

The Higher Education Academy

History Subject Centre

NEWSLETTER



In this Second Edition of the Newsletter:

- Report on the 12th Annual Teaching and Learning Conference
- The winning essay of our Undergraduate Competition
- Information about ongoing research projects
- An update on the Internationalisation Project
- News of all upcoming events

**The
Higher
Education
Academy**

WELCOME

In August 2009 the rebranded History Subject Centre was launched. The History team are delighted at the positive reception we have received in our first year as a new Centre. One major innovation was our new website: www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk. The website's unique visitors have increased by over 90 per cent compared with the previous two years and we have many avid followers on our Facebook and Twitter sites. Some of the most enthusiastic responses to the website focus on the eLibrary, a repository of open educational resources for the learning and teaching of History. We have included an article on the eLibrary and encourage users to deposit their own materials.

We also launched two new publication series this year and these too have proved immensely popular. *Historical Insights: Focus on Teaching* has now published four titles: *Hollywood for Historians* by Andrew Dawson; *Medieval Castles* by Robert Liddiard; and *Teaching as a PhD Student and Contemporary Britain* by Kate Bradley. The latter is our latest release and you can find out more information on page 12. The sister series *Historical Insights: Focus on Research* which is published in conjunction with the Institute of Historical Research has issued one title: *Quantitative Skills for Historians* by Mark Freeman. The publications are available in hard copy or to download from our website.

Our events and activities have been well attended over the past year; with waiting lists in operation for many workshops. We have been particularly pleased at the revitalisation of the important regional networks. Highlights include events on Teaching Visual Sources at Manchester; on E-Learning at Wolverhampton and on the Undergraduate Dissertation at Lincoln. We are finalising dates and arrangements for next year's calendar but details of our proposed key events may be found on page 15.

Research is at the heart of the work of the Subject Centre. The HEA/JISC funded HumBox Project on Open Educational Resources in the Humanities has proved to be a great success this year (for more information see page 7). In the autumn, the UKCISA funded Teaching International Students will release the results of a year-long project with accompanying resources for Departments. Finally, The History

Passion Project is exploring the 'pleasure, purpose and value' in University History teaching in the UK.

Readers may be aware of the current re-organisation that is taking place in the Higher Education Academy. As we go to press there are no details of how the restructuring will affect the History Subject Centre but we hope to bring you more news in the Autumn. In the meantime, we are aiming to build upon the successes of our first year as a new Centre in order to meet the forthcoming challenges for HE in the UK.



**Director,
History Subject Centre**



REPORT FROM THE 12TH ANNUAL TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HISTORY CONFERENCE

The Annual Conference organised by the History Subject Centre is now well-established as a key event in the international calendar of activities that focus on the scholarship of teaching and learning within the discipline of History. This year delegates enjoyed the usual diverse range of topics from angelology to disruption. The quality of the papers was superb with speakers placing their case studies within a wider pedagogical scholarship. Audience participation was a key component of the conference, the presentations often provoking extensive discussions, which continued outside the scheduled sessions. The knowledgeable and engaged delegates are a key element of the conference's ongoing appeal and success. The mix of international speakers, experienced academics, postgraduate and early career teachers and undergraduates ensured that speakers were provided with thoughtful and insightful feedback on their papers from a range of perspectives.

The conference opened on Tuesday with 3 powerful and thought-provoking sessions. Sean Brawley (University New South Wales) spoke on the failure of a major curriculum transformation at UNSW introduced last year. He highlighted a possible problem in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Whilst it is important to emphasise recognition and reward good practice and innovation, we don't talk about failure, or learn from it, which could lead some to disregard all elements of an innovative project, rather than changing or removing only those elements that don't work. His experience in assessing what went wrong: the timing of essays, innovations in peer review, the involvement of key staff; led Sean to conclude that the new course was less than the sum of its parts due to a failure, not in innovation, but implementation. Students could see the value of the innovations but the course as a whole "didn't quite work".



In our next session, Alan and Jeanne Booth discussed the thinking behind the exciting History Passion Project currently being funded by the History Subject Centre. The project will explore what it takes to become a history teacher; what sustains them and whether inspirational teachers are 'nice to have' or essential for preparing graduates in the connected world of the 21st century. For further information on the History Passion Project, please see page 6 of this newsletter.

In the final session of the first day, Keith Erikson explained that the awareness of HOW we teach in history has existed since before the 1920s and in the 1980s and 1990s came the increased drive for the recognition of teaching, leading to the formation of the History SOTL group in 2006. He raised questions and ideas about future initiatives and how to advance SOTL, highlighting the importance of taking SOTL work to multiple audiences, including schools and the public at large. Keith also highlighted the History Pedagogy Bibliography (hosted on the History Subject Centre website) which includes over 600 publications. For more information on how to access and utilise this resource please see page 8 of this newsletter.

Together, these inspiring opening sessions highlighted significant themes we should consider in our discipline to promote study in our subject during a time of significant uncertainty in HE. The questions raised were returned to throughout the conference in planned sessions and informal discussions alike.

REPORT FROM THE 12TH ANNUAL TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HISTORY CONFERENCE, HELD 23RD TO 25TH MAY 2016

On the first evening of the conference there was a reception to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Higher Education Academy's National Teaching Fellowship Scheme. We were fortunate to have a high number of the History National Teaching Fellow's present to mark the occasion. The event both celebrated the existing fellows and drew attention to the scheme in an effort to encourage more historians to consider applying for fellowships. History as a subject is under-represented in the college of National Teaching Fellows.

The next two days of the conference continued this theme of insightful and stimulating presentations and discussions. Subjects as diverse as eLearning,

plagiarism, the worth of Historians in the 21st Century and the first-year transition were all discussed in depth. This is just a small selection of all the fine presentations that were held over the three days of the Conference.

Erica Morris spoke on the work of JISC's Academic Integrity Service in collating and disseminating best practice on the important issue of plagiarism. Erica reminded delegates that an increasingly diverse student population has led to an increasing range of skills; assessment of academic writing and methods of assessment in HE needs to adapt to become robust and transparent to deal with a range of issues.

The session on digital technologies saw presentations about the use of the Nineteenth Century British Library Newspapers online repository in undergraduate history teaching, an update on the background and uses of the HumBox Project (for more information on HumBox, please see page 7 of this newsletter) and on the application and effectiveness of discussion boards in the teaching of a History Masters Degree programme. The session effectively showed the increasing importance of utilising the widening world of digital and online resources in the teaching and learning of history.

Samantha McGinty and Ian Gwinn introduced a group participation session centred around a three-year project on

reconceptualising feedback practices. These group discussions proved thoughtful and extensive reporting considerations on the importance of understanding the purpose of feedback to students and to shape the delivery of it to match or re-shape their expectations.

The discussion on first-year transition began with Freyja Cox Jensen highlighting the particular issues surrounding the transition to Oxford-style tutorials and the pressures this placed on first year-undergraduates unused to the strong emphasis on independent study. Delegates offered a number

of suggestions on this issue including on the importance of peer support structures. Julian Wright looked at the transition by describing his collaborative work with secondary schools and highlighting the divergent values held by university historians and the secondary history curriculum. The session highlighted

again the need for flexibility by lecturers in providing for the varying needs of the first year students and developing a network of mutual support.

For more information about the 12th Annual Teaching and Learning in History Conference, including materials from the workshops and a full conference report please visit www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/library



In her fascinating session, Jolene Debert offered delegates examples of how to integrate enquiry-based learning into historical teaching. By using hyperlinks within her PowerPoint presentation, Jolene was able to interact with students altering the course of her lecture based on student responses. This Choose Your Own Adventure style of lecture enabled students to fully engage with the material, and in the end, her students demanded the lecture be extended in order to allow them to put forth their own interpretations of the evidence.

TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HISTORY

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In his presentation, Richard Hall asked the conference delegates to consider the role of History and the historian in Higher Education in a 21st century world that faces significant disruption. Richard argued that by utilising the skills developed through the teaching and learning of history, Historians are ideally placed to contribute to the development of the 21st century. This was a thought-provoking and challenging session which was well-received by delegates.

The conference concluded with a final plenary session that highlighted the positive statements on the value of the study of history. When asked what conclusions the delegates had reached at the end of the three days on the initial questions of the importance of expanding history's pedagogy, admitting to failure as well as success and a continuing of their own passion for teaching, it was clear that the three days had raised far more questions than had provided answers. Many delegates expressed the desire to take on the suggestions and musings of other presenters at their own universities and return next year with their own experiences.

If you would like to contribute or participate at the 13th Annual Teaching and Learning Conference, it will be held at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, in April 2011



An underlying theme of this conference centred on the demands of supporting a high quality student experience in a time of change and funding uncertainties. At such times, the collective help and support of the academic History community as well as of discipline-based organisations such as the History Subject Centre prove invaluable. Our congratulations and thanks go to all our presenters and delegates for making this conference a stimulating and thought-provoking event.

THE HISTORY PASSION PROJECT: PLEASURE, PURPOSE AND VALUE IN UNIVERSITY TEACHING

What makes a university historian into a passionate teacher? What difference does passion make to our students anyway? What contribution does it make to preparing graduates to make a good living in the 21st century?

These are some of the questions addressed in the 'history passion project' which is being led by Alan Booth from the School of History, University of Nottingham and Jeanne Booth, former head of a University careers service. Its purpose is to explore the role of passion in teaching, what inspires and sustains it, how it is demonstrated in interactions with students, and what impact it makes. The project was launched at the History Subject Centre conference in March 2010 and will be reporting its findings next year.

The language of passion is often revealed in the practitioner discourse of historians and their students; yet it generally receives little attention in the 'official' prescribed curriculum. In a policy environment dominated by the language of efficiency, measurable outcomes and employability skills the passion project hopes to create space for other languages that speak to what is important to teachers and students, and to construct more complex and nuanced ways of articulating more effectively to policy-makers the value of history teaching and its contribution to society, now and in the future.

So, the history passion project aims to examine some important issues and suggest new ways forward. It will also deliver practical resources for the whole history community of teachers and students including:

- Digital narratives from interviews with historians and with their students and graduates.
- Opportunities to discuss teaching including a webinar on core values and future-thinking.

- Bibliographic resources including literature review and other contextual material.

To be successful the project needs your help. It starts with you, contributing your views on teaching in your work as a historian by completing a short online survey which will be sent to all UK historians over the summer.

For more details and opportunities to get involved, see www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/research or email alan.booth@nottingham.ac.uk

It took two hundred years to fill the shelves of the Library of Congress with more than 57 million manuscripts, 29 million books and periodicals, 12 million photographs and more.

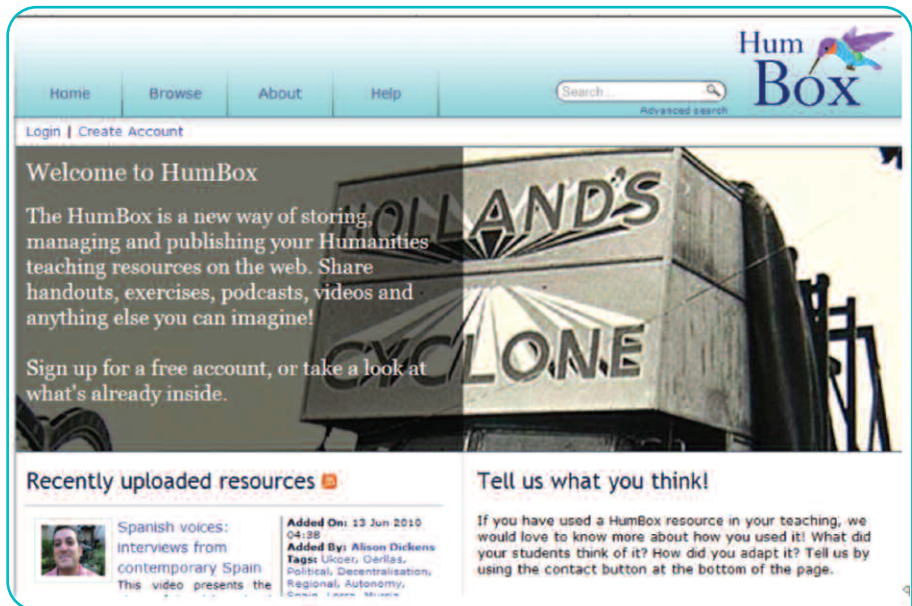
Now the world generates an equivalent amount of digital information nearly 100 times every day.



THE HUMBOX PROJECT – LAUNCHED AND GOING FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH

In our first newsletter we gave details of our involvement in HumBox – one of the 12-month pilot OER projects being funded by JISC and the Higher Education Academy.

The general aim of the project, and the pilot scheme more widely, was to encourage the publication and sharing of learning resources by and across subject communities: promoting interest in the study of humanities disciplines in UK Higher Education and raising the profile of UK HE worldwide. It has been a busy but very productive year, with the project achieving and exceeding the pilot objectives – the main achievements being:



Over 1100 digital resources published and shared online in a variety of media including videos, podcasts, handouts, interactive online activities, powerpoint lectures, etc.



The creation of a trusted, user-friendly and attractive online space (the HumBox) for sharing resources which offers dynamic social-networking style tools for building a community of users



An expanding community of 220+ registered users who are active in publishing, sharing, using, re-using and reviewing each others' resources.



The creation of a process for peer review of OERs and renewed notions of how quality in open resources is understood



Community-creation of guidance materials on using a repository effectively and on IPR and copyright



An active user-community who are engaged in promoting HumBox and OERs in general across their institutions and to the wider community, thus raising general awareness of OERs and initiating trends for sharing



The creation of a model for sustainability which includes community input and technological innovation

Our significant conclusions are that OER publication **can** be successful when approached from a **subject** perspective, and that humanities academics are willing to share their teaching resources and demonstrate their excellence as teachers in this way.

With ongoing support from the project team the HumBox project continues to grow ...

why not take a look at <http://humbox.eprints.org>

For further details on the early phases of the project, and insights from one of History's project partners take a look again at our first newsletter on line at:

<http://www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/publications/winter2009>

Or, as summed up in the words of one of our project partners from Aston University, **“I think we’ve proved as a group that OER sharing is possible”**.

THE HISTORY SUBJECT CENTRE'S eLIBRARY

One of the key resources that the History Subject

Centre offers is our eLibrary. This is an open-access repository of education resources to enhance the Teaching and Learning of History. We hold a number of different types of educational resource:

- Case Studies: Provide descriptions and analysis of new methods of teaching and learning.
- Teaching Guides: Provide practical advice and guidance on how to approach teaching a wide range of specific topics as well as examples of key themes and class materials. Topics include Hollywood for Historians, Teaching Byzantium, Medieval Castles, Contemporary Britain and Teaching as a PhD Student.
- Research Guides: A new series of guides published tri-annually which detail new or under-used sources and methodologies and help historians integrate them into their research.
- Briefing Reports: Commissioned by the HEA, these papers offer in-depth information and advice on how to deal with particular topics.
- Conference Presentations and Reports: PowerPoint Presentations from the many conferences and workshops that the History Subject Centre are associated with

In addition to these materials, the History Subject Centre has

developed, in conjunction with HistorySOTL and Keith Erikson from University of Texas at El Paso, the History Pedagogy Bibliography. It aims to provide the international history community with an up-to-date, annotated bibliography of the scholarship on teaching and learning, with specific reference to works focusing on teaching history in Higher Education. The bibliography offers users a choice of three databases: general works, history-specific studies and introductory pieces. Users can then create custom, annotated bibliographies on a variety of sub-themes such as assessment, seminar activities and first-year transition.

Collaboration with the wider academic community is welcomed. If you would like to suggest a title for the database, assist in creating or updating the annotations of existing entries, or would like us to add a new work to bibliography please contact the History Subject Centre.

HOW TO USE THE eLIBRARY

The eLibrary offers a number of ways to search for resources. In these examples, we will look at searching for the Conference Report from our 12th Annual Teaching and Learning in History Conference.

By using the resource type browser, simply click on the button for Conference. This will bring up all conference reports in the eLibrary. You can pick more than one category to narrow your search.

The screenshot shows the 'eLibrary Resource Type Browser' interface. On the left is a navigation menu with categories like 'Home', 'About Us', 'eLibrary', 'Subject Centre Themes', 'Historical Topic', 'Resource Type', 'Keyword Search', 'External Resources', 'Bibliography', 'Publications', 'Events', 'Research', 'Funding', 'News', 'Spotlight', 'Recognition Scheme', and 'Get Involved!'. The 'Resource Type' section is expanded, showing a list of options with checkboxes: Briefing Report, Case Study, Conference Presentation, **Conference Report** (checked), Course Materials, Powerpoint, Research Guide, Review, and Teaching Guide. The main content area displays '35 of 172 pages match' and lists three conference reports: '10th Annual Conference', '11th Annual Conference', and '12th Annual Conference'. Each entry includes the author(s) and a brief description of the programme and report.

The screenshot shows the 'eLibrary Search Box' interface. The search box contains the text 'Conference'. Below the search box, a list of search results is displayed, including 'Conference Report from the Nottingham Postgraduate Collaboration Day' (07 Jun 2010), '12th Annual Conference' (03 Jun 2010), '8th Annual Conference' (03 Jun 2010), '5th Annual Conference' (03 Jun 2010), '10th Annual Conference' (03 Jun 2010), '11th Annual Conference' (03 Jun 2010), 'Jeanine Graham's 'Skills, History and Employment'' (08 Jun 2010), 'James Wisdom's 'The Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ)'' (08 Jun 2010), 'Improving Lecturing' (08 Jun 2010), and 'Linking Research and Teaching in History: Some Issues' (08 Jun 2010). A 'More results' link is visible at the bottom of the list.

Another way to search the eLibrary is to use the keyword search. Simply enter the title, author or keyword and results display automatically.

In this example, by typing Conference, we are presented with a different list to that in our first example but which also contains the report we are looking for.

Finally, by choosing either of these links, we are taken to the main 12th Annual Conference Page. From here, we can access the conference programme and read the conference report. Instructions are also provided on how to search for all other conference materials in the eLibrary.

The screenshot shows the '12th Annual Conference' page in the eLibrary. The page header includes the title '12th Annual Conference' and the authors 'MELODIE BEALS, ANTONY BOUNDS AND LISA LAVENDER'. The page type is identified as 'CONFERENCE REPORT'. The main content area contains a description: 'Programme and report from the 12th Annual Teaching and Learning in History Conference, held at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford on 1-3 April 2009. Individual presentations can be found by using the searching for "TLC 2010" or using the relevant eLibrary browser.' Below this, there is a 'SIMILAR RESOURCES' section listing links for the '5th Annual Conference', '8th Annual Conference', '10th Annual Conference', '11th Annual Conference', and '12th Annual Conference'. At the bottom, it indicates '0 page comments'.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN HISTORY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF FIRST YEAR TRANSITION

During the past year, the History Subject Centre, in conjunction with the Higher Education Academy *Teaching International Students* (TIS) project, has been researching the perceptions of first-year students in UK history programmes.

The study utilized a combination of web-surveys and interviews over the past academic year to discover which issues student felt were most pressing as they made the transition from work, secondary school, or further education into their first year in higher education. Working with students from a wide variety of international backgrounds and previous experiences, the study was able to draw out some of the common fears and expectations students had when entering their programmes as well as their final conclusions on their first year experiences. More importantly, it was able to hone in on the different areas about which international, mature, and traditional students felt the most apprehension and offers some insights on how to provide support.

Although History is not perceived to attract the same percentage of international undergraduate students as other disciplines, it is among the disciplines that benefit most from a variety of perspective and a diverse student body. It is therefore all the more important that history departments assist students from all backgrounds integrate fully into their discipline communities in order to further the educational experiences of all students at all levels.

International Students in History: A Comparative Study of First Year Transition will be published in September 2010 along with supplementary materials to assist home and international students transition into first-year history programmes.

Melodee Beals

The study offers insight into student perceptions of

- Pre-arrival expectations
- Lecturing
- Seminars and tutorials
- Assessment
- Diversity
- Course structure
- Peer support
- Contact hours
- The roles of the University, Faculty, Department and individual staff in transition



NEWS FROM THE NETWORKS

The work of the Regional Networks ...

The Regional Networks, supported by the Subject Centre, play an important role in sharing innovation and best practice in teaching and learning, at a local level. The North-West and Midlands networks have between them run an informative and varied programme of events this year, and more are planned for the summer and autumn. For example, 'Preach What You Practice' is a workshop being held on 14th September 2010, at the University of Birmingham, including a keynote address from Carl Chinn.

In addition to these two established networks, a workshop on 'Preparing Undergraduates for the Dissertation' was held on 16th June in Lincoln for East Midlands colleagues, and the first meeting of a new network of teachers of North American History will take place in Manchester as we go to press with this newsletter. Both these events came out of a need expressed by academics to develop and share an understanding of the given topic amongst colleagues. The support and administration provided by the Subject Centre enables these events to take place, and facilitates valuable relationships across universities in our discipline.

If you would like to find out more about any of the networks, or upcoming events visit:

<http://www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/getinvolved/networks>

Northwest Network of Historians – Modern British History Seminar

Spotlight on the North-West Network ...

The long established North-West Network co-ordinates events out of Manchester and Liverpool, including two ongoing seminar series on Modern British History, and the Long Eighteenth Century. First, on 30 October 2009, Dr Adrian Bingham (Sheffield) delivered a paper on 'Kinsey and "Little Kinsey": Sex Surveys and the Press in Post-War Britain' at the University of Manchester. Dr Bingham discussed aspects of his recent OUP monograph *Family Newspapers? Sex, Private Life and the British Popular Press 1918-1978* (2009) in front of a large audience of staff and students. On 7 May 2010, Professor Mark Peel (Liverpool) delivered a paper on 'Men in Strange Places: Two Projects in the History of Modern Masculinity' at the University of Liverpool. Prof. Peel has just joined the History Department at Liverpool, and the seminar enabled many staff and students to meet a new colleague working in the field.

In addition to these seminars, the network runs individual workshops looking at current topics and concerns in teaching practice. The most recent workshop was held on 12th March in conjunction with the Northwest Network Long 18th Century Seminar. Organised by Dr. Max Jones (Manchester) and Dr. Robert Poole (Cumbria), this one-day workshop shared wide-ranging, innovative examples of 'Teaching Visual Sources'. The workshop attracted a large audience of academic staff and postgraduates from around the country and was packed with ideas and resources used by academics, providing inspiration for delegates.

A full report on the event can be found on the Subject Centre's eLibrary at

www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/eLibrary

For further information about the Northwest Network Modern British History Seminar, please contact the secretary Dr Max Jones on max.jones@manchester.ac.uk.

The 2010-11 programme will be published on the History Subject Centre's web-site in September.



NEW PUBLICATIONS

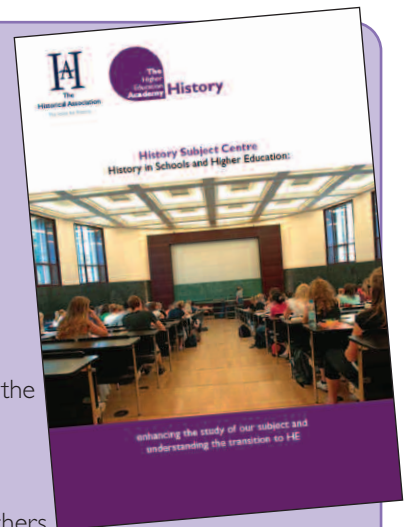
History in Schools and Higher Education: enhancing the study of our subject and understanding the transition to HE

The inspiration for this guide was taken from the 2009 History in Schools – Present and Future conference (the event report can be found in our eLibrary), where discussions frequently returned to two main points:

- highlighting the advantages of studying history to a higher level
- the role that closer collaboration between schools and universities can have in revealing the importance of such study, giving a taste of what HE study would be like, and helping to provide robust pedagogic and contextual teaching to advance pupil study skills.

If you are interested in working in this area, the guide highlights practical ways in which teachers in schools and HE can further interest and study of history, by providing background information on current school and HE practices, and case studies by staff and students from the history community.

View it online at: <http://www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/spotlight> or search for it on our eLibrary. Alternatively, request a hard copy from the History Subject Centre.



Historical Insights: Focus on Teaching Contemporary Britain

Kate Bradley

“Contemporary Britain is becoming increasingly popular both as a subject for historical research as well as for undergraduate and postgraduate teaching. It offers a fascinating means of understanding the concerns of the present day and of uncovering the reasons for massive social and economic changes since 1900, especially from 1945 onwards. Contemporary British history offers great potential for innovative teaching, learning and assessment techniques and offers potential for interdisciplinary work and collaboration with sociology, film studies and other departments.”

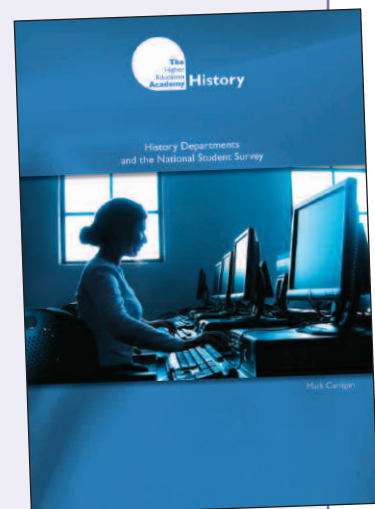
Contemporary Britain provides readers with a guide to specific examples of seminar topics, suggested reading and key teaching themes.



History Departments and the National Student Survey

Mark Carrigan

This report presents results from an analysis of the 2009 National Student Survey (NSS). It aims to present these averages in a comparative fashion so as to understand the relative student perceptions of history departments across all institutions, particular strengths and weaknesses suggested by the NSS results and any patterning in these respects which is identifiable across different institutional groupings and regions of the country.



For these and other publications, please visit the History Subject Centre website

WHAT ADVICE WOULD I GIVE TO A NEW FIRST YEAR HISTORY STUDENT?

Congratulations to the winner of our Student Essay Competition: William Egan of the University of Nottingham. Students were asked to write on the topic: What Advice Would I Give to a New First Year History Student? We received entries from students at universities across the country and it was a challenging decision as to which one should win! Commendations also go out to our two runners up, Stephanie Pickerill of Queen Mary, University of London, and Chris Zacharia of the University of Warwick. William's winning essay is reproduced here.

It is almost all over. My three years of studying History at the University of Nottingham are coming to an end and I am currently overwhelmed with the wealth of possibilities and options available to a History graduate. But for you, the challenge of what will be the three most enjoyable and intellectually strenuous years of your life will be about to begin. So before I shoot off into unknown territory, let me give you some advice which I have found beneficial whilst studying History.

Perhaps the most important advice I have is to remember, in the midst of essay deadlines and exam revision, why you applied for History in the first place. Remember to enjoy and exercise your passion for studying the past. Not only will this make your degree more enjoyable, but the quality of your work will increase. In my first year I was part of a group project on the Robin Hood ballads and we visited Sherwood Forest and even saw the Great Oak which was his supposed base. Similarly, I visited Nottingham Castle where Edward III staged his coup d'état (1330), arresting Mortimer and his mother after travelling through the castle's secret passageways. Visiting these historical sites increased my passion for studying them and helped me to describe the

events in question. It was Elton who wrote that 'the historian must read not only with the analytical eye of the investigator but also with the comprehensive eye of the storyteller.'¹ Exercising your enjoyment of History in this way will certainly be beneficial, and more importantly, fun. Moreover, if you are not immediately surrounded by fascinating Historical sites then there are simpler ways to help your studies. Historical films are a great way to complement your scholarly research and will aid your memory in exams. On my crusaders module a group of us watched 'Kingdom of Heaven.' The film helped me to imagine the crusades and provided us with the opportunity to critique the film and how it stood up to the past as we saw it. The writer L. P. Hartley once famously wrote that 'the past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.'² If you visit places relevant to your studies or watch historical films, you will gain an insight into the past and can also exercise your passion for history at the same time.

In addition, it is important that you should get involved with your universities' History Society. This will help you to make friends on the course which will prove invaluable by the time of the third year. For instance, your course friends will be an important support network when studying. My library is currently open twenty-four hours a day in preparation for essay deadlines and every night, on the same tables, you will find History students working together and supporting each other. Moreover, if you have group presentations in your seminars then it will turn a potentially stressful experience into one of enjoyment, as you will know the people you are working with. Of course, there are other reasons for getting involved. Our society organises socials which have ranged from bar crawls to historical tours and they are a source of great fun and a chance for all History students to pull together and enjoy themselves. On another note, you could even run for a place on the committee. It is an exciting opportunity to gain organisational work experience whilst offering a leading role within the History department. For instance, we are currently finalising our final year History ball! Therefore, one valuable piece of advice I can give is to join your History society at your freshers' fair and get to know your fellow students!

¹ G. Elton, *The Practice of History* (London, 1967), 84.

² J. Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2000), p.6.

However, it is just as important to exercise your mind as well as your enjoyment of History. At undergraduate level, the nature of the discourse will be fully revealed in its complexity and I urge you to delve into it. You will be asked to consider whether it is possible to accurately recapture the past or whether it has been forever lost and we can only guess as to the actions of our historical counterparts. Indeed, the conception of 'ultimate history' which argues that we can arrive at a 'factual' interpretation and which was prominent in the nineteenth century has now been revised by the post-modern movement. Lipstadt summated this conception by describing how 'any truth can be retold. Any fact can be recast. There is no ultimate historical reality.'³ However, it is up to you to arrive at your own conclusion as to the nature of History. Whilst studying you should consider how the sources you are using were created; consider the bias of the writer, the era they were writing in, and subsequently whether you can trust what you are reading. You should also consider your own beliefs and whether these are causing you to interpret the past in a certain way. For instance, I am on the History Committee at my university and this may have led me to stress the importance of your getting involved in your own societies. Yet overall, anybody's advice reflects their own vested interests and experiences and it is up to you, the reader, to draw your own conclusions! Overall, your skills of critical analysis will increase and this will be reflected in the quality of your work.

So there you have it. These three key tenets of advice have proved invaluable to me over the course of my degree. Indeed, my only regret is that I did not get involved in the History society earlier. I also feel that I should have taken the opportunity to visit more historical places which lie further afield than Nottingham. I urge you to have no regrets when you finish university. Therefore, immerse yourself in the study of History; try to come to your own conclusions about its practice. Also, get involved. Visit local sites of interest and join your History committee. The benefits will soon reveal themselves.

The History Subject Centre is Pleased to Announce its
Annual Student Essay Competition

Are you studying for a degree in History?
Would you like to win an iPod Touch for a 1,000-word essay?
Well now's your chance!

The Higher Education Academy History Subject Centre is giving you the chance to offer your opinions and experiences in a 1000-word essay on:
"What Advice would I give to a New First Year History Student?"

This opportunity is open to anyone studying history as part of their HE course.
The winning essay will be put on the Subject Centre Website, and will be featured in our summer newsletter. So, get writing!

Prizes:

- 1st Prize: 32GB iPod Touch + £100 iTunes Vouchers
- 2nd Prize: £50 in iTunes/Amazon Vouchers
- 3rd Prize: £25 in iTunes/Amazon Vouchers

 **History**

Deadline for submission: 30th April 2010.
For further information please contact us at:
✉ heahistorysubjectcentre@warwick.ac.uk
🌐 <http://www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/studentessay>



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Elton, G., *The Practice of History* (London, 1967).
Evans, R., *In Defence of History* (London, 1997).

³ R. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London, 1997), p.242.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

CONFIRMED EVENTS:

10th September – 19th Annual Conference of the Women's History Network
University of Warwick

14th September – Preach What You Practice – Midland Network Workshop
University of Birmingham

FORTHCOMING EVENTS:

A full programme of events is currently being planned for 2010-11. These will include:

- More events for the Midlands, North West and North American networks (for ideas of what type of events have been run previously please visit www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/getinvolved/networks)
- Country-wide Postgraduate Training Workshops: (Details of previous events and current resources can be found at www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/postgraduates)

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