



# The Next Generation of History Teachers

**A CHALLENGE TO DEPARTMENTS OF HISTORY  
AT AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**

**ENDORSED BY:**

American Historical Association  
Organization of American Historians  
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## **THE CHALLENGE**

**R**ecognizing that many Americans learn about the past, and how to think about it, during their K12 years, many historians have worked to strengthen the bonds between historians and history teachers. Historians have long been active in their communities, in workshops with teachers, and in national organizations.

One important locus of activity, however, has been neglected: history departments themselves. We believe that historians in higher education might educate, in more purposeful and effective ways, the future teachers among their own students. In fact, it seems to us, all history departments might benefit from interesting themselves in these issues even if they have not done so before.

*We urge every department to devote at least one department meeting in 2007 to discussing this message. To help focus the conversation, this document offers background, resources, and strategies that have worked elsewhere.*

## THE BACKGROUND

A national conference at the University of Virginia and Monticello in the summer of 2006, funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, considered the issues involved in the task of preparing students who hope to become history teachers. The alliance formed at that conference—historians from a broad range of higher education institutions, master teachers from high schools, representatives from leading professional organizations, and specialists in the teaching and learning of history—prepared this document to suggest strategies to make history departments more effective in the important work of teacher training. Roundtables at the American Historical Association, the Organization of American Historians, and the National Council on History Education annual meetings in 2007 carry the conversation forward.

Recognizing that departments of history vary widely in size, context, mission, and capacity, we present a range of strategies that have worked in different kinds of departments. We hope this document will provide a starting point for historians to decide how they might best serve the future teachers who look to them for knowledge, example, and inspiration.

Several assumptions underlie this message. We believe that the changes historians undertake should be departmentally focused, institutionally tailored, and community minded. We do not believe that historians need to revolutionize their teaching, their departments, or their institutions to accomplish these things, but that they do need to approach this part of their work in a more self-aware and coordinated way.

One assumption underlies all the others: historians are uniquely qualified to assist prospective teachers in developing the habits of mind and instructional strategies necessary to teach effectively about the past. Long experience suggests that if historians do not assert responsibility for preparing future history teachers, others will.

## THE SITUATION

The teaching of history is not getting easier. Teachers in our elementary, middle, and high schools find themselves bound to new statewide standards and ever-increasing expectations for topical coverage.

There are reasons to be optimistic, however. History teaching has become more democratic and inclusive over the last several decades; a broad range of people and subjects long neglected now play significant roles. Textbooks and standards acknowledge the importance of gender, ethnicity, religion, and other topics in ways they did not before. Document-based questions on the Advanced Placement tests have shifted attention to the intrinsically interpretive quality of history. In fundamental ways, the field has been redefined.

Specialists in history education now describe a vision for lower grades very much in keeping with what happens in our best college classrooms. Content and pedagogy are fused. Students

actively engage the substance of history by doing history: analyzing primary sources, juxtaposing perspectives, exploring the reasons some historical accounts seem more compelling at some times than at others.

A pedagogical continuum of active and engaged history learning now stretches from the elementary classroom to the advanced seminar. As students become more skilled and nuanced in historical understanding, teachers of history pull back the curtains a bit farther at each step until we reveal all the ropes and pulleys of our craft.

Past debates aside, today no one denies that history teachers need to know history. No one denies that teaching is a professional practice that can be developed and improved. No one denies that the best history teachers are driven by a passion for their subject as well as by concern for their students. And no one doubts that passion for history often comes to young teachers from their history professors.

*As a result, we believe that departments need to create new opportunities for the people in our classes to begin thinking like history teachers as well as history students. They need to be exposed to historiographical thinking sooner rather than later, explicitly defined and carefully elaborated. Underlying this recommendation is the conviction that the best preparation for future history teachers is the best preparation for all history students. By performing this central task more effectively we can improve all the teaching we do.*

## SOME STRATEGIES

History departments can follow concrete, immediate, and targeted strategies to make themselves effective mentors to the future history teachers among their students.

### TAKING STOCK

The first step is *to gauge the situation of their own students*. Many of the academic historians at the Charlottesville conference admitted that they had no idea how many of their students were planning to become teachers or what paths students follow to that goal. Many admitted that they had never thought about future teachers or how they might best be prepared for the work they would be undertaking in the near future. Many acknowledged that a large proportion of their best students were applying to Teach for America but were being given no aid in preparing for that challenging work. It will be helpful for each department to identify those students, their numbers, and their needs as early as possible to understand the scale and scope of what might be done.

A second step might be for history departments *to consider where they stand within their own institutions*. Every school, from community colleges to the Ivy League, prepares future teachers of history. There is, as a result, great variety in the ways that future history teachers are prepared and a range of strategies to make that preparation effective.

If history departments are in institutions with schools of education, for example, the depart-

ments should open communication and establish collaboration. Joint advising has been successful at many schools and some historians might propose cross-listing their courses or team-teaching classes of the sort described below. If history departments are on their own, without schools of education, they have an even greater responsibility to think about preparing the future teachers in their charge.

A third step is for history departments *to learn more about the situation in the K-12 classrooms of their community*. Our conference showed how much historians in colleges have to learn from teachers in high schools. Inviting history teachers to visit to talk about standards, curricula, and local resources would help historians be better allies. By offering to help evaluate pre-service teachers in their practice teaching, in turn, historians could focus on disciplinary content and help students recognize the connections between what they teach and what historians teach in their own classrooms. By working with new history teachers in local schools in induction programs historians could make an immediate impact on the quality of history instruction in their communities and on beginning teachers' success in the field.

### **THINKING ABOUT THE CURRICULUM**

The new history pedagogy emphasizes that future teachers need to know how to “do history,” how to construct historical narratives and arguments. The “Resources” section of this document offers some helpful recent scholarship on the subject.

Fortunately, academic history departments are expert at such work; now, they need to present it to their undergraduate students more explicitly and more systematically.

The basic curricular principles are straightforward:

- History teachers-in-training *need to be exposed to differing interpretations and research methods early and in a sustained way*.
- History teachers-in-training *need to discuss the thinking behind the work they are doing, the purposes and strategies that animate good history teaching*.
- History teachers-in-training *would benefit from an integrated departmental curriculum that introduces them to a broad range of history*. An uncoordinated combination of idiosyncratic and highly specialized courses does not serve them well.

Each department will have to decide for itself how this kind of teaching can best be integrated into its curriculum. They might ask themselves whether, in their institution, there should be:

- special classes for future teachers
- a particular path through the history course offerings
- new kinds of classes that cover history more synthetically—in world history, for example, or in comparative history—in ways that prepare future teachers for the demands of the K-12 classroom

- a role for local, state, or national standards in shaping the curriculum
- a junior-senior semester capstone that "revisits" at least one of the surveys at a more mature level
- department workshops dedicated to teaching, in which students are invited to participate
- syllabi shared with one another and with historians elsewhere
- ways in which faculty in the department might make the decisions behind their own teaching more transparent
- discussions among the faculty about which particular teaching method might be most effective in teaching a particular topic

Any combination of these strategies would make history departments better allies for their students who plan to become teachers of the discipline.

### **RECOGNITION AND REWARD**

Most institutions have not adequately recognized the contributions of historians who work with teachers. We hope this national initiative might be an occasion for departments to focus the attention of deans, provosts, and promotion committees on this important work. Departments and their chairs might begin this process themselves by *more formally recognizing and more generously rewarding teacher preparation.*

### **RECRUITING FUTURE HISTORY TEACHERS**

While we may assume that most of those students before us who are inclined to become history teachers may already have decided on that career path, *history professors might also encourage others to consider becoming teachers.* That recruitment may be as simple as a kind comment on a paper or a private conversation during office hours. Recruitment, however, could also involve inviting in a star local high school teacher or welcoming colleagues from local school districts to hold a session on campus in which they explain their needs.

Whatever the strategy, we suggest that history departments *actively recruit excellent students to become history teachers and help lay out the paths by which that career can be achieved.*

### **THINKING ABOUT GRADUATE PROGRAMS**

Increasingly, school districts are looking for teachers with masters degrees in their subject areas. A great deal that cannot be taught at the undergraduate level can be taught in two years of graduate training.

While the demand is increasing for history teachers with masters degrees, however, the opportu-

nities for that training may not be developing as they could. Departments with doctoral programs are diminishing the role of masters degrees and masters degree programs are not as dedicated as they might be to preparing future teachers. Instead, they are often taught as the first step toward a PhD that many students have no intention of pursuing.

We suggest that history departments *reconsider their graduate programs in light of the growing demand for advanced training in history teaching.*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

All the elements are in place for history departments to play a more central role in the training of the next generation of history teachers. We urge our colleagues to think about how their departments might best take the lead in preparing future teachers to become skilled and informed colleagues. The need is great, the stakes high, and the means are at hand.

We recommend the following steps:

### DEPARTMENTS OF HISTORY SHOULD:

- devote at least one department meeting in the academic year 2006-2007 to a discussion of the preparation of teachers of history.
- create new opportunities for students to begin thinking like history teachers as well as history students.
- audit the students in their classes to gain an estimate of how many are considering a career that includes the teaching of history.
- make use of intellectual resources within their own institution appropriate to teaching history to prospective teachers of history, such as Schools of Education.
- explore the K-12 classrooms in their local communities to learn how history is being taught and to discover resources available from local teachers of history.
- more formally recognize and more generously reward teacher preparation.
- recognize as professional contributions the work of their colleagues engaged with the teaching and learning of history.
- recruit excellent students to become history teachers and help lay out the paths by which that career can be achieved.
- reconsider their graduate programs in light of the growing demand for advanced training in history teaching.

## **DEPARTMENTS OF HISTORY SHOULD CONSIDER:**

- special classes for future teachers.
- a particular path through the history course offerings.
- new kinds of classes that cover history more synthetically – in world history, for example, or in comparative history – in ways that prepare prospective teachers of history for the demands of the K-12 classroom.
- a role for local , state, or national standards in shaping the curriculum.
- department workshops dedicated to teaching, in which students are invited to participate.
- syllabi shared with one another and with historians elsewhere.
- ways in which faculty might make the decisions behind their own teaching more transparent.
- discussion about which particular teaching method might be most effective in teaching a particular topic.

## **RESOURCES**

A rich scholarly literature and an encouraging array of examples can help guide our work.

### **HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

Robert Orrill and Linn Shapiro, “From Bold Beginnings to an Uncertain Future: The Discipline of History and History Education,” *American Historical Review* 110 (June 2005)

<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/110.3/orrill.html> and the ensuing on-line conversation: <http://www.historycooperative.org/phorum/list.php?15>

### **BOOKS AND ARTICLES ON HISTORY TEACHING**

Robert Bain and Jeffrey Mirel, “Setting Up Camp at the Great Instructional Divide: Educating Beginning History Teachers,” *Journal of Teacher Education* 57 (May/June 2006), 212-18.

Keith C. Barton and Linda S. Levstik, *Teaching History for the Common Good* (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004)

Thomas Bender, et al, *The Education of Historians for the Twenty-first Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, for the American Historical Association, 2004)

D. Antonio Cantu and Wilson J. Warren, *Teaching History in the Digital Classroom* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003)

Frederick D. Drake and Sarah Drake Brown, “A Systematic Approach to Improve Students’ Historical Thinking,” *The History Teacher* 36 (Summer 2003),



- Thomas Fallace and Johann N. Neem, "Historiographical Thinking: Towards a New Approach in Preparing History Teachers," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 33 (Summer 2005), 244-61.
- Fritz Fischer, "Preparation of Future History Teachers: The History Department's Role," *Perspectives* 44 (December 2006): 19-20.
- Tom Holt, *Thinking Historically: Narrative, Imagination, and Understanding* (New York: The College Board, 1990)
- G. Williamson McDiarmid, "Understanding History for Teaching: a Study of the Historical Understanding of Prospective Teachers," in M. Carretero and F. J. Voss, eds., *Cognitive and Instructional Processes in History and the Social Studies* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lea, 1994)
- Peter Seixas and Carla Peck, "Teaching Historical Thinking," in A. Sears and I. Wright, eds., *Challenges and Prospects for Canadian Social Studies* (Vancouver, BC: Pacific Educational Press, 2004), 109-117
- Peter N. Stearns, Peter Seixas, and Sam Wineburg, *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History: National and International Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 2000)
- Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001)
- Bruce VanSledright, *In Search of America's Past: Learning to Read History in Elementary School* (New York and London: Teachers College Press, 2002)
- Laura M. Westhoff, "The Historian's Role in Teacher Education," *Perspectives* (September 2006), 33-5

## **GRADUATE PROGRAMS**

"Retrieving the Master's Degree from the Dustbin of History" AHA Committee on the Master's Degree <http://www.historians.org/projects/cmd/2005/Report/intro.cfm>

## **PLACES TO START**

AHA Resources for Teachers at All Levels

<http://www.historians.org/teaching/index.cfm>

OAH History Teacher Resource Center

<http://www.oah.org/teaching/index.html>

NCHE Resource Center

<http://www.nche.net>



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