Student-Centered Pedagogy in the GEP, Part I: Historical Perspectives

Rob Harper, Department of History
Before creating first-year seminar, ask:

“What should be the educational character of the first year of college?”

- Vincent Tinto, Syracuse University
### What should be the educational character of the first year of college, given our structural constraints?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keys to student success</th>
<th>GEP surveys at UWSP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• High expectations</td>
<td>• Sections of 40+ students</td>
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<td>• Academic and social support</td>
<td>• Large rooms, fixed seating</td>
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<td>• Frequent feedback</td>
<td>• Few assignments</td>
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<td>• Active involvement</td>
<td>• Stand-alone courses</td>
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<td>• Relevant learning</td>
<td>• Support available – to those who seek it</td>
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**What should be the educational character of the first year of college, given our structural constraints?**
Prepping My Old History Survey

- What will I cover?
  - Which textbook?
  - What lectures?
  - Added color?
- How will I make them read and show up?
- What will I put on the exam?
What should be the educational character of a history survey course, given our structural constraints?
SoTL in History

- Learning by DOING history
- Active practice, not static knowledge
- Skill-centered, not content-centered
- “Historical thinking”
  - Interpreting evidence
  - Critically examining arguments

But... most of these recommendations come from folks who teach small classes.
Teaching History for Critical Reading

- Identify core critical reading skills
- Emphasize skill development throughout
- Create narrowly focused, guided reading assignments
- Closely integrate assignments, lesson plans, and assessment
What is “critical reading”?

- Questioning
- Sourcing
- Connecting
- Analyzing
- Evaluating
Roadmaps for Reading: Worksheets

- Guide students through the assignment
- Target specific component skills
- Introduce transferable study strategies
- Normalize idiosyncrasy, confusion, and learning
Sample worksheets

- "Telling the Truth about Textbooks" (pink)
  - Unit 1: ideas about the past change
  - Noticing differences between texts
- "Childhood in Early New England" (yellow)
  - Unit 2: interpreting primary sources
  - Questioning and sourcing
- "Antebellum Plantation" (green)
  - Unit 3: understanding secondary sources
  - Analyzing
How do worksheets work?

- Alphabetized folders & scanning
- Graded pass/fail
- Diminishing frequency
- Integrated with lecture, discussion, in-class small-group work
A student-centered journey

- Where will my students go?
  - College-level critical reading

- Why should they buy into going?
  - Transferability of skills; relevance of questions

- How will they get there?
  - Focused content; worksheets; group work

- How will they show how far they’ve gotten?
  - Skill-centered examinations