then retrieving materials through their own university accounts, the students furthermore practice technological research skills and familiarize themselves with library resources. Kathy Peiss, “Charity Girls and City Pleasures,” *OAH Magazine of History* 18, no. 4 (July 2004): 14-16; Maureen A. Flanagan, “Gender and Urban Political Reform: The City Club and the Woman’s City Club of Chicago in the Progressive Era,” *American Historical Review* 95, no. 4, (October 1990): 1032-1050; Leslie A. Schwalm, “Sweet Dreams of Freedom: Freedwomen’s Reconstruction of Life and Labor in the Low Country South Carolina,” *Journal of Women’s History* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 9-39.

11. Sara Evans, *Born for Liberty* (New York: Free Press, 1997).

12. Graham Parton and Richard Bailey, “Problem-Based Learning: A Critical Rationalist Perspective,” *London Review of Education* 6 no. 3 (November 2008): 282.

13. Fear score of 5.92; confidence score 4.67.

14. Figures and quotes from Jennifer Cote, “HIST 247 Evaluation #1,” University of Saint Joseph, West Hartford, Connecticut, Fall 2014.

15. Difficulty score regarding other history classes was 8.25; regarding other courses of the same level across campus, 7.58.

16. Score on perception of class as rewarding was 5.

17. “HIST 247 Evaluation #1.”

18. Work by James Gee on reading suggests this line of thought: students considered poor students and weak readers—students who allegedly are not able or willing to learn—are in fact remarkable learners when the topics are those they care significantly about. He points to *Pokémon* as an example. *Pokémon* features a very complex world of changeable characters, all of whom have different and evolving features and names. Children, however, often learn this system’s intricacies and can offer analysis of its elements with ease because learning it was meaningful to them. Gee, 9.

19. Ann E. Berthoff, *The Making of Meaning: Metaphors, Models, and Maxims for Writing Teachers* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1981), 5.

20. “HIST 247 Evaluation #1.”

21. This has been my observation, but has also been substantiated by numerous scholars, including Chauncey Monte-Sano; Roy Rosenzweig, “How Americans Use and Think About the Past,” in *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History: International Perspectives*, ed. Peter N. Stearns, Peter Seixas, and Sam Wineburg (New York: New York University Press, 2000); and Peter Seixas, “Popular Film and Young People’s Understanding of the History of Native

American-White Relations,” *The History Teacher* 26, no. 3 (May 1993): 351-370.

22. I should note that the last survey, because they took it in class rather than at home, had eighteen respondents, a change that may have impacted the numbers a bit.


23. “HIST 247 Evaluation #3.”

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

## Appendix A

## Course Syllabus for HIST 247: Women in American History

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">American Women's History</p>		
	<p><b>Instructor</b></p> <p>Dr. Jennifer Cote Lynch 105 X5281 Office Hours T/Th 11-12:15</p>	<p><b>Course</b></p> <p>HIST 247 TTh 12:30-1:45 Lynch 107 Meets AE and WS gen eds</p>

### When you were in school, how did you learn American history? Whose history was it?

Did you do a lot of memorization? Learn a great deal about a fairly limited number of the movers and shakers in our nation, most of them white men?

In this class, we'll be turning that approach to history over as we look at it through the lens of women's experiences. While you'll learn a great deal about our foremothers in this course, you'll also be developing historical skills that will allow you to read and think critically about primary documents—the backbone of the historian's craft—and situate them in context.

Because women's experiences were and are not monolithic, we will emphasize the differences between them, differences of class, race, and culture, and the ways in which the concept of gender has changed over time. We will explore the political and social structures of women's lives, including patriarchy, slavery, marriage, work and family, and

explaining the development and shifting nature of such institutions.

You'll be doing most of the driving of this class, and you'll be able to use both the content and the skills you learn here in your daily life, regardless of your primary field of study. A critical eye on our everyday lives is an important skill to cultivate.



Top, Young flappers in the 1920s

Right, Ida B. Wells



## Course Objective

To construct historical knowledge through historical inquiry and interpretation.

(That's really the heart of our enterprise. Sure, there are steps along the way to get there, but this is our main purpose and goal.)

## Course Methods

This course asks you to take the lead in your education on a daily basis. Our class is an inquiry-based course through which you'll gain historical knowledge and skills. We'll use the first 3 weeks of class to learn some historical methods and approaches; we'll also use that time to form groups around key guiding or interpretive questions for the term.

After the first few weeks, every week will have a distinct unit with a particular pile of documents. Your job is to read these documents and begin to understand and interpret them. As we'll cover in the early days of class, you might often have more questions about these documents than understanding—that's ok!—and you'll work on contextualizing

your understanding by reading and discussing secondary, scholarly works that will be on Blackboard or in the library. You'll write short papers on several of these.

You'll do the document and source reading prior to class on Tuesday, which will be devoted to working in groups. On Tuesday your group can work on translating those documents (sometimes the past feels like it's in a foreign language), digging into your scholarly material, and addressing the group's key question.

On Thursday, each group will present its argument—its interpretation of the documents—according to its key question, to the class. These discussion points should open up a broad

conversation about both the week's historical content but also philosophical questions embedded in the act of interpretation. I encourage you to critique and question each other's interpretations.

The idea is to develop a critical thinking skill set that includes the ability to read closely, contextualize and understand documents, and to interpret them using a guiding question as framework. These skills translate well beyond historical study and are useful in most walks of life.

As the semester progresses, you'll gain confidence in your skills and begin to apply them to a larger project—you will plan and take an oral history and then use that oral history as your primary document for a final paper. Essentially, you'll be doing on your own what



**Zitkala-Sa, early 20th century. Zitkala-Sa or Red Bird was a Dakota woman who wrote several works, including music, on her conflicted identity as an indigenous American.**

**If you have special needs.** you should see **Disabilities Services** as soon as possible. They can help you with any problems you are having, and will aid you in forming a plan and getting in touch with your professors if, for example, you need extra time. Calling the coordinator promptly will aid you greatly in your college career. The office can be reached at x5428.

**For writing assistance,** the **Center for Academic Excellence (CAE)** provides a range of services such as tutoring, editing, assistance with paper formats, and help with study skills. Keeping in touch with the CAE can yield bountiful results! It is located in the library, and the phone number there is x5514.

**Keep in touch with history program on Facebook:**  
<https://www.facebook.com/USJhist>  
[ory](http://ory)

you have been doing in a group all term: crafting an interpretation of your oral history, using contextualizing secondary sources, and framing that interpretation with your guiding question. We'll talk about this project more during the semester.

### So, you want to know what you'll be graded on.

A reasonable request. Here's how the course will work:

Development of the **guiding question** 10%

I'll be handing out a grade rubric/feedback for your group's interpretation each week. Because the idea here is to build your skill set, I assume few of you have those skills really refined coming in, and I expect most of the groups won't do very well for the first few weeks. And that's fine—you'll fail forward and learn from the experience. I'll keep track of those grades, but **only the last two will count toward your final grade.** 25%

**Participation** refers specifically to what you do for others. Do you offer feedback and critique on Thursdays? Did you offer a thoughtful workshoping of a peer's final paper? 15%

**Five individual précis.** These are 2-page essays that

provide a synopsis of a historian's argument in one particular piece, followed by a brief criticism. You'll write a précis for five different secondary sources across the term. You can choose which ones to write about, but we'll construct a calendar of due dates to keep you on top of things. 20%

### Oral history project.

This is the culmination of your work this term. You'll need an idea of who you'll interview and what kinds of questions you'll ask her by mid-semester; Thanksgiving break is a good time to conduct your interviews.

Once you have your interview, you will use it as your main primary source for a paper. The paper will function much as your group discussions/Thursday interpretations have run all semester—you'll use your key question as your interpretive framework of your documents (the oral history). You'll need to ground that history in supportive context, which is why the project requires **THREE** scholarly sources of your choice. Other primary documents are not required.

The paper should be 8-10 pages long and will be graded using the CORE rubric.

Two copies of first drafts are due in the last Tuesday of class (12/2), and you will peer workshop the following Thursday. Final drafts will be due during finals week, and will be accompanied by an oral presentation. 30%





**"Matoska als Rebecca, converted and baptized in the Christian faith, and wife to the worthy Mr. John Rolfe."**

Pocahontas, age 21 in 1619, as interpreted by Simon van de Passe

Make sure your Blackboard account is fully functional. Most of our materials will be online, where you can easily access, print, and do quick, further research on them.

You will also use Blackboard for paper submission.

If you do not know how to log onto Blackboard or if it is malfunctioning, contact the Help Desk, x5310.

#### Keep in touch with history program on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/USJhistory>

## Let's set out a few ground rules.

### Academic integrity

Your student handbook has the finer details of the USJ policy. Students who pass off other people's work as their own (this includes cutting & pasting from the internet as well as borrowing your friend's paper), who do not cite quotations and data, who cheat on exams in any and all ways (cell phones, cheat sheets, asking peers for questions ahead of time, and so on) are in violation of this policy. These students may fail the assignment and be subject to the academic integrity procedures outlined in the handbook. If you are concerned that you might be plagiarizing but aren't certain, do ask—it's always better to find out early than the hard way later.

### Other Points of Interest

**Attendance** is crucial to our class as it is based heavily on discussion and group dynamics, both of which disappear without your attendance and your participation. You are allotted 2 absences before your grade is impacted via your participation score.

**Devices** are permitted in this class as you can use them to access the readings, rather than print them all out. There are two caveats, however: your average smart phone is a terrible size

for this kind of work, so unless you lack other options, leave those SILENCED in your bag. Second, if you are using your device for goofing off (I can only imagine the temptation), your ability to use it in class will be revoked. Out of respect for your peers and for me, use your device(s) in a responsible manner.

Make sure you **back up your work**. We all learn this the hard way from time to time, but for your own sanity at least email yourself key stuff you're working on so you don't lose it in a hard drive failure. Extensions are not granted for computer error.

I encourage you to email me, but take care in doing so—**eliminating casual text-speak** is a good habit to get into, particularly as you approach the world of work down the road.

Also, make a point of **checking your email** at least once a day—I use Blackboard to send you important, time-sensitive information.

If your **group has an internal problem**, handle it among yourselves first and come to me second. Learning to work out group difficulties is an important part of adulthood, but if you need a mediator I can help.

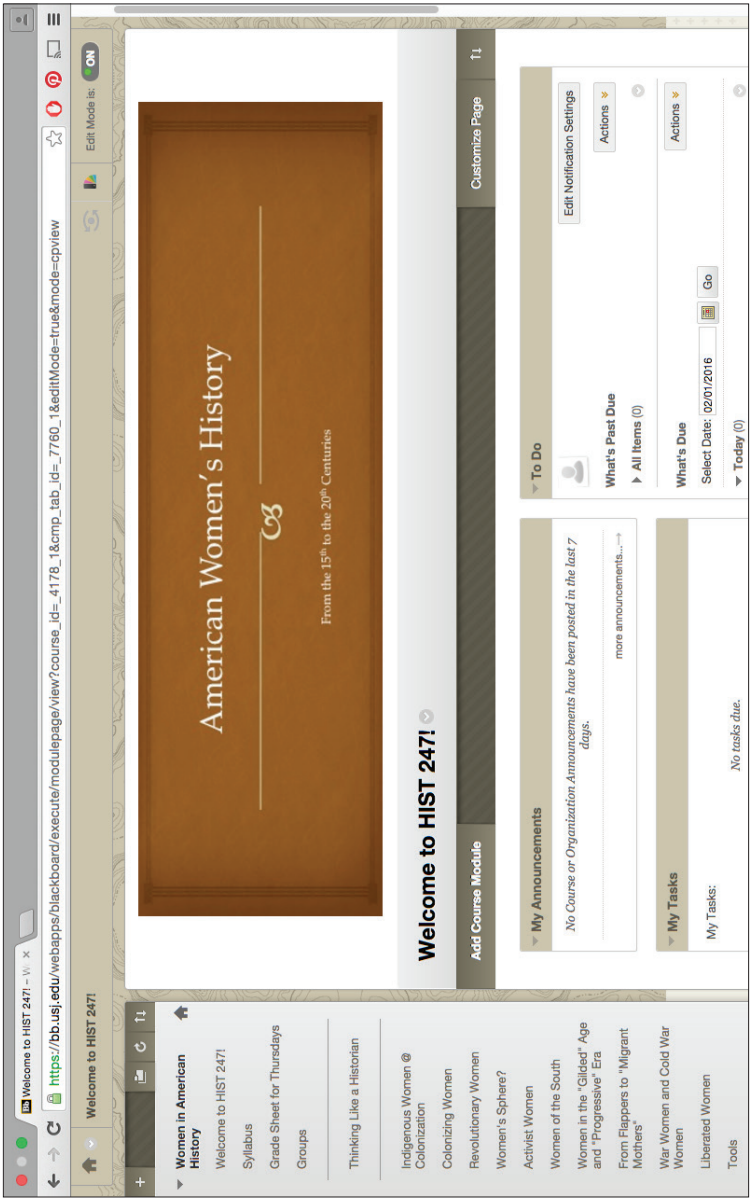
## Course Schedule

8/26. Course Introduction	10/21-23. Women of the South Evans, chapter 5
8/28. Discussion: Clara Sue Kidwell, "Indian Women as Cultural Mediators"	10/28-30. Women of the "Gilded" Age and "Progressive" Eras Evans, chapter 6
9/2. Discussion: Carroll Smith Rosenberg, "Female World of Love and Ritual;" primary documents, given in class	11/4-6. New Women Evans, chapters 7 + 8
9/4. Start video, "Midwife's Tale"	11/11-13. "Migrant Mothers" and "Rosie the Riveters" Evans, chapter 9 + 10
9/9. Finish video and discuss	11/18-20. Cold War women Evans, chapter 11
9/11. Guiding question day. Read Margaret D. Jacobs, "Getting Out of a Rut," for today	11/25-27. Tuesday the 25 <sup>th</sup> is a wiggle room day for days that run over earlier in the term. Thursday the 27 <sup>th</sup> is Thanksgiving. Should we not need the day, we'll use Tuesday as a work-from-home day.
9/16-18. Indigenous women at colonization Evans, chapter 1	
9/23-25. Colonizing women Evans, chapter 2	
9/30-10/2. Revolutionary women Evans, chapter 3	12/2. Drafts of projects due 12/4. Peer Workshop.
10/7-9. Women's Sphere?	Final papers will be due on our designated final exam day. You will give an oral presentation that day as well. The rubric for the presentations will be distributed during the semester.
10/14-16. Activist Women Evans, chapter 4	

*Sara Evans' **Born for Liberty** is our only required book. It's a very general history of American women's history, and I advise you to read it with some speed. It provides really important background information; you'll need that background information to provide context for the rest our materials (all very specific and particular), so reading it is not optional.*

Appendix B

Course Management Page for  
HIST 247: Women in American History



HIST 247: Women in American History homepage on Blackboard. Note the units on the sidebar.

## Appendix C

**Self-Rubric for Critical Thinking**  
**HIST 247: Women in American History**

HIST 247 Super Fun Thursday Grade Sheet

Group:

Categories—Are you ready? 40 points total

Preparedness	_____	(10 pts.)
Adherence to Question	_____	(10 pts.)
Understanding of Content	_____	(10 pts.)
Clarity of Presentation	_____	(10 pts.)

ALIVE—What's your interpretation, does it make sense, and can you back it up? 60 points total

Assumptions	-
Limitations	-
Implications	-
Validity	-
Evidence	-

ALIVE \_\_\_\_\_ (60 pts.)

## Appendix D

**Student Evaluation Questions for  
HIST 247: Women in American History**

## HIST 247 Evaluation

On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is much less and 10 is much more:

1. How much effort have you been putting into this class, **relative to other classes of similar level?** (i.e., 200-level courses) \_\_\_\_\_
2. How much effort have you been putting into this class, **relative to other history classes?** (“n/a” is an option) \_\_\_\_\_
3. How much effort have you been putting into this class, **relative to your expectations before the course began?** \_\_\_\_\_

*Briefly explain your answers to questions 1, 2, and 3.*

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4. How much critical thinking have you been doing, **relative to other classes of similar level?** \_\_\_\_\_
5. How much critical thinking have you been doing, **relative to other history classes?** (“n/a” is an option) \_\_\_\_\_
6. How much critical thinking have you been doing, **relative to your expectations before the course began?** \_\_\_\_\_

*Briefly explain your answers to questions 4, 5, and 6.*

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7. How much ownership do you feel you have over your learning, **relative to other classes of similar level?** \_\_\_\_\_
8. How much ownership do you feel you have over your learning, **relative to other history classes?** (“n/a” is an option) \_\_\_\_\_
9. How much ownership do you feel you have over your learning, **relative to your expectations before the course began?** \_\_\_\_\_

*Briefly explain your answers to questions 7, 8, and 9.*

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10. How capable do you feel engaging resources in other classes as a result of this class? \_\_\_\_\_

*Briefly explain your answer:*

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11. How active a role do you feel you have in this class, **compared to prior experiences in history classes**? (“n/a” is an option) \_\_\_\_\_

*Briefly explain your answer:*

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12. How empowered do you feel to construct your own understanding of the world in this class, **relative to other classes**? \_\_\_\_\_

*Briefly explain your answer:*

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13. How would you qualify your engagement with the reading, **relative to other classes**? \_\_\_\_\_

*Briefly explain your answer:*

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14. How do you prefer this format to a lecture-based format? \_\_\_\_\_

*Briefly explain your answer:*

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15. How do you prefer this format to a full-class discussion based format? (i.e., always having a big group discussion) \_\_\_\_\_

*Briefly explain your answer:*

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On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is the least and 10 is the most:

16. How fearful about our format were you when we began this class?  
\_\_\_\_\_
17. How fearful are you now? \_\_\_\_\_
18. How apprehensive were you that the format wouldn't work when we began our class? \_\_\_\_\_
19. Where do you rank your apprehension now? \_\_\_\_\_

*Briefly explain your answers to questions 17, 18, and 19.*

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On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is the easiest and 10 is the hardest:

20. How difficult did you find this course **relative to other classes**?  
\_\_\_\_\_
21. How difficult did you find this course **relative to other history classes**? \_\_\_\_\_

On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is the most and 10 is the least:

22. How rewarding did you find this class **relative to other classes**?  
\_\_\_\_\_
23. How rewarding did you find this class **relative to other history classes**? \_\_\_\_\_

On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is decreased significantly and 10 is increased significantly:

24. How has your interest in history changed as a result of this class?  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Briefly explain your answers to questions 20 through 24.*

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