

HISTORY

European History (History 134)

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Course

History 134: European History II (2 sections, 30 students each), Spring 2005
This course provides a survey of European History from 1500 to the second World War. Special attention is given to the integration of primary source documents.

In light of my participation in the Ignatian mentoring, I made the following changes to the course. I intend to include the same additions in future semesters, making minor improvements based on my experience this year.

1) Syllabus addition

I added the following language to my syllabus and discuss it on the first day of class. A primary aim of the text is to foster an environment in which students feel free—and will be specifically encouraged—to raise ethical and moral implications of the topics we study.

This semester we will be exploring together the history of modern Europe, from the time of the sixteenth-century reformations deep into the twentieth century. Considering that our many subjects of study will include the origin of the Jesuits, it is appropriate to consider the ways in which our own institution is a product of the ideas and ideals rooted in the history we study. Xavier University continues to cherish its Jesuit tradition, as reflected in this portion of its Mission Statement:

With attention to the student as an individual, Jesuit education seeks to develop: 1. Intellectual skills for both a full life in the human community and service in the Kingdom of God; 2. Critical attention to the underlying philosophical and theological implications of the issues; 3. A world view that is oriented to responsible action and recognizes the intrinsic value of the natural and human values; 4. An understanding and communication of the moral and religious values through personal concern and lived witness, as well as by precept of instruction; and 5. A sense of the whole person- body, mind, and spirit.

The study of history, especially at a Jesuit university like Xavier, should include far more than learning names and dates of people and events long past. In and out of class, I encourage you to consider with me the philosophical and ethical implications of the history we study, and to use what you learn to continue to develop your own intellectual, ethical, and spiritual perspectives.

Want to know more? Check out these documents on Jesuit education: <http://www.xavier.edu/jesuit/tradition/>

2) In-class writing and discussion about the meaning of Xavier's "Jesuit identity"

Near the beginning of the semester (18 January), I asked the students to spend 15 minutes writing about what they know or think they know about the Jesuit character of Xavier. The primary aim will be to discern the perspectives that students bring into the course and to encourage the students to begin to consider the question. There was quite a range of knowledge and perception among the students. Next year I will allow even more time for the discussion, and attempt to help them better explore that understanding our own culture—including the culture at Xavier—requires an understanding of the history of our society, its culture, and its institutions. We will return to this question in the conversation that follows number 4 (below).

3) Lecture on early Jesuit education within the context of the Christian Humanism

I devoted a considerable portion of one lecture (20 January) to the foundation and early years of the Society of Jesus, based in part upon John O'Malley's book, *The First Jesuits*. The foundation of the Jesuits and the first Jesuit schools were presented within the context of broader movements like religious reform and humanism. We also read brief excerpts from the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola during the class; I self-consciously included in these selections some parts that emphasized the way in which this classic spiritual text was written in a very particular historical context and, in part, speaks directly to contemporary controversies in Christianity.

4) Assignment: Read and respond to primary source readings related to the origin of the Jesuits

In keeping with the previous assignments, students were required to read primary source documents related to the early Jesuits. We then used Blackboard (course management software) to conduct online small-group discussions before having a class discussion about the text. I chose selections from the *Constitutions* of the Society of Jesus, focusing on the parts of the document specifically related to the original goals of the early Jesuit schools. In the future, I may add selections from the letters of Francis Xavier to this assignment.

The in-class discussion brought together the readings, the online discussions, and the lectures in a conversation that addressed Jesuit education, past and present. We considered what has changed and what has not changed. Some principles from the sixteenth-century text seemed to the students to apply very easily, whereas others seemed more particularly bound to the original historical context—a point I was happy to see the students grasping. This raised another important question for discussion: how do we interpret our participation in a tradition with particular historical roots, some of which seem to apply better to our culture than others? More specifically, to what extent do we or should we allow the history of the Jesuits to guide how we construe our identity as members of a modern Jesuit university?

Periodically over the rest of the semester, I made brief references to the influence and impact of the Jesuits, from contributions of particular Jesuits in political theory to their education of European monarchs and their prominent roles in what we might call culture wars, the latter occasionally resulting in their expulsion from various European countries.