

PERSONALIZED SYSTEMATIC INSTRUCTION

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"PSI as an Experimental Western Civilization Course"*

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The Keeler Plan of Personalized Systematic Instruction has neither produced revolutionary results nor the elimination of the lecture. As a result of teaching Western Civilization by PSI at Lander College for four and one half years, the use of PSI is advocated in order to help the teacher isolate his own values about history and about teaching and to develop student goals consistent with his own philosophy. PSI is proposed for its liberating effect on teacher and student, because the simplicity of this relationship diffuses to the teacher's lecture courses, and because the results of such experimentation are needed by the educational community if the teaching of history is to continue its ongoing process of evaluation and modification. The original component features of the PSI method (mastery-orientation, individual pacing, printed study guide, student proctors, and occasional motivational lectures) create a teacher-student relationship that produces a specific outcome.

Questions about the lecture method in Western Civilization led to the adoption of PSI. Several basic assumptions existed about the nature of the course: (a) it should be interdisciplinary; (b) terms drawn from the history of various disciplines should fall into periods or units of study; and (c) terms and events considered transitional should be delineated. Problems of testing format, grade inflation, and student procrastination arose during the experimental period.

The PSI experiment demonstrated that statement of broad goals and objectives could improve student-teacher communication. In addition, the PSI courses showed the value of returning test papers as soon as possible to provide "instant feedback" to the students.

*Eds. synopsis.

A review of current literature on PSI indicates a need for more research into the effects of unit-mastery requirements; size of units and number of quizzes; self-pacing; and the use of explicit unit objectives, review units and lectures. The role of proctors in the PSI process needs further evaluation as well.

The use of PSI at Lander Co-lege helped to alleviate some problems in teaching Western Civilization. Student test anxiety was greatly reduced, and students were less frustrated by the large amount of material to be covered. The impatience of brighter students with slower ones was eliminated. Students who have participated in the PSI courses seem to retain more knowledge about general historical movements. On the whole, the experience with PSI at Lander College has been a positive one.