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TEACHING NARRATIVE

Conceptualization of Teaching

I equate the student/teacher relationship as a reciprocal one. It is the teacher's responsibility to impart knowledge, however, the teacher also benefits from the background and knowledge that the students bring. To this end, I am open-minded and respectful of various opinions and interpretations presented in class, as I seek to continue to grow as a scholar and as a person. Such a social contract cements bonds as students feel comfortable conveying their interpretations in class. It also places responsibility on the student in terms of understanding how they negotiate the classroom setting. This team initiative, which is similar to the relationship between a coach and an athlete, is crucial for the classes' success. Students therefore feel invested in the course and learn to articulate their arguments in a receptive and nurturing environment. Like Paolo Friere, I encourage my students to think critically, and use what they learn in the classroom to make an impact outside of it. I transform my classroom into Africa, through lecture and the integration of clips that take students to places we discuss. They get to meet South African activists or experience how slavery still impacts Africa today. I pose questions to students that are open ended allowing them to marshal available evidence into a concise lucid argument. In structuring student/teacher relationships using reciprocity, I cut across gender, age, race and class distinctions by being fair and judicious in my assessment of students' work and by encouraging them to speak in a collegial environment. My philosophy is that learning is an interactive process, not only through the visual mediums or the historical documents used, but also through the conversations that emerge allowing both the learner and the teacher to engage each other in a meaningful dialogue where various interpretations are presented and respected. In fact students often comment, "I could have my own opinions without feeling embarrassed. I just had to defend my answers." It is these kinds of statements that contribute to students, about twenty of them from my tenure here thus far, to taking more than one class with me.

My undergraduate courses consist of lectures, homework assignments, research papers, historiographical reviews (graduates) and discussion sessions. I teach the following courses: HST 150 African Culture and Civilization, HST 285 Africa Since 1800, HST 385 African Liberation in the African Diaspora, HST 455 Oral History, and HST 486 History of South Africa. My goals are: 1) to discuss and analyze major themes in African history; 2) to expose students to the geography of Africa; 3) to challenge prevailing myths and stereotypes about Africa; 4) to expose students to Africa using lectures, films, documentaries, and class discussions; and 5) to challenge students to think critically. All of these goals help me to define

the trajectory for the semester as well as further hone my skills as an Africanist. In my courses, students are eager and willing to learn about Africa, which inspires me to work harder to enliven the history that I present. My significant contributions comprise the ability to get students talking about theories and the literature in unique and intriguing ways. Sometimes, they transform into historical actors and have to figure out how they would govern an African colony. Besides devising administrative policy, they also have to explain their rationales for their selection. This exercise challenges them to make arguments, and to debate in a scholarly manner Africa's glorious, tumultuous and inspiring past and its riveting present. As well as making comparisons with broader historical debates and events throughout the world, students apply this same discerning eye to what transpired in Africa. An intra-comparative perspective allows students to see a holistic picture of Africa, permits them to understand Africa from a continental perspective as well as a global one, and also helps them to identify its nuances in terms of region, gender, sexuality, religion, politics and culture among other topics. With this approach, Africa becomes demystified, tangible, and relatable to historical places throughout Africa and the world at large.

Transmission of Material

I use power point software as a visual aid. Power point allows students to think about various concepts introduced throughout the lectures. With outlines given before each lecture, students see the trajectory of the discussion and my goals for a particular lecture. I devised my courses to present a thematic interpretation of the African continent from its development in ancient times to the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994. The goal is to illustrate major debates in African history and to show how these differing scholarly interpretations play a role in coloring our impression of Africa. In learning about ancient Africa, students understand that Africans had extensive kingdoms, were part of the world trade market as places such as China, and India served as trading partners, and that they developed universities that rivaled those in European capitals, yet we know little about their impact. Such an approach solidifies the notion that Africa developed independently and had established political and social institutions prior to European arrival. Students learn that once Europeans penetrated the African continent, divided up its regions, and split ethnic groups apart, the image of Africa changed to support the prevailing racial ideology of the time. Through power point, photographs, and recordings of oral history, students gain exposure to Africa's vast continent and learn about its historical processes. The addition of Power Point is based on suggestions by students in their evaluations. I am finding that this technique works, however, I must limit the information that I put on slides so that students listen to more of what I am saying than writing everything on the screen. I also speak slower, so that they can absorb the concepts, the narratives, and the arguments.

Other strategies for conveying information includes the showing of videos. I have shown clips of the Atlantic slave trade, ancient African kingdoms, the Rwandan genocide and

various depictions of apartheid South Africa among other issues discussed throughout the courses I offer. In one class, we watched the “Swahili Coast” which is part of Harvard University Professor Henry Louis Gates’ “Wonders of the African World” series. This video reinforced what was discussed in lecture while also giving students an opportunity to analyze Gates’ methodology, his audience and the various themes that the work presented. Students commented on his biases, as his story analyzed the politics of identity and difference in the Swahili Coast where there are descendants of Persians, Arabs and indigenous Africans who intermarried. Some of his interviewees deny their African heritage and privilege their Arab and Persian descent. Students discerned that Gates had preconceived notions about the Swahili people and that he based his interviewing skills on leading questions. A discussion about the methodology of oral history ensued with some students collegially disagreeing while articulating lucid arguments to support their stances. Although 108 people were in this course, the discussion was quite lively with students zeroing in on the myths that Gates not only purported about Africans but also about Americans.

I further encourage dialogues and debates with an in-class cartoon assignment. I lecture on the Scramble for Africa and discuss how European nations partitioned Africa into different spheres of influence. I then ask students how they would visualize this historical moment. Students produced works that detailed the following: the depiction of the Scramble like musical chairs; viewing Africa as a piece of pie or cake with different European powers taking a chunk, or a board game akin to Monopoly and many other creations. After interpreting these drawings, I show cartoons produced by professionals and how they envisioned the Scramble. In many ways their in-class assignment echoed themes and approaches of the professional artists we examined. After observing the various drawings, students realized that they could have different historical interpretations even though they were analyzing the same topic. Because I divide my courses thematically and use case studies from Kenya, South Africa, Algeria, Nigeria, and Ghana among other places on the continent, I paint a transnational and comparative canvas about Africa and its many historical mutations. Students understand African history as a holistic experience that is not limited by its geographical boundaries or the constraints of its politics. Besides encouraging discussion, students are assessed by their written performances. Students choose from two essay questions worth 60 points, and four out of six identifications worth a total of 40 points. A sample test appears below:

ESSAY: Pick one (1) of the two essays below and explain it as fully as you can. Be sure to answer each sub-question. Make sure you provide specific detail (such as names, organizations, and concepts when appropriate) to illustrate each question. Be sure to incorporate lectures, class discussions, films and readings. Africa was a continent that experienced major upheaval when European powers decided to carve the continent into specific spheres of influence. What was this process called, how did it begin, and what were some of the results? How do scholars such as Robinson and Gallagher, Stengers and Turner explain the occurrence of Africa’s partition? Which author do you think is more credible and why?

Identifications: Be sure to answer who, what, where, when, and most importantly, why. What is historically significant about the subject? Why should historians care? What is it about this person/place/thing that was so significant?

Examples:

Cecil Rhodes Quinine Lord Frederick Lugard cash crop Dr. David Livingston Nemesis

New Courses Accepted

I have introduced four new courses to the curriculum: HST 285 Africa since 1800, HST 385 African Liberation in the African Diaspora, HST 455 Introduction to Oral History and HST 485 Women and Gender in African Societies. These courses expand the curriculum on African history in the following ways: they highlight the complex nature of migration, gender, political ideologies, and social movements among other key topics that connect Africa to the global transnational world that it has been a part of since the dawn of time; they provide a different lens through which to discuss resistance, gender and other age old topics; they also allow students to be a participant in the making of African history. This is particularly true with the Oral History course where students focus on the theme of African immigrants in Nebraska and they conduct their own interviews with informants they have recognized and have consented to having their words and even their images recorded and produced. With these courses, I see the importance of giving students the intellectual, factual and analytical skills so that they may further engage with Africa through participating in cultural activities in Lincoln, Omaha or other places in the country, and also so that they can also experience Africa by studying abroad in one of its fifty-three countries.

HST 285 Africa since 1800 explores major themes and debates in African history beginning with the settlement of Liberia to apartheid's demise in 1990. The course will cover these topics: the imposition of colonial rule, different types of colonial rule, theories of underdevelopment, and the effects of colonialism, nationalism, independence movements, and decolonization. Students will study these themes as they relate to case studies representing regions in North Africa, West Africa, southern Africa and Central Africa. This approach provides the opportunity for students to learn about various countries, their leaders and the strategies they employed during the liberation struggles. Featured leaders include these individuals: Ken Saro Wiwa (Nigeria), Jomo Kenyatta (Kenya), Ben Bella (Algeria), the Aba women (Nigeria), and various personalities from South Africa. That said, the overarching objective of this course is to expose students to Africa's complex and paradoxical history while also stimulating interest for students to pursue further study beyond this fifteen-week course.

HST 385 African Liberation in the African Diaspora will explore various notions of African Diaspora from theory to applied case studies. In this course I will underscore the significance of African Diasporic experiences not only in Europe, and the United States but also those Diasporic communities that develop on Africa's vast continent. A class of this kind will

highlight the complex nature of migration, gender, political ideologies, and social movements among other key topics which will form the basis of this course. This course will fill a departmental need in terms of highlighting the Atlantic World, Caribbean history, Black Europe and the Black Pacific to underscore how these geographic regions shaped notions of Blackness and Diasporic consciousness.

HST 485 Women and Gender in African Societies will subvert “traditional” western conceptions of thinking about women in Africa. The course seeks to examine the following questions: Does work by Africans and Africanist scholars challenge prevailing themes and depictions of African women; how should the west discuss women and gender in African contexts; in what ways does patriarchy play a role in fashioning or not fashioning constructions of femininity and masculinity. Readings include theoretical material that covers North Africa, Southern Africa, West Africa and East Africa. Through a variety of books, films, and oral interviews, we will explore how the contemporary women’s movement has emerged within Africa and why it is important to explore its relationship to social change.

Lastly, I am currently writing a proposal and formulating an itinerary for the department’s first study abroad program to South Africa during the pre-session May 13-June 10, 2013. This course will allow students to immerse in South African culture as we will attend church, visit historical sites, attend plays, and other cultural activities, in addition to learning languages. Students will also experience homestays where they stay with a family in Alexandra and further learn about that township’s culture and history. Through an invitation from Dr. Mark Mathabane, author of *Kaffir Boy*, students will have an opportunity to participate in the making of the film, *Kaffir Boy: There Lies Hope*. In addition to that, students will perform community service in Alexandra at elderly homes, soup kitchens, women’s shelters, and at the Community Resource Center. Through these avenues, students will gain the following: invaluable contacts, the opportunity to visit and see different townships so that they can compare and contrast, make a documentary of their experience, engage with the Alexandran and the university community in Johannesburg. For their assignments, students will keep a journal that they then will turn into an article length manuscript for possible publication in an anthology. It is in this way that I hope to get students to start thinking about the professionalization of History as a discipline and as a career. Thus, these courses will enable me to enhance my teaching, further cement my style, and provide an interactive experience for me as well as the students that I teach.