

# HISTORY

## Reading, Writing, and Reflection: The Ignatian Value of Reflection in the History Area of the Core Curriculum

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### The Course

#### 1. European History II, HIST 134

- Fulfills part of the History Area requirement of the Core Curriculum

#### 2. From the Syllabus:

- Why study European history?  
Over the past 500 years, Europe has been the center of major cultural and intellectual movements, changed the ways economies and families are organized, dominated the world, and nearly destroyed itself. For better or worse, European history still exerts a strong influence on our own societies. We learn about European history not only to understand the past, but also to understand ourselves.
- Course Objectives:  
In this course, we will discuss the Wars of Religion, Absolutism, the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, the 1848 revolutions, imperialism, World War I, World War II, the Cold War, and the European Union. Over the course of the semester, we will consider various forms of religion, state building, industrialization, political ideology, the family, gender roles, and nationalism.
- Lectures will be framed as inquiries into historical problems: What were the causes of the French Revolution? How did industrialization affect family life? How did the Nazis come to power in Germany? Through the analysis of broad change, events, personalities, words and images, students will learn not only what happened, but also the way historians think about problems in European history.
- In this course, you will learn basic historical skills, including using written and visual primary source documents, writing clearly and effectively, and reasoning through historical problems. We will balance the lecture and reading and with the study of primary source documents, including texts, paintings, and film.

### New, Mission Driven-Components

#### 1. Goals

- To encourage students to reflect more carefully upon the reading and their writing.
- To encourage students to appreciate that the processes of reading and writing can form a fundamental part of their development as reflective individuals in the Jesuit tradition.
- In concrete terms, I would like to develop:
  - A new policy concerning re-writing papers.
  - A new kind of writing assignment based on reading for class.

## 2. Background

- The Jesuit habit that has been most meaningful to me in my reading and conversations with my mentor, Lisa Close-Jacobs, is that of reflection.
- In the chapter “Jesuit ‘Products’ are Persons of Quality,” William J. Byron, S.J., writes, “Reflective persons are not impulsive; they are not necessarily indecisive... but they are measured and deliberate in their approach to decision making.”<sup>1</sup>
- In terms of student development, I view reflection to mean the ability to sit back, consider carefully what one has read, re-read with a new perspective, write with discernment and purpose, and re-write with the aim of achieving a more perfect, sharper piece of communication.
- In other words, I would like to encourage students to view reading and writing as a constant conversation in which the end product is not a grade, but a better understanding of 1) the human experience in history and 2) how to communicate more effectively about history.

## Re-Writing papers

### 1. The Problem

- I have always allowed students to re-write their papers, and a few students benefited greatly from the second opportunity.
- However, the majority of students made minimal changes, often simply fixing grammatical errors that I have already marked or responding to specific problems, without rethinking the paper or making additional changes.
- Under the old policy, the new grade for the papers after the re-write averaged an improvement of less than 2.5%.

### 2. The New Policy

- I will go over rough drafts of your papers with you if you bring them to my office (during office hours or by appointment). You may also re-write your first paper.
- **THE NEW GRADE WILL AVERAGE THE TWO GRADES.**

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<sup>1</sup> From *Jesuit Saturdays: Sharing the Ignatian Spirit with Lay Colleagues and Friends* (2000, Loyola Press)

- Re-writing includes re-thinking your essay and may include making changes beyond the comments that I have written on your original.
- Making changes on a draft and/or re-writing does not guarantee an “A” paper.
- If you would like to re-write your paper, you must turn in:
  - Your original paper with my comments.
  - A list of changes that you have made to the assignment.

### 3. Assessment

- Provided a learning opportunity to students who truly missed the point of the assignment or who wanted to put in extra effort to improve their writing.
- Discouraged students who were simply looking for a few easy extra points from submitting a re-write.
- Example of student-generated list of changes on a paper on the eighteenth-century French *Encyclopedia*:
  - Discussed how the writing styles were biased.
  - Brought forth the argument of how politics were influenced by the Encyclopedia
  - Fixed tense and grammar
  - Combined ideas and deleted unnecessary ones
  - Indication of sources

## New Writing Assignments

### 1. The Problem

- Classroom discussion of reading for which the students have no written responsibility often became stilted and unenlightening.
- Students either did not do the reading, or did not sufficiently engage with the reading before class.

### 2. The New Policy

- Eight typed responses on primary sources, five will count toward your grade (2% each).
- Response days marked on the syllabus: \*RESPONSE DUE\*
- Questions will be posed to the class before they are due.
  - Example: Why do you think the title of this book is *The Embarrassment of Riches*?
- 150-200 words.
- Responses only accepted in class – no late responses will be accepted.
- Responses will be graded as 0, 1, or 2 points, with comments.

### 3. Assessment

- Students’ writing reveals a far greater depth of understanding than I have ordinarily experienced in classroom discussion.

- Students have become accustomed to using primary sources and citing specific passages.
- Students devoted more time to their reading and writing this semester than ever before.
- Reading responses revealed to me questions and misunderstandings.
  - For instance, several students took at face value the claims of Hungarian nationalists that they were “enslaved” by the Austrian government and did not acknowledge the nationalist hyperbole underlying that poetic license.

### **A Final Note**

- The success of both of these new components has depended in part on my ability to consistently express and model for the students the importance of reflection in the process of reading and writing.
- I strive to articulate this importance in many different ways. The frequency of the responses has and will continue to remind me of this key part of teaching reflection.