

CONNECTING THE PARTS

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History is by its very nature interdisciplinary. This is so obvious to most historians that we tend to forget that it must sometimes be pointed out to others. As my colleague, Dr. Thomas Keene, has explained elsewhere in this journal, Kennesaw State is in the process of implementing a new core curriculum which emphasizes the connections between core disciplines to a greater degree while making core requirements more rigorous. Under the existing core, as he noted, students had the option of choosing one of two five credit hour courses in the world history sequence (History 111 or History 112) and one of two courses in the U.S. sequence (History 251 or History 252). In considering the revision of the core, the history faculty reached the consensus that a complete survey of both U.S. and world history would better serve our students than simply requiring that they study what happened before or after an arbitrary date.

Our options were limited, however. We could not require that non-majors devote twenty hours of the core to history, and we chose not to attempt a complete survey of either U.S. or world history in a single five hour course. We opted instead to require four new three credit hour courses. History 151 and 152 cover U.S. history from the colonial era to the present and History 205 and 206 cover world history.

In the process of revising the history surveys, we took the opportunity to take a second look at the nature of these courses. In addition to emphasizing the connection between history and other disciplines such as literature, philosophy, and art, a goal established by the Ad Hoc Core Curriculum Committee, we wanted to help our students understand the source of history by using documents to supplement and/or replace the traditional textbook. Doing all this in a three hour course without imposing a five hour workload on our students proved challenging.

I taught the new History 205 course, World History to 1650, during fall quarter 1991, and have had the chance to review the student evaluations, so I have some idea what worked and what did not. Many of my examples will be drawn from western civilization.

In a sense, I am not doing anything in History 206, the new three hour survey, that I did not do in its five hour predecessor, History 111. I have always used documents, and I have always drawn examples from art and literature. Philosophy, both western and eastern, has always been standard fare for my world

civilization students. The change is one of emphasis. In the past, students were not required to purchase a book of documents to accompany their texts, and there was little effort to coordinate the topics covered in the various core subjects. This change of emphasis, we believe, will not only help our students understand the discipline of history but also help them to recognize that the core is an integrated body of knowledge, not an unrelated and meaningless series of rites of passage they must endure before they can get on with "real education" in their major fields.

Our closest relationship in creating the new History 205 has been with the department of English. In a series of meetings with our colleagues, we agreed that no one should be compelled to teach the course exactly the same as everyone else - each of us has his/her own strengths and areas of expertise - but that certain key areas should be dealt with in both the world history and world literature surveys. For 205, which covers world history to 1650, these included: Periclean Athens, Eastern Chou China, Gupta India, the High Middle Ages, and the Italian Renaissance. The idea was to have certain common points through which each class could reinforce the idea of connection, and to incorporate the use of primary sources.

I have found that there are a number of ways to emphasize the importance of primary sources. One of the most obvious is in-class discussion of selections assigned from the documents collection. References to assigned documents in the course of lectures/discussions also remind students of the connections between primary sources and the topic being covered: "Pan Chao's 'Lessons for Women,' which was part of your reading assignment for today, shows how Confucian ideas influenced everyday life as well as political theory." References to works of literature which students have encountered in high school or which they will be reading in their English classes are often effective means of illustrating historical points. Chaucer, for example, familiar to many students from high school, clearly illustrates the anti-clericism of the late 14th century, and when they are reminded of him, students not only understand the concept better, they sometimes see the connection between their history class and literature. Sometimes this is all it takes: a reminder that literature can tell us about history and vice versa, that art, philosophy and political science are all part of the integrated realm of human experience.

Even exams can be used to emphasize connections as long as the students do not perceive that they are

being punished in some way. I, like some of my colleagues, am in the habit of preparing lists of essay questions for my students. A quote from the *Analects*, a portion of which is included in the required documents book, could be the basis for an essay in which the student is asked to critique Confucius' concept of society from the point of view of a Legalist or a Taoist.

Three of my most successful experiences in "connecting the parts" in the new world history course reinforce both the connection between documents and history and the relationships between the various disciplines of the new core. They involve the use of an ancient legal code, a play, and the life of a famous philosopher to attempt to convey a richer understanding both of past cultures and of history as a discipline.

I have always included Hammurabi's Code as a part of my survey of the earliest civilizations. Portions of the code are included in the students' documents collection. I generally bring a fuller text to class to supplement what they have read. By choosing specific laws for discussion, students are able to delve into such topics as the nature of crime and punishment in Hammurabi's Babylonia, the role of merchants and craftsmen in a largely agricultural society, and the role and legal status of women. If the right questions are posed, they begin to learn something else: an appreciation for the difficulty of historical interpretation. How are we to understand Hammurabi's apparently extreme edict that a physician whose patient dies as the result of failed surgery should lose his hand? What was the intent of this law and what was its probable effect? Do the harsh penalties imposed in the code indicate a society in which there was little crime or are they a response to a society in which crime was rampant? Many students, especially those who have lived or traveled in lands where Islamic law prevails, automatically assume the former to be the case until they are asked whether the law code alone gives us enough evidence to determine which interpretation is more likely. Introducing them to documents and giving them a chance to interpret a primary source this early in the course - letting them be historians - helps them to understand the problems historians face and helps them to deal with any conflicting interpretations they may encounter as the course progresses. I recently had an example of negative reinforcement on this point: A student in History 112, who had not had this experience because she had not been required to take History 111 under the old core, asked in all sincerity, "Which is right,

you or the textbook?"

When we come to Periclean Athens, I have found that I have had to pare down my coverage of wars and politics, but between the text and lectures, we manage to lay the traditional "historical" background. I then go on to discuss the culture of classical Greece. The centerpiece for this is always Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. It is generally included in literature courses and some students have usually read it already. Even if they have not, the basic plot is easily sketched for them, and it is a perfect vehicle for exploring the issue of fate vs. free will, the concept of *sophrosyne*, and the Greek playwrights' attempts to make their audiences think for themselves. In History 111, I generally run through the entire plot all the way to Jocasta's off stage suicide and Oedipus' blinding himself. Given the time constraints of 205, I have found a short cut that seems to work. Reminding the class that we are retelling the story in chronological order rather than the order of the play, I let those who are familiar with the story help me take it to the confrontation between Oedipus and the group of strangers on the road as he attempts to flee his fate. That is far enough. There we have a classic example of the dilemma: has Oedipus killed his father because it is his fate (because he is controlled by external forces) or are his actions the result of his own choices and his own pride?

Reminding the class that these plays were produced when Athens' power and pride were at their height as a result of her domination of the Delian League and that the decline of drama coincides with Athens' defeat in the Peloponnesian Wars, I then turn the task of forcing their fellow citizens to think over to the philosophers. After a brief sketch of the Pre-Socratics' efforts to understand the natural world in terms of reason, we concentrate on Socrates and the shift in the focus of philosophy from nature to humanity. I try to emphasize the common goal shared by Sophocles and Socrates, the playwrights and the philosopher. Both are attempting to force their fellow citizens to grapple with important questions about themselves as individuals and as a society. In the five hour History 111 survey, I generally share with the class a bit of one or the other of the dialogues to give them a taste at least of the Socratic method, but in this three hour survey, time is once again precious. I have found that a few well chosen lines from the *Apology* not only add drama but also convey Socrates' rigid insistence on reason as the only foundation of knowledge and his determination to compel his fellow Athenians to examine honestly

their laws and their beliefs. Once the cup of hemlock is drunk, I only say a word or two about the contributions of Plato and Aristotle. The text and the documents book provide more information about them, and as a former philosophy minor, I have always insisted that it is impossible to deal with Plato, even at an elementary level, in more than five minutes or less than a week. The important point, I feel, in a survey course is not so much the difference between the various philosophical schools, but rather the insistence of the Greek philosophers that human beings have a right to question and that answers can be found through reason.

We have arranged some pilot courses in which the connections between the world history surveys and the world literature surveys are even more easily reinforced. In these courses, students are taking a world literature survey and the corresponding world history survey during the same quarter, ideally, scheduled back to back. The instructors in each of the courses work closely with each other to ensure the greatest possible degree of overlap in terms of content and sequence. As more faculty are added to the departments of English and Philosophy, such deliberate pairings will be more common. At present, most students would find themselves in such a situation only as a result of chance scheduling. What we hope is that if we continue, in various ways, to emphasize the relationships between disciplines the students will make the connections for themselves when they encounter the concepts again.