Reimagining the US History Survey

Rethinking Learning Objectives, Design, Activities, Assessments, and Delivery Modalities
Driving Question

• Can we make the survey more engaging and interactive – without sacrificing coverage or rigor?
Design Thinking

• A deliberate, structured process for solving problems and fostering innovation.

• Begins with a focus on the “end user,” and that individual’s unmet needs, desires, and priorities.

• Address the challenge by:
  – Brainstorming
  – Concepting
  – Rapid prototyping
  – Iterating
Backward Design

• Ask what students should know and understand and be able to do.
• Design learning experiences to move students to mastery.
• Create assessments that evaluate whether students have attained mastery.
Alternatives to the Coverage Model

• Approaches that offer an alternative to an emphasis on factual knowledge are over a century old:
  – Source method of instruction
  – Problem-based approach
  – Cultural literacy and citizenship education
  – Historical mindedness
  – Lab courses emphasizing independent research
Learning Objectives

- **Core knowledge:** Mastery of essential facts, chronology, and periodization.

- **Historical interpretation:** Familiarity with significant controversies and conflicting interpretations.

- **Thesis formulation:** Ability to formulate meaningful, researchable historical questions.

- **Research skills:** Ability to locate, evaluate, and interpret primary sources.

- **Historical thinking:** Ability to describe development of institutions, customs, and values over time; understand contingency of historical events and the trade-offs that accompany historical change; and understand the perspectives of historical actors.

- **Historical perspective:** Ability to connect past and present.
Reimagine Everything

- **Pedagogy:** Evidence-driven, inquiry-based, problem solving, challenge-based, gamified, team-based, using multimedia
- **Assessment:** Points-based, competency-based, and performance-based
- **Delivery modes:** Flipped, fully online, field-based
Approach 1: Inquiry

- **American icons**: Symbols of nationhood
- **Hidden history**: Backstory of contemporary issues
- **Historical analogies**: Useful or misleading
- **Historical debates**: Questions of our past
- **History detective**: Solving historical questions
- **History’s mysteries**: Unsolved puzzles of the past
Approach 1: Inquiry

- **How do we know?** How historians answer key questions
- **Hollywood vs history:** Cinematic treatment of the past
- **Judging the past:** Evaluating past decisions and actors
- **Myth vs reality:** Debunking myths and misconceptions
Approach 1: Inquiry

- **Predictions about the future**: How people in the past envisioned the future
- **What if?** What might have happened if a single event turned out differently
- **History through…**: Advertisements, architecture, art, dress, gravestones, maps, movies, music, names, photographs, political cartoons, and propaganda posters
Approach 2: History & the Social Sciences

- Placing key issues in the social sciences in historical perspective:
  - Urbanization
  - Modernization
  - Migration
  - Stratification, and
  - Families and the life course.
Approach 3: Comparative

- Major issues in US history viewed from comparative, cross-cultural perspective:
  - Revolution
  - Civil war
  - Slavery
  - Industrialization
  - Growth of a welfare state.
Approach 4: Thematic

- Key themes in US history:
  - Rights and liberties
  - Citizenship
  - Presidential power
  - Diversity and gender
Approach 5: Gamification

• Make history class more game-like through role playing activities that recreate key debates in US history drawing on primary sources:
  – Drafting the U.S. Constitution
  – The impeachment of Andrew Johnson
  – Deciding to drop atomic bombs on Japan
  – Presidential decisionmaking and the Vietnam War
Approach 6: Uses & Misuses of History

• The uses of history for political or nationalistic purposes.
• The perpetuation of myths.
• History as a form of entertainment rather than enlightenment and reckoning with past misdeeds.
• Examining the value of historical analogies
• Drawing lessons from the past
Approach 7: History & the Professions

• Using history to help in the development of a professional identity by:
  – Introducing students in medicine, law, engineering, and business to the history of their fields
  – Exposing pre-professional students to the ethical issues that their future profession has faced
Approach 8: Cognitive Revolutions

• Fundamental shifts in outlook and values, including:
  – The growth of humanitarianism
  – The rise of psychological thinking
  – The emergence of environmental consciousness, and
  – The rights revolution
Approach 9: Presentist

• Focusing on the origins of contemporary controversies, such as:
  – Immigration policy
  – Foreign policy
  – Presidential power
  – Race relations
Approach 10: Freshman Research Experience

• Individual and team-based research opportunities
• Training in methods: oral history, local history
• Goal: To create a public resource