



Subject Centre for
History, Classics
and Archaeology

11th Annual *Teaching and Learning in History* Conference

2009 Conference Report



An Introduction from the Subject Director for History

The annual Teaching and Learning in Higher Education History conference is a flagship event in the History community. Thus, it was a daunting task in this, my first year as History Subject Director, to organise a programme which would measure up to the high reputation of past conferences. It is also a momentous year for History within the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre community. The conference marks a moment of transition from History represented within the Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology to a new configuration, where History will exist as a separate entity within the Higher Education Academy's Subject Centre network.

In putting together the programme the History team wished to reflect on the opportunities and challenges posed by this transition. We wanted to re-establish connections with colleagues in History faculties overseas. International speakers had been a highlight of conferences in the past but attendance had recently dwindled. We wanted to allow space for reflection and further discussion of History teaching at HE level and of the role of the subject centre in supporting this. We were also keen to provide a place for the student voice to be heard. However, above all we wanted a high quality programme which reflected the diversity of teaching practice and research across higher education in History, both within and outwith the UK.

The conference provided us with valuable feedback and suggestions for the shape of History within the Higher Education Academy in the future. These ideas will help to inform our planning for 2009-10. We were delighted with the contributions from our many overseas speakers. We had representatives from Australia, US, Sweden and Ireland who, in addition to delivering insightful and engaging papers, added richness and depth to discussions on the UK context. One of the most thought-provoking panels was that focusing on postgraduate teaching practices. Speakers from England, Scotland and Wales shared their experiences with a refreshing honesty which drew admiration from longer-standing academics in the audience. For the first time, the conference also hosted some undergraduate History students who are participating on a research project funded by the Subject Centre on HE teaching spaces. We hope to develop opportunities for student engagement in conferences of the future.

These were just some of the highlights of the Eleventh Teaching and Learning in History conference. I am sure, that on reading the report, you will discover many more. Please do contact us if you have reflections on this year's conference or would like to suggest themes and papers for future events.

Sarah Richardson, History Subject Director



Programme

The 11th Annual Conference on Teaching and Learning in History aimed to bring together a diverse programme of topics and speakers: the common theme engendered was purely the enthusiasm of those attending to meet, discuss and drive forward teaching and learning practices.

Where to Next? Discussion on the Purposes and Programme of a Single History Subject Centre

*Facilitated by Alan Booth
(University of Nottingham)*

Decoding Primary Sources and Historical Arguments: Defining What Students Have to Do

David Pace, Joan Middendorf, Arlene Diaz, and Leah Shopkow (Indiana University)

Decoding History: Navigational Checks and Midcourse Corrections

*David Pace and Joan Middendorf
(Indiana University)*

Decoding History: Acting Collectively so our Students Learn What We Want to Teach Them.

*Arlene Diaz and Leah Shopkow
(Indiana University)*

The Conditions for Internationalisation

Melodee Beals (HCA Subject Centre), Alison Twells (Sheffield Hallam University) and Henrik Ågren (Högskolan i Gävle)

The Numerical Skills of Today's History Undergraduates

David Nicholls (Manchester Metropolitan University), Geoff Timmins (University of Central Lancashire) and Roger Lloyd-Jones (Sheffield Hallam University)

The Elephant in the Room: How We Integrate Climate Change into our Teaching; Some Views from the Rescue!History Network

Mark Levene (University of Southampton)

The History Data Service

Richard Deswarte (University of Essex)

Textbooks in the Digital Age

Beat Kumin (University of Warwick), Mark Greengrass (University of Sheffield), Derek Harding (University of Teesside) and Tessa Harvey (History Publisher for Wiley - Blackwell)

Games and Problem-Based Learning in History

Mike Cosgrave (University College Cork)

Beyond Audio-Visual

Andrew Koke (University of Indiana)

Problem-based Learning in the Teaching of History

*Phil Sheldrick
(Australian National University Canberra)*

The Great History Conundrum: Solving the Problem with Research Skills

Alex Moseley (University of Leicester)

Spaces and Stories of Higher Education

Cath Lambert, Danny Wilding, Laura Evans, Hannah Lever, Laura Moorhouse (University of Warwick), and Lisa Lavender (HCA Subject Centre)

History of Medicine and Medical Humanities

Vicky Long (University of Warwick)

Small Group Teaching at Oxford

Freyja Cox Jensen (University of Oxford)

That's a Very Good Question: The Postgraduate Experience of Teaching Outside Your Dissertation Topic

Andrew Struan (University of Glasgow)

Tutor, Teacher, Leader, Preacher: Teaching as a Postgraduate Historian

*Daniel Budden
(Swansea University and The History Lab)*

The Assessment of Work-Based Learning

Harvey Woolf (Institute for Learning Enhancement, University of Wolverhampton)

Finding Evidence for Student Learning: New Thoughts from an Old Answer

Keith Erikson (University of Texas at El Paso)

The Use of Generative Learning Objects in Higher Education History Teaching

*Richard Hawkins
(University of Wolverhampton)*

eLearning: Why Bother?

Max Jones (University of Manchester)

Introducing the Subject History at Loughborough University: Challenges and Opportunities

*Chris Szejnmann
(University of Loughborough)*

From Smorgasbord to Gateway: Curriculum Transformation in the History Major at UNSW

*Sean Brawley
(University of New South Wales)*

The Future of the Subject Centre

In the opening plenary session of the conference, Alan Booth, former Subject Co-Director for History, introduced delegates to the current mission of the Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology and put forth a series of questions on its future. He asked those present to discuss the needs and goals of the history community and to consider what they felt should be the central goals of the coming years and what specific support the aims could provide. The group discussions clearly highlighted three strong aims that the Subject Centre should embrace: enhancing teaching and learning through campaigning and the creation of pedagogical resources, maintaining a balance between leading and responding to the community and building networks within the discipline. It went on to suggest several activities the Centre may wish to prioritise to meet these aims:



- Gathering resources on good practice from HEI History departments and sharing them in hardcopy and electronic format
- Developing an interactive, resource-based website, including an e-library and an expanding annotated bibliography
- Promote employer engagement and the cultivation of transferable skills
- Plan strategic and targeted events:
 - Support for Postgraduates and Early Career Historians including applied teaching methods
 - Reaching out to the non-engaged
 - A SOTL Seminar Series
 - The Annual Conference as the Flagship Event
 - ICT in Teaching
 - The Future of History in Schools and Universities
- Provide support and consultancy services to:
 - Further Education programmes
 - Internationalisation programmes and networks
 - Discipline groups
- Provide additional support through
 - Targeted grants throughout the UK, supporting innovative teaching projects
 - Online activities and courses
 - Bridging disciplinary divides
 - Forming relationships with teaching and learning units within HEIs

Overall, there was a feeling among the delegates that the Subject Centre should not fill the calendar with too many events, which may fragment attendance if not discourage it, but rather work to provide a definite space a few times a year in which members of the HE History community could gather and share ideas. It was also stressed that the creation of SOTL networks, domestic and international, were vital to preventing feelings of isolation, especially for probationary staff.

International Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in History



After our opening session, we were pleased to host a delegation from History SOTL, an international society for the scholarship of teaching and learning in history based at the University of Indiana. They led three sessions on working with students to develop historical skills and overcome the difficulties they face.

In the first session, Decoding Primary Sources, we were asked to identify a key stumbling block our students had faced in the past. It was interesting to take a step back from the automatic processes an academic goes through in their research and look at a problem, or 'bottleneck' from the student's point-of-view. To think about viewing a resource as a creation, and to question the reasons for its creation, rather than consider it as something that exists and is studied in isolation.

The motivating effect of engaging students in research and evaluation was expanded upon in the parallel sessions. In 'Acting Collectively so our Students Learn What We Want to Teach Them,' we were asked to consider what we were preparing our students for. The skills they obtain can and should be of use beyond academia, as most undergraduate students won't become history academics. The History Learning Project at Indiana has devised a set of challenges and solutions which can be incorporated into courses to address key skills in teaching and learning. By looking at the curriculum from a multi-year perspective, departments can use thematic courses to layer skill sets and better prepare students for a life within or outside of academia. In the complementary session on 'Navigational Checks and Midcourse Corrections' the delegates worked in small groups to devise mid-course assessments to ascertain how well the students were grasping not only historical concepts, but the research skills they were meant to be learning. Feedback from the session made it clear that not all 'bottlenecks' could be easily assessed prompting us to reconsider how difficult these skills may be for undergraduates to obtain in the first place.

The panel on internationalisation was led by Melodee Beals from the Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology, Alison Twells from Sheffield Hallam University, and Henrik Ågren from the University of Gävle. After a brief overview of the increasing role of international students in HEIs, Alison Twells and Henrik Ågren spoke on their attempt to create a dual-campus history course at Sheffield Hallam and the University of Gävle. They offered their experiences and sought information from the other delegates on similar programmes and the institutional and departmental support they had received. The discussion highlighted several difficulties in adapting to increased levels of internationalization in HE history. It became clear that a lack of support has meant innovations are the result of individual work by particular academics and most solutions are developed in a reactionary manner. Furthermore, most of the support offered is based on the faculty or university level, with little discipline-specific provision to either staff or students. Without this support, it will be very difficult for individual academics to internationalise their curriculum.

The Subject Centre is currently gathering information on support for internationalisation in HE History. For more information, or to become involved in the project, please contact Melodee Beals at m.beals@warwick.ac.uk

Resources for Teaching and Learning

The session looking at the numerical skills of today's history undergraduates was led by Roger Lloyd-Jones (Sheffield Hallam University), David Nicholls (Manchester Metropolitan University) and Geoff Timmins (University of Central Lancashire), and raised some concerning facts about numeracy provision in history degrees in the UK. The research carried out so far by the history team in the 'Every Student Counts: Promoting Numeracy and Enhancing Employability' project reveals that the decline in economic history as a discipline has had a corresponding effect on the teaching of numeracy as a historical skill: as noted by the panel, "the typical picture is one of patchy, episodic engagement, usually by a handful of committed individuals". A number of key issues surrounding numeracy provision were discussed. Do departments have the capability now to teach numeracy? Should we only be concerned about 'historical' skills or wider 'employability' skills? Project findings so far show that no HEI has a compulsory numerical skills element in their undergraduate programme: a sobering thought that students can go through their university life without addressing numeracy at a time when the employability of our students will have an increasing profile.

Mark Levene, of the University of Southampton, led a group discussion on the role and responsibilities of the history community in educating and inspiring action in regard to climate change. After a brief overview of the Rescue!History project, the delegates discussed how different sub-disciplines might approach and integrate the subject into their work. While the field of environmental history appears, at first, a simple solution, most felt that the study of "human impact on the environment" was not the same as "environmental history". There was also a debate on where academic space might be found for such studies. It was acknowledged, however, that as any new scholarship needed to be placed within the context of existing works, carving out a new space would be difficult. In general, it was agreed that historians had an obligation to use their understanding of the human condition to analyse this issue; scientific enquiry would not suffice. The constant pressure to procure research funding has, regrettably, distracted us from our proper roles as public educators.



Richard Deswarte, meanwhile, provided information on the History Data Service. The talk did not overlook the negative impact of losing AHRC funding for the HDS's predecessor (AHDS History) in 2008, in terms of reduced resources and providing advice, training and outreach. Nonetheless, a discussion of key aspects of the range of 650 data collections and upcoming projects highlighted how the service has moved on from its change in funding status. One strength is its provision of quality research material on 19th and 20th century British economic and social history, particularly census data and the complete population reports from 1801 to 1937. Integrated Census Microdata (I-CeM) is a project in development that will integrate all census data from 1850-1911, to enable a researcher to track an individual and their various relationships throughout the period: a potentially fascinating teaching tool.

Links of Interest

Every Student Counts: http://www.uclan.ac.uk/information/services/ldu/every_student_counts.php

The Subject Centre will be involved in the proposed Humanities Employability Conference in October. For more information on employability, please contact Lisa Lavender at L.A.Lavender.1@warwick.ac.uk

Rescue!History: <http://rescue-history-from-climate-change.org/>

The History Data Service: <http://hds.essex.ac.uk>

Innovations in Teaching and Learning



The conference then hosted a panel on publishing and textbooks in the digital age and how to get the most out of hard-copy texts and online resource in HE history teaching. Beat Kümin reflected on how a 'conventional' textbook still gives an authoritative voice for students in a core undergraduate course, but can be supported by a digital companion, providing additional resources to enhance the thematic nature of research. Mark Greengrass developed the discussion on e-books: their availability, range and format. He

highlighted how students used them as part of directed reading, rather than a means to comprehensive research and study. Understanding these limitations, the question was posed: Can e-books be used more successfully to enhance bibliographical context?

Derek Harding from the Association of Historical Computing raised the question of ICT provision within history departments: students are often simply being 'exposed' to VLEs rather than being trained and supported in how to use and assess the worth of such resources. Al Bertrand from Wiley-Blackwell expanded on the discussion of quality, and the challenges facing textbook publishing at a time of increasing supply of digital information of varying quality. Bringing the panel talk full circle, the value of the textbook as a sound core of information and knowledge was highlighted, and online publishing needs to, and can move forward in updating, enhancing and supporting academic scholarship.

This panel was followed by an extended lunch and marketplace session. The marketplace, which was comprised of information stands from several of the speakers, allowed delegates the opportunity to hold more informal conversations with panellists and for the speakers to provide additional literature and information on their projects and organisations. The open-space for conversation and networking allowed delegates to share common difficulties or successes in their teaching and provided a jumping off point for the practical sessions of the afternoon.



Following the morning's presentations, the afternoon of the 2nd showcased practical workshops on innovative teaching methods in HE History. Mike Cosgrave, from University College Cork, demonstrated the use of table top war games in military history. After being given the example of the hex-and-counter game Napoleon at Waterloo, his students were charged with creating their own battle game. This required in-depth research into the geographic conditions of the battlefield, the historical deployments present, and relative strengths and weaknesses of the various military units. Further discussion made it clear that

while computer games may not be usable in the classroom environment, pen-and-ink games can be easily created by students to explore a variety of historical problems. Resource-based games especially, wherein the players must collect and deploy resources to succeed, can be adapted to mirror both international politics and regional socio-economics.

Andrew Kote, of the University of Indiana, meanwhile handed round Graham Crackers, an American favourite, and ‘threw away’ a pound coin as part of his engaging and memorable presentation on the use of haptic techniques in teaching. Whilst such practices are common in teaching young children, the fear of appearing flippant may be a barrier to expanding such techniques into higher level teaching. However, Andrew demonstrated the potential for stimulating (HE) student responses by engaging their wider senses with examples that could be incorporated into sessions on a wide variety of topics and enthuse discussions. The potential and effectiveness have yet to be investigated fully, although many at the conference were urging Andrew to plan further research in this area. A physical tool (such as the cracker) can provide a focus for memory that just listening to, and watching, a speaker may not create for all students: much food for thought.

The concept of problem-based learning was explored by Phil Sheldrick of the Australian National University Canberra and Alex Moseley of the University of Leicester. There have always been problems in teaching specific knowledge to students because this may change even before graduation. Instead students must be taught how to approach problems in order to meet novel challenges after university. Moseley demonstrated his use of research puzzles to teach a large class of history students not only historical skills, but also how to collaborate effectively without specific direction from the instructor. Other approaches, such as mock trials, can also be used to encourage independent learning and organisation. Although there is very little statistical evidence available on the effectiveness of problem-based learning as a single-approach teaching methodology in history, it was generally felt that it could be used to add variety to seminars and integrate student research.



The matter of student research was addressed as part of the parallel session looking at two projects recently given funding by the HCA: *Teaching Patterns in Medical History* and *Spaces and Stories of Higher Education*. The latter is a project investigating how relationships between space, pedagogy and curriculum have developed in HEIs from a sociological and historical perspective. Project leaders Cath Lambert and Danny Wilding backed by the History SC, have employed three undergraduate students to carry out much of the archival research. Their progress, observations and integration into the sphere of research will be followed as the SC looks more into student engagement in the discipline. Vicky Long, on the other hand, detailed changing patterns in how medical history is being taught in HEIs to students in medical, history, and history of science departments. Her research brought to light the difficulties of definition in teaching sub-disciplines in higher education.

The second day of the conference closed with a session on teaching in HE as a postgraduate student. Andrew Struan, Freyja Cox Jensen, and Daniel Budden all weighed in on the rewards and difficulties of leading seminar sessions. Despite the fact that the three PhD students hailed from different regions of the UK, it quickly became clear that they shared similar difficulties, namely a lack of concrete departmental support and training and concerns over their role as “transmitter of knowledge”. Many of the postgraduates who choose to teach, and certainly not all do, were usually only a few years older than their students and were unsure how to establish themselves as tutorial leader, and thus gain legitimacy, without falling into the secondary school teacher-student relationship that many first years expect. In all three institutions, the undergraduates anticipated a simple transmission of knowledge, while the postgraduates were keen to foster student-led discussion. Some suggestions were offered by delegates: the institution of a mentoring or shadowing programme between postgraduate tutors and the regular teaching staff would increase confidence and the giving of clear, explicit information on the purpose and format of seminars in the first class would prevent a “transmission of knowledge” model from taking root.

The Subject Centre is currently organizing a series of workshops for postgraduate tutors throughout the UK as well as the provision of electronic teaching materials and guides

Teaching beyond the Lecture Hall and Creation and Change in HE History Curriculum

Keith Erikson, of the University of Texas at El Paso, and Harvey Woolf, of the Institute for Learning Enhancement at the University of Wolverhampton, provided examples of bringing history education into the public sphere through work-based learning. From the discussions, it was clear that there were many advantages to bringing students into contact with the public sphere, through historical societies, museums, and part-time employment. The most important of these was the expression of history's "signature pedagogy", using archival and research skills to educate the public about their connection to the larger historical narrative. It was likewise clear that there were some difficulties to overcome. Outside traditional classroom assessment, clear guidance was needed on who should assess the students' progress, whether it be the academic, the employer, or the student themselves, and what weight should be given to each of these assessments.



Our session on e-learning brought forth several ideas on making ICT technologies such as WebCT, Blackboard and Moodle accessible to all university staff, regardless of their technological expertise. As the number of contact hours steadily decreases, VLE will become increasingly important in using seminar sessions effectively. Max Jones, of the University of Manchester, provided several examples of simple but valuable uses for the Blackboard system including the posting of course requirements, the embedding primary source material and links to secondary reading, and dissemination of questions to direct seminar preparation. Richard Hawkins, of the University of Wolverhampton, likewise provided information on GLOs (Generative Learning Objects) and their use on introducing students to a combination of visual and textual sources. Richard highlighted the advantages and disadvantages of this medium and the group discussed the ways in which it could be best utilised.



The final session of the conference brought together Chris Szejnmann of the University of Loughborough and Sean Brawley of the University of New South Wales to examine curriculum creation and change in higher education. It was clear that both designing a new course and reorganising an existing one were major undertakings which benefited greatly from a comparative study of History departments in Higher Education. Chris felt there was much freedom and enthusiasm to innovate with the re-establishment of history joint-honours programmes at Loughborough, whilst Sean has faced opposition at all levels in his efforts to drive forward a more thoughtful, student-centred programme from the existing 'smorgasbord' of options New South Wales. The presentations and discussion brought out several key themes, notably the importance of providing students with a cohesive and distinct learning experience enhanced but not weighed down by the use of ICT.

Final Thoughts on the Conference

This year's conference delivered a range of thought-provoking and innovative sessions in popular and congenial surroundings—even the weather was on our side. To reflect the feedback received during and following the event, our thanks must again go to all the speakers for the thought they put into their presentations, particularly our international visitors, who provided invaluable insights from their countries and attested to receiving the same in return. Too often funding and institutional structures can blind us to the fact that there is an international community of scholars dedicated to the development of teaching and learning. We were fortunate that so many of these men and women were able to attend this conference and that we have all been invited to a similar conference in Indiana this autumn.

Simply spending time in discussion with like-minded academics was an important part of the event, and different sessions struck chords with different people. However, a number of delegates noted that the absorbing talks given by the three postgraduate teachers, and resulting discussion, made a particular impression. Supporting early career historians, and the students they are learning to teach, is at the heart of our activities and will continue to be a key focus in the coming year.

We were also struck by the great enthusiasm for ICT and problem-based learning, and by the extent to which delegates were excited to shared ideas, successes and obstacles, not only during specific sessions but also in the hallways, pubs and dining room—wherever and whenever time allowed. On the other hand, many attendees, ourselves included, were disconcerted by the decreasing numeracy of history undergraduates and the reduced presence of economic history in university curricula. We hope to dedicate time and space to these pressing issues in the future and provide continuing support to the community in these areas.

We also aim to provide another diverse programme at next year's conference, to satisfy regular and hopefully many new delegates in the history community. Further postgraduate participation will be encouraged and integrated into the event and we hope that the conference will again provide a chance for those who are just starting their careers to meet and share their experiences and expectations with likeminded and more experienced academics.

The organisers would like, once more, to thank all the attendees for their thoughtful contributions and we hope to see you all next spring.

—Lisa Lavender and Melodee Beals
Academic Coordinators for History





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