

## **TEACHING PHILOSOPHY**

**Dr. Kirwin R. Shaffer, Professor of Latin American Studies, PSU – Berks**

Wonder! In February 2012, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* published an article on two professors who approached teaching from different strategies—one high tech, the other old-school lecturing. What both came to realize is that the key to being a really effective professor is somehow (as one prof put it) to impart a sense of wonder in the classroom.<sup>1</sup> This sums up my approach to teaching: recognizing wonder and creating environments that empower students to experience these wonders. But just as importantly, I want students to share with each other their acquired knowledge and understanding of global cultures, history, and politics. In this way, we explore the world by democratizing classrooms through student presentations, debates, student-produced films, and discussions.

In 2002, I was hired as Assistant Professor of Latin American Studies, achieving promotion to full professor in 2015. The field of “Latin American Studies” is interdisciplinary. I have taught 37 unique courses—22 alone at PSU-Berks—in comparative film and literature, history, integrative arts, international studies, political science, and Spanish. No matter the course or strategy used, of utmost importance is fostering an understanding that it is okay to care about and engage in global issues even if you don’t live in or have never visited where you are studying. As humans, we have a right or even an obligation to discuss issues central to humanity—past and present.

To develop a sense of wonder and appreciate global affairs, I treat students like thinkers and facilitate higher-level thinking and engagement. Course design is pivotal. I take basic surveys and make them specialized “topics” courses in the Liberal Arts school tradition. For instance, Modern Latin American History becomes “Violence and Social Conflict in Latin America,” where violence is the topic used to unlock two centuries of Latin American history. Introduction to International Studies becomes a topics course on “Global Terrorism” or “Contemporary Global Crises” while Introduction to International Film and Literature becomes a course on “Children and Youth on the Global Margins” or “Gender and Sexual Politics in Latin America.” Through this approach, we go into depth on engaging topics while incorporating key concepts from traditional surveys. Often classes begin with a question, followed by a series of questions that help students answer the initial query. For instance, in a unit opening a section on “Bandits, Guerrillas, Revolutionaries, and Terrorists” in the Modern Latin American History course, I ask students “Is it OK to steal?” “If so, from whom?” “When does ‘criminal activity’ become ‘political’?” Then we explore outlawry and rebellion in Cuba to see how “political bandits” played key roles in Cuba’s independence struggles. In the end, simplistic notions of “black” and “white,” “right” and “wrong” become understood in more nuanced, historically, and culturally informed dimensions.

I also challenge students to engage issues via non-traditional assignments beyond standard essays or research papers. In several courses, students create short narrated Power Point assignments that allow them to be creative but also require them to concisely relay information on a slide while elaborating in a voice over. Such an assignment pushes students to merge research, implementation, creativity, and oral communication skills. In my History First-Year Seminar, I employ the same Power Point assignments for content aspects of the course, but beyond that I try to be one of a student’s first “go-to” people to advise them on how to navigate the university’s bureaucracy, make it work for them, and how to explore the university’s myriad academic possibilities. For instance, during the semester, I hold one-on-one meetings, requiring them to conduct a major and minor search to understand options related to their interests and then we discuss these options. In my INART course, students study narrative and technical issues by watching and analyzing “road movies” from Latin America. By semester’s end they produce their own road movies. After group critiques and re-edits, we host a film showing for invited guests.

Students have been very receptive. For nearly twenty years, my SRTEs have averaged between 6 and 7 on the two aggregate questions regarding instructor and course. More importantly, my Global Studies students have been successful upon graduating. They have become high school teachers, lawyers, a Swedish institute researcher, a Fulbright Fellow in Taiwan, an analyst in the Kenyan government, two US military officers, analysts with US- and European-based corporations, employees in US governmental and non-governmental agencies, and holders of advanced degrees in Political Science, International Diplomacy, and International Affairs.

Finally, my teaching has taken on a new dimension as author of a student-friendly textbook. Because I conduct research on transnationalism, I began to explore teaching Caribbean history from a transnational perspective, but there are no histories of the Caribbean utilizing this approach. In 2018, Palgrave Macmillan International offered an advanced contract to create a transnational history of the Caribbean. I will submit the manuscript *A Transnational History of the Modern Caribbean: Resistance across Borders* in 2021.

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<sup>1</sup> “A Tech-Happy Professor Reboots after Hearing His Teaching Advice Isn’t Working.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* February 12, 2012 <http://chronicle.com/article/A-Tech-Happy-Professor-Reboots/130741/>