



The Undergraduate History Syllabus

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Abstract:

In this study, the primary goal was to formulate an adequate syllabus for an undergraduate history course, rooted in readings applicable to weekly topics. The project was directed at the course titled "World History to 1500" and involved analyzing primary and secondary sources to construct a syllabus around them. Because of the early time period, findings for topics such as African Prehistory and the origins of humanity were restricted to archaeological or anthropological research. The syllabus itself consisted of assignments that were based around these readings, particularly the primary sources. Students will create three short essays that answer a prompt revolving around the source. They will also draft a final paper that satisfies Florida State University's "Cross Cultural Studies" requirement. While it may seem superficial, the research here is incredibly significant because many history courses today are taught in the same way covering the same trivial topics. A more in-depth analysis into what makes up our vast history can allow these classes to be more creative, interesting, and engaging. Additionally, for those who are pursuing the history major (as this course is a prerequisite), the primary source analysis skills are crucial to build early on, as it is something that will be used heavily in the future.

Methods:

- The first step of this project was to examine the syllabi of history courses at other institutions to see how they conducted their classes. I looked at the topics, means of teaching, and lesson plans to get a general sense of what my own should look like.
- I then consulted 4 world history textbooks and made note of what each chapter covered. Obviously, different books covered different subject matters, so it was crucial to allocate topics for the syllabus accordingly.
- World history in general tends to focus mainly on the European continent, therefore I made sure to include critical components of history from Africa and Eastern Asia.
- Once I had each weekly topic selected, I built a knowledge on each one through a research of different articles and books pertaining to it. What I had at the end was basically a syllabus already laid out.

The Schedule:

Week 1: African Prehistory

Week 2: Early Civilization in the Near East

Week 3: Human Beginnings in India

Week 4: Origins of the Greek World (**Primary Source**)

Week 5: Rising Dynasties in China

Week 6: Roman Conquests (**Primary Source**)

Week 7: What Caused the Roman Collapse?

Week 8: Rise of Islam in the Middle East (**Midterm**)

Week 9: Early Medieval Europe and Monasticism (**X**)

Week 10: Mongol Empires

Week 11: Premodern African Kingdoms

Week 12: History of the Americas (**Primary Source**)

Week 13: State of the World in 1400

Week 14: The Renaissance in Europe and China

Week 15: Muslim vs. Christian Empires

Primary Sources

- **Allegory of the Cave** by Plato
Students will read the allegory and answer a prompt on philosophy in the Greek world

- **The Life of Constantine** by Eusebius

Students will read selections from the book and write on the newly Christianizing Roman Empire

- **Cortes' Letters to Charles V** by Hernando Cortes

This will cover the letters of Cortes regarding the Native Americans, and students will write on their relationship

Final Paper

For the final paper, students will be assigned to read a selection from the Penitential of Theodore. In doing so, they will be asked to examine how Christian missionary work changed over the course of the class, comparing it to later on. The prompt expects them to consider the impacts of missionary work outside of Europe, but also into the Middle East and Asia. While grounded in the primary source, this paper will expect students to do outside research in order to make those connections.

Conclusion:

Because of how reading and reading-intensive history courses are, it is important to build skills such as these early on in the major. Speaking from experience, primary source analysis can accelerate a good paper from a great one, lending itself to be one of the most fundamental aspects to a history course in general. Therefore, shaping a syllabus around this idea and tying it into the topics covered can make a course more engaging as a result. However, it of course coincides with examining how different cultures and ideas fluctuated among each other in history.

References:

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