

## Project 13 – Professional Development for Year 13 History Teachers

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### Rationale

This proposal has its origins in my own twenty-one-year struggle to get it right, and I know many professors share my predicament. The “it” is the introductory U.S. history survey course, a requirement of the history major, a staple of general education curricula, and, ideally, the gateway drug into our discipline in an era of declining enrollments. Its reach even extends into masters’ programs, as most K-12 teachers in training have to pass through some version of it. And because of the survey’s function as a kind of national civics course—a primer for American citizenship—the content of a U.S. history syllabus continues to be a topic of passionate political debate. Conservatives still argue that educators are not teaching “the facts”—that they are hijacking the narrative to serve an agenda of political correctness. When distinguished scholars created a set of national standards to improve K-12 curricula, a political fight ensued, with Congress ultimately voting against them 99 to 1. Although these so-called history wars are now over twenty years old, they underscored the contested nature of both history curricula and teaching methods for a whole range of stakeholders. As Nancy Quam-Wickham has written, the survey “serves many masters.”<sup>1</sup>

I enter this territory not so much interested in the politics but in the pedagogy of the U.S. survey course. Here I join conversations already in progress—and we have been talking about this for a long time. William Weber has chronicled a history of committees and commissions stretching back to the late nineteenth century. In 1899, for example, a Committee of Seven inveighed against “the old rote system” of memorization, advising the AHA that analysis of primary documents could improve an increasingly moribund history education.<sup>2</sup> In the twentieth century, the movement for “inquiry teaching” had many fits and starts, influenced by Progressive educational reform, the Cold War, the Great Society, and the fluctuations in school funding at the national and state levels. Yet despite ambitious experimental efforts, some of them well funded by the government, the U.S. history survey seemed impervious to change. It was still “a principal target for criticism,” wrote Professor Robert Waller in a 1975 review of the literature on the college survey, especially “the lecture mode of instruction.” By that time, the evidence revealed convincingly that a “sharp break from dependence on lectures, textbooks, and objective

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Quam-Wickham, “Reimagining the Introductory U.S. History Survey Course,” *The History Teacher* 49, no. 4 (August 2016): 520. See also James M. Lang, “Reinventing the Survey Course,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 21, 2018, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Reinventing-the-Survey-Course/242271>.

<sup>2</sup> William Weber, “The Amherst Project and Reform of History Education, 1959-1972,” *The History Teacher* 51, no. 1 (November 2017): 39.

examinations," was, as Waller put it, the "best means of urging the learning process on to the learner."<sup>3</sup>

Fast forward, and we can point to a range of collaborations and research aimed at improving both curricula and teaching practice, among them the Teaching American History grants, the AHA's Tuning Project, and, here in California, the statewide California History-Social Science Project. At every meeting of the AHA or OAH, there are now panels dedicated to teaching improvement. In recent years, the AHA has led the way, not only with its Tuning Project, but through a new annual conference on the introductory history course. The Gardner Foundation, a prominent higher education non-profit and think tank, is embarking on a new venture that targets the "gateway courses" in all college majors. Almost twenty years ago, Sam Wineburg's pioneering research on the cognitive processes of historical thinking changed the conversation, and many brave historians – mostly untrained in educational theory but determined innovators – are tinkering and trying, and some are making noteworthy contributions to the growing scholarship of teaching and learning.<sup>4</sup>

And yet, the decentralized abundance of this scholarship can be daunting to access and put into practice. The help is out there, but it's not clear how professors can become able and regular users of this "how to" literature. And how does a college teacher put an article on pedagogy into practice in a room of live variables – our students? Further, the professional culture and reward system in higher education does not encourage faculty to do this. While K-12 teachers are expected to do continuing education to refresh and refine their skills, there is no similar expectation in higher education. As many have observed, a new college professor walks into a classroom with little training. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* just cited a poll which showed that less than twenty percent of graduate students and faculty reported "meaningful" or even "decent" preparation to teach.<sup>5</sup> Graduate programs have already started to address this deficit, and teaching and learning centers are now fairly common in colleges and universities, but their programming competes with other faculty obligations and is rarely tied to promotion and tenure.<sup>6</sup> Contrast this with K-12 teacher training (in California), where there are budgets, conferences, and institutes statewide devoted to improving instruction, and

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<sup>3</sup> Robert A. Waller, "The United States History Survey Course: Challenges and Responses," *The History Teacher* 8, no. 2 (February 1975): 201-202.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Lendol Calder, "Uncoverage: Toward a Signature Pedagogy for the History Survey," *Journal of American History* 92, no. 4 (March 2006): 1358-1370; Joel Sipress and David Voelker, "The End of the History Survey Course: The Rise and Fall of the Coverage Model," *Journal of American History* 97, no. 4 (March 2011): 1050-1066.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Alsop, "Who's Teaching the Teachers?" *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 11, 2018. This is an observation one can find in many columns and articles on teaching, and this lament can be found at the high school level as well, even for teachers trained in credential programs. Nancy McTygue, the Executive Director of the California History-Social Science Project, noted that "the greatest challenge for social science and history educators is that too few teachers are trained in inquiry-driven, active pedagogies." Quote from Quam-Wickham, n. 23, 544.

<sup>6</sup> On the value of faculty development in higher education, see Catherine Haras, Steven C. Taylor, Mary Deane Sorcinelli, and Linda von Hoene, eds., *Institutional Commitment to Teaching Excellence: Assessing the Impacts and Outcomes of Faculty Development* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 2017), esp. 37-45.

although the quality of this instruction is not uniformly good, there is at least a baseline expectation that a teacher remains a student of their craft throughout their career. In fact, every K-12 teacher knows the abbreviation “PD” (professional development) because it is baked into their identity – an integral part of their socialization into the profession. They do PD year-round, even in summer, because it is rewarded (financially and through continuing education credits) and because it is an integral part of their work culture. How can we export the best parts of this PD culture to higher education?

I propose Project 13 as one approach. The focus will be on year 13 U.S. history teaching and learning, that is, the hand-off from high school social studies to college history. I target this developmental stage for two reasons. First, we are witnessing changes in the way history is taught and learned in elementary and high school. Although the Common Core does not have a formal history component, its overall emphasis on “critical questions,” active learning, and skill development in language arts and literacy has implications for college-level history instruction. Moreover, California’s new History-Social Science Framework (adopted in 2016) emphasizes content knowledge *and* literacy skills. The Advanced Placement exams, too, have undergone a revision that tilts towards inquiry. College pedagogies must be revised and refreshed to build on these reforms, otherwise we miss the chance to reinforce and extend important developmental skills already learned. Project 13 would offer faculty PD based on the premise that students in a survey course are in *year 13* of their history education, and almost always in *year one* of their college education. Syllabi and teaching methods, then, must be designed around the needs of these learners at a particular developmental stage. We cannot, to paraphrase Waller’s odd but intriguing phrasing, urge a learning process onto a learner, without understanding who that learner is, what prior knowledge they bring to the classroom, and how they are best nudged along to higher levels of learning.

A second reason Project 13 will target the year 13 learner is because we know how critical yet precarious the high school-to-college transition can be. Nationwide, and especially in California, our students are increasingly “diverse,” by which we mean non-white, often first-generation or close to that experience, and middle- or lower income. This is the happy result of a decades-long democratization in access to higher education, but these learners deserve pedagogies that will help them finish what they start. The evidence, however, suggests otherwise. A recent study by UCLA and Claremont Graduate School found that 70% of seniors are going on to college, but only 25% of them are graduating in six years.<sup>7</sup> The Gardner Foundation has found alarmingly high rates of failing or near failing grades (and withdrawals) in the U.S. survey among students of color, first generation learners, and students from lower income brackets. Study author Andrew Koch shows that failure in a first-year course, such as the U.S. survey, “predicts ultimate dropout from college altogether.” The survey is not a gateway but a roadblock, and we teachers of the survey are implicated. As Koch puts it, “many well-established approaches to teaching introductory history . . . may be subtly but effectively promoting inequity.” He concludes with a challenge: “So now that you know this, what will you do?”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Howard Blume, “Many L.A. Students Go on to College, But Few Finish,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 3, 2017, B5.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew K. Koch, “Many Thousands Failed: A Wakeup Call to History Educators,” *Perspectives on History*, May 2017, 19.

My answer is Project 13. I want to take on the U.S. history survey as both a teaching problem (in the good sense of that term – something to solve) and an educational equity challenge (to puzzle over how the survey can and should be a pathway to college persistence and completion). I also want Project 13 to help transform the professional culture of the professoriate – to shift faculty culture from one of presumed expertise to one of continuing reflection and learning about effective pedagogy. We can no longer accept the status quo: sending in unprepared teachers into classrooms of underprepared students at a critical stage of their entry into college.

### **Goals, Outcomes, and Structure**

Project 13's "product" would be a professional development program for teachers of the collegiate U.S. history survey. This is not currently in the marketplace of teacher training. K-12 teachers seeking PD often find plentiful opportunities through their districts, through university-led initiatives, or by shopping around for privately-run teacher ed programs, such as EdTechTeacher. A college professor, however, has slim pickings, unless they want to join a seminar aimed at K-12 teachers (which I did once, somewhat under the radar; it only confirmed my view that high school and college professors have to join forces if we want to improve the survey). The fact that there is so little out there for the college instructor is a confirmation that higher ed (or the educational marketplace) has not yet grasped the fact that excellent teaching requires a substantial, on-going commitment of time and resources – on both the part of the institution and the faculty. The hoped-for outcome of Project 13 is simple: a slow but steady reversal of the statistics cited by Koch and others – data hidden in plain sight, daily evidence of an educational crisis unfolding right in front of us. This cannot happen without focusing as intensely on college teachers as we do on college students.

The following represents my *early-stage thinking* about the structural possibilities for Project 13:

- 1) In its most modest form, it could be a website (similar to the Stanford History Education Group) but targeted at year 13 U.S. history teachers. A website alone, however, cannot deliver the kind of professional development (reading, reflection, practice, assessment, reflection anew) required for professional growth. Like our students, we cannot merely learn on-line, but I see on-line resources as a part of Project 13.
- 2) It could be housed in one of the California History-Social Science Project (CHSSP) sites, where K-12 teachers and scholars have long worked together to innovate on curriculum and instruction. This collaboration could address two concerns I have about our current teacher training efforts.
  - a. First, high school teachers are too often absent as intellectual partners when we work on college teaching improvement. We meet their students only three months after graduation, but we know little about the teaching and classroom cultures and practices of the high school social studies

teacher and student. Year 13 U.S. history learning should be in dialogue with grade 11 (maybe even 8) classroom practitioners. The Teaching American History Grants tried to bridge that gap, but they also reinforced the divide. Typically, faculty were brought in for morning “expert” lectures, and the work of integrating and adapting the new knowledge into lesson plans was done in the afternoon after the faculty member had left.<sup>9</sup>

- b. Second, housing Project 13 in a CHSSP site would enable collegiate survey teachers to learn from scholars researching and teachers practicing culturally responsive pedagogies. One of the CHSSP’s missions is to develop instructional practices that reach underserved students – the very students who are showing up in our survey classes. There is a vast literature on culturally responsive (or “sustaining”) pedagogies, but it is not evident that we are integrating it in a systematic or deliberate way into our own profession’s faculty development. Such pedagogies are not well known outside the field of education but should be foundational to a survey course whose topic engages identity, inclusion, and citizenship.<sup>10</sup>
- 3) Project 13 could reside in an extant institute at a large university where there are readily available learning laboratories (that is, big survey courses) for teaching the U.S. history survey. A Cal State campus comes to mind (Long Beach State or Cal State LA have strong education and history departments), but something like the Huntington-USC Institute, with its considerable resources, teacher seminars, and summer teacher institutes (where, again, we have the example of summer PD for K-12 teachers but not for professors) could be a potentially good match.
- 4) Project 13 could be an initiative of the AHA or the OAH—or a joint initiative between the two. Right now, the AHA is in a better position to undertake something like this because of its work on the Tuning Project and its current annual conference on the introductory course. Sessions on teaching are valuable additions to the OAH and AHA’s annual conferences, but they are never the main event. We need to envision something akin to what the AHA is already

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<sup>9</sup> Weber describes how an earlier high school-college collaboration to improve history instruction, the Amherst Project, ultimately featured minimal contact between these two teaching communities. Further, he describes a precedent for partnerships between schools and colleges before the Teaching American History Grants. In 1969, the AHA coordinated a History Education Project, “a five-year consortium of partnerships” that could be found throughout the country. See Weber, 44.

<sup>10</sup> For a useful overview of the literature on critical race theory and culturally responsive or relevant pedagogy, see Gloria J. Ladson-Billings, “Preparing Teachers for Diverse Student Populations: A Critical Race Theory Perspective,” *Review of Research in Education* 24 (1999): 211-247. Her 1995 historic article, “Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy,” continues to generate discussion about inclusive practices in education. More recently, Django Paris, for example, has suggested that “sustaining” is a better nomenclature (versus “relevant” or “responsive”) for our discussions of equity and diversity in education. See Django Paris, “Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: A Needed Change in Stance, Terminology, and Practice,” *Educational Researcher* 41, no. 3 (April 2012): 93-97.

doing: a conference that is itself dedicated to a small but significant practice, and one that welcomes a whole range of teachers. Another model is Project Next (mathematics), which offers multi-day conferences attached to a national conference, or sequential mini-conferences that its fellows must attend.

Many questions remain about the structure and scope of Project 13. Should it target only California teachers? The state's vast and multi-tiered higher education system offers an ideal context in which to innovate and experiment. The University of California and California State University systems enroll the diverse learners we need to reach nationally. In fact, history professors in the Cal State system are already trying some exciting interventions to improve outcomes in the U.S. survey.<sup>11</sup> Further, the CHSSP is well established in the state, with strong connections with K-12 teachers and college professors.<sup>12</sup>

Where to put "it"? Does Project 13 need a physical headquarters? Or could it be administered at one institution or through a professional organization but travel as a PD workshop? (The Lilly Conferences offer a model here.<sup>13</sup>) Effective professional development happens in spaces that are conducive to learning – adult learning in this case – which means we need a physical place for U.S. survey teachers to meet one another, to obtain quality (evidence-based) instruction, to meet with researchers of teaching and learning, to be vulnerable and take risks, and to find peer mentors and potential partners for the long haul of refining their practice back in their own classrooms. It must be a space where both high school and college teachers feel equally enfranchised to share knowledge and dialogue about the development of a year 13 history learner. It could be one part think tank, one-part teacher commons.

## Conclusion

There are many excellent ideas and programs already out there, and my purpose is not to replicate but to collaborate, innovate, integrate, and disseminate. The question is: is it possible – or even advisable – to consolidate the creative but disparate efforts at improving the U.S. history survey? Project 13 posits the idea of a "go to," a place where survey teachers can find both PD and community. There are advantages but also tradeoffs with such an approach. What kind of institutional, fiscal, and physical

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Carole Srole, Christopher Endy, and Birte Pflieger, "Active Learning in History Survey Courses: The Value of In-Class Peer Mentoring," *The History Teacher* 51, no. 1, (November 2017): 89-102. See also an upcoming panel at the OAH: "Undermining Student Success? How U.S. Surveys Landed on the Chancellor's Shortlist for Low-Success Courses and What 30 CSU Historians Did About It," forthcoming presentation at the OAH Annual Meeting, April 12-14, 2018, Sacramento, CA.

<sup>12</sup> As Quam-Wickham notes, "what happens here [in California] often reverberates across the country. Quam-Wickham, 521.

<sup>13</sup> The Lilly Conferences are not discipline specific, but they offer an evidence-based teacher training for higher education that can help any collegiate history instructor. The Cotsen Foundation offers another possible model, but it is only for elementary teachers. Cotsen's Art of Teaching professional development program can be found here: <http://cotsen.org/the-art-of-teaching-program/>.

infrastructure might be necessary to launch Project 13? This proposal is intended to start conversations about all of these questions with potentially interested stakeholders.

David Pace recently warned in *Perspectives*: “This is not a time for business as usual.” Good history teaching, he argued, is essential to counter current antidemocratic trends and rising inequalities in our country.<sup>14</sup> Project 13 can be democratic intervention through teaching reinvention. By focusing singularly on the U.S. survey course – the methods, not the content – we can help tackle the larger challenges of college retention and declining majors, and we can do our part to counter the educational inequities that perpetuate class and racial injustices. As Quam-Wickham says of the survey: “There may not be a more critical course in the collegiate history curriculum,” and I would extend that claim to include students’ first-year experience in college, and, most importantly, to their long-term civic education. A good U.S. history survey can enfranchise a citizen-student in the broadest sense of that word.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> David Pace, “The History Classroom in an Era of Crisis: A Change of Course is Needed,” *Perspectives on History* (May 2017): 17-18.

<sup>15</sup> Quam-Wickham, 520.