

Teaching Philosophy

My teaching philosophy stems from a sincere belief that an understanding of how men and women struggled through events and issues of the past can help orient present and future action. Many of today's issues—racial diversity, the environment, the conflicting demands of social order and individual freedom, the proper size and role of government—have been confronted in the past. Critical and intelligent study of the others' successes and failures in dealing with these issues may help today's citizens make informed choices for the future.

I am often disturbed about the lack of basic historical literacy among high school and college graduates. This concern will shape my teaching strategy for survey courses. Unfortunately, there tends to be a flawed assumption among many college students that history is too boring and not important or relevant to the present. By utilizing interesting and enjoyable readings, as well as a conscious effort to include humorous or bizarre events and personalities, I attempt to bring excitement to the lecture hall. My goal is that the excitement generated will transform into a genuine interest in the field. The profession itself is important to my teaching philosophy. All too often students complete a survey course with knowledge about the past but have learned little about the field of history. I believe, even at the survey level, students should be introduced to the basics of historiography. A fundamental understanding of how historians have interpreted the past will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the discipline and a greater appreciation of the profession.

I am aware that over the long term, students will remember only a small fraction of the factual knowledge imparted to them in class. This is understandable. My aim is not to overload students with facts and dates. Instead, I seek to teach students how to critically think through a problem confronting a society. Whether this problem be social, political, economic, or cultural, the ability to analyze and draw intelligent and informed conclusions is crucial to everyday life. It is important that courses seem interesting and relevant to students so that they gain a lifelong appreciation for history. If students begin a habit of reading and thinking historically, I will have accomplished my goal of improving their historical literacy and encouraging more informed citizenship.