

Teaching About Creativity in the College History Classroom: Thoughts and Reflections After Three Semesters



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What is Creativity? How should historians talk about it? These questions provided an impetus for creating a new undergraduate course, “History and Creativity,” part of the Discovery Seminar program at Oxford College of Emory University for entering students. This presentation will share the author’s perspectives gained after three semesters of teaching this pilot Seminar course. It will provide general comments on how the course defined creativity for pedagogical purposes. It will also look at the syllabus, course format, and classroom approach. Concluding thoughts will provide reflections on challenges, feedback, and the value of thinking historically about creativity.

Taking as its theme “Creativity Meeting a Need,” the History and Creativity Discovery Seminar emphasized human creativity as the constructive impulse to make, build, improve, and understand. This broader framework was the lens to view many key innovations with a shared purpose and focus: science and technology, arts and architecture, cosmological understandings, and literature in all its various forms. As an undergraduate History course, factual historical details also were an emphasis, especially broader considerations like geography, periodization, historiography, or key sources. Combining a Western focus with some World History, content in the first part of the course focused on the early periods, with a fairly extended look at the Agricultural Revolution. Consideration of historical patterns formed in early human history often took us into discussion of much later periods during the latter half of the semester. Students pursued a wide variety of final research projects, based on themes and details drawn from the class. We read a shared book, Marc Bloch’s *The Historian’s Craft*, to think some about the meaning and purpose of historical study.

Along with an overview of the syllabus, course content, and approach, this presentation will also offer some reflective personal comments on unique challenges teaching a course on creativity, especially in areas like best ways to gauge student learning, best use of classroom time, and selecting readings. The author will also provide some thoughts on the significant value of studying creativity within a historical framework.

Biography:

David Leinweber is an Associate Professor of History at Oxford College of Emory University, with over thirty years logged in the college classroom. His teaching assignments have included both halves of the introductory survey in Western Civ/European History, as well as upper-level offerings in Church History, The Revolutionary Era (1789-1848), Europe from 1500-1700, and Mythic Kings. He has published numerous essay, reviews and reference articles. His 2020 book *The Art of Ancient Music* was published by Rowman-Littlefield.