



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

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**Before creating first-year seminar, ask:**

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

**- Vincent Tinto, Syracuse University**

## Keys to student success

- High expectations
- Academic and social support
- Frequent feedback
- Active involvement
- Relevant learning

## GEP surveys at UWSP

- Sections of 40+ students
- Large rooms, fixed seating
- Few assignments
- Stand-alone courses
- Support available – to those who seek it

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?

History 176  
Final Exam

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**PART I: MULTIPLE CHOICE.** Choose the one alternative that best completes the statement or answers the question. Record your answers on the separate bubble sheet. The first four questions require that you consult the map at the back of the test. The first four questions require that you consult the map at the back of the test.

There are 32 questions. You will get two "free misses": your first two incorrect answers will not count against your final score. A perfect score of 32 will receive two extra credit points. This section comprises 1/2 of the final exam grade.

1. **MAP QUESTION:** Which letter marks an area where slavery was prohibited by the Missouri Compromise?

A)                      B)                      C)                      D)                      E)

2. **MAP QUESTION:** Which letter marks the state where the events in *Calix, a Slave* took place?

A)                      B)                      C)                      D)                      E)

3. **MAP QUESTION:** Which letter marks an area that became part of the US after the Mexican-American War?

A)                      B)                      C)                      D)                      E)

4. **MAP QUESTION:** Which letter marks an area that was once an independent republic?

A)                      B)                      C)                      D)                      E)

5. **MAP QUESTION:** Which letter marks a place where slavery was prohibited by the Northwest Ordinance?

A)                      B)                      C)                      D)                      E)

6. The United States won the War of Independence in large part because

- A) Few American colonists were loyal to the King.
- B) The United States formed an alliance with France.
- C) The states kept the Continental army well supplied throughout the war.
- D) Enslaved African Americans failed to support the British.

7. During the 1780s, Spain threatened America's future by

- A) Refusing to lend Congress more money.
- B) Demanding that the United States give up its western territory.
- C) Closing the Mississippi River to American trade.
- D) Supporting the British army.

8. Shay's Rebellion

- A) Was led by enslaved African Americans who wanted freedom.
- B) Was led by Loyalists who wanted to restore British rule.
- C) Was an attempt to save poor farmers from bankruptcy proceedings.
- D) Was a protest by factory workers against high federal tariffs.

## My Goals

- Complexity of the past
- Improved reading
- Critical thinking
- Exam = necessary evil
- Learning for all

## Students' Reality

- Cramming and forgetting
- Minimal reading
- Just tell us the facts!
- Exam = all that matters
- Sheep vs. goats

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