# Teaching Philosophy

Scholarly inquiry in the humanities puts us in touch with our
own humanity. It allows us to investigate our identities by exploring what Sam
Wineburg calls the ?familiar and the strange? in order to understand our own
position in the world. It imparts the wisdom to evaluate the ideas, people, and
events in the present. I believe the skills learned within the framework of
historical thinking and digital literacy offer a solid knowledge base upon
which students can begin to connect the past to the present. The ability to
question, contextualize, and evaluate conflicting evidence?essential to
historical thinking?helps students form and communicate their own perspectives;
the ability to do this work in the context of a digital medium is essential to
modern life. Using a student-centered, praxis-based approach, I facilitate an
inclusive environment designed to help students learn these skills as they work
through scholarly problems and questions for themselves, either in groups or
individually. Rooted in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, all of my
pedagogical strategies are dedicated to teaching students how to apply the
tools and skills they learned in the classroom to their needs as future
scholars, employees, and humans in ways that will remain with them long after
they leave my classroom.

Across all of my teaching areas, whether survey, seminar, or
method, I organize my courses to teach the core skills of historical thinking
and digital literacy, regardless of the content focus. In my classes, students
are historians and agents of social change. They collaborate and produce
authentic work, often in public through a digital medium, creating real history
projects or working to address real social issues. To accomplish this, I
incorporate core critical thinking and applied skills into our exercises and
class discussions as a means to answer questions about the past and the
present. By blending skills and content, I am able to engage students with the
topic or problem in front of us in a more authentic way, which invests them in
the work. For example, to help facilitate a discussion about connections
between Jim Crow segregation and the Black Lives Matter movement, students in
my Introduction to the Digital Past course mapped the crimes that occurred
during the Chicago Race Riot of 1919. Using an open data set and original
research, students collaborated in groups to put the riot-related homicides in
the context of life in the ?Black Belt? of Chicago. Students visualized data
points, but were also required to find, evaluate, and use often conflicting
sources of information to develop a story of what happened during the riot and
perceptions of the events that followed. This style of multi-step, in-class
research allowed students to develop a vivid picture of de facto
segregation in a Northern city for themselves in a more meaningful way than a
lecture, or even a discussion, could deliver. Furthermore, by asking students
to come to these realizations through their own body of work, as opposed to a
lecture by me, they were able to connect the past to the present for
themselves. My job was then to facilitate a conversation about hierarchies and
social constructions of race throughout American society.

Scaffolded and iterative assignments are key to helping students

succeed in this environment. Frequent, ?smaller-stakes? writing and skills exercises, as well as quizzes, help students process new information or practice new skills that will be required of them later. These types of assignments also allow me to monitor individual progress and intervene if a student starts to fall behind or miss key concepts; and students appreciate the frequent and consistent feedback. These exercises are organized to logically build toward the knowledge and skills needed to complete the more complex, ?high-stakes? midterms and finals that I assign. For example, a student in my Digital Past course may create several practice maps before they analyze one to support their argument in their final research project. These project- or argument-driven assignments require students to showcase their mastery of a body of knowledge and use evidence to communicate their arguments clearly. This combination of assignments allows students to develop a portfolio of their work. Initially, these portfolios may include every practice or written exercise attempted. At the end of the course, I encourage students to curate what they believe to be their best work to be graded. I frequently teach students from a range of majors within the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, and many of my students have expanded upon their course portfolios for use in their own disciplines. Several have shared that they included them as part of their employment or graduate application packages.

Stephane Levesque argues that sophisticated thinking occurs when a student can take information and concepts learned in one setting and apply them to new and unanticipated situations. Historical thinking skills and digital literacy skills help students do just that. In my classrooms, I ensure students learn these important skills through a combination of iterative and complex assignments that are designed to guide them through the process of doing the work that scholars do. Although some students might rather just study for a test, I have found that this type of work gives students a sense of ownership and keeps them engaged in the content long after they leave my classroom.