



Report from the 12th Annual Teaching and Learning in History Conference

Held 23th – 25th March 2010

Lady Margaret Hall
University of Oxford



INTRODUCTION

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 (to find out more read the detailed accounts of the sessions below). 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.

As usual, the setting of Lady Margaret Hall in Oxford provided an ideal setting for the conference although the fire alarm at 5.00 am was perhaps an unwelcome reminder of life in student halls. 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 Fellows 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.

Many delegates commented on the excellent organisation of the conference, which reflected an immense amount of work by Subject Centre staff. In particular, Tracy Smith and Antony Bounds dealt with many last minute hitches (including ramifications of the strike by British Airways staff); Kerry Drakeley managed the travel arrangements for the large number of international delegates; and Melodee Beals and Lisa Lavender co-ordinated the conference programme.

Finally, an underlying theme of the 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.

Dr Sarah Richardson
Director, History Subject Centre



Embracing Failure and Learning from Mistakes: The Continuing Story of the History Gateway at UNSW

Sean Brawley

History Passion Project: Pleasure, Purpose and Value in University Teaching

Alan Booth and Jeanne Booth

Reconnecting History to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Keith Ereksan

TUESDAY

Sean opened this year's conference on a thought-provoking and powerful note – discussing the failure of the major curriculum transformation at UNSW that was introduced to us last year. Using the example of the negative student feedback and reduced take-up of history he had encountered with the 'Gateway' system of progression, Sean 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 over the last year 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 in implementation. Students could see the value of the innovations but the course as a whole "didn't quite work".



In conclusion, a number of points were raised for our consideration. Ensure that the implementation of innovation in teaching is a deliberate, worked-out process. It's important to overcome student resistance to innovation: is there a role for involving them in the change process itself? Finally, share your failures – there needs to be more space for this if SOTL is going to succeed and advance and it will form the core of the next ISOTL conference in Liverpool in October 2010.

Following on from Sean's presentation, Alan and Jeanne discussed the thinking behind the exciting History Passion Project currently being funded by the Subject Centre. The joy of teaching history often lies in its transformative qualities in our students, and not just the effect on the academic themselves, as teaching is closely bound up with emotion as well as intellect. The project explores 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?

One example of the stimulating comments made during the presentation? "We are currently preparing students for roles that don't yet exist, in order to solve problems we don't even know as problems yet. A passionate teacher can help to cultivate the kind of skills our future graduates will need."

The project outcomes will include a survey, webinar and literature review to discover, and provide examples of, what teaching with passion involves. Alongside this will run an assessment of the contribution that teaching with passion makes to effective learning, involving an analysis of student surveys and further literature review. We look forward to an update on the project next year!



In considering how we can best advance SOTL by applying historical methodologies, Keith began by pointing out that an 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, not just research, leading to the formation of the History SOTL group in 2006. An important focus has been the History Pedagogy Bibliography (now hosted on the Subject Centre website: <http://www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/elibrary/bibliography>), which includes over 600 publications, but most are articles, with only 141 books dedicated to this subject. Keith raised questions and ideas about future initiatives and how to advance SOTL. Work with schools is important, but it needs to be connected from primary through to HE level. He also highlighted the need to organise our field, including collaboration to review all the journal material, embedding of transnational tagging in the bibliography work and encouragement of feedback and comments on resources. In conclusion, the importance of taking SOTL work to multiple audiences, including schools and the public at large was highlighted. Moreover, the crucial question was asked: “Is there room for a journal on SOTL to build on the work of the bibliography?”

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.



Doing History: Writing History an Interdisciplinary Genre-Based Model to Make Explicit the Writing Expectations of Particular History Departments

Mary McKeever and John Wrigglesworth

Re-considering Assessment for Students: Developing Good Academic Practice in History

Erica Morris

Promoting the Digital Literacy of Historians at the University of Wolverhampton Using Nineteenth Century British Library Newspapers Online

Richard Hawkins

The progress of OER adoption in the Humanities and the example of the 'HumBox' community

Lisa Lavender & Rob O'Toole

Blended Learning to Teach a Postgraduate History Module

Katherine Holden & Steve Poole

WEDNESDAY

The first session of the morning asked important questions about supporting students properly in terms of advancing writing skills and subsequent assessment of their work. Mary and John asked the simple but fundamental question – what do we want students to do?

Learning to pass exams and absorb pre-digested knowledge is an unavoidable part of the school system that feeds our universities, where students are then thrust into an environment where this focus is questioned and writing skills and academic literacy become immediate issues. The 'Doing History' project aims to give exemplars for students on the critical use of sources and arguments. Focusing on the texts they write, student work is analysed using a genre-based model, and lecturers are interviewed and filmed about their expectations of the analysed work. A thoughtful model, it will be interesting to see if its implementation at Portsmouth has enhanced the understanding and expectations of specific assessments of students and tutors alike.

Continuing onwards, Erica introduced the work of JISC's Academic Integrity Service in collating and disseminating best practice on the important issue of plagiarism (as part of their remit on academic integrity). Whilst recognising that some plagiarism, collusion and cheating is blatant, and should be dealt with accordingly, other students fall foul of the problem inadvertently, through ignorance of correct citation and misconceptions of website information usage. The increased diversity of students has led to an increased range of skills; the assessment of academic writing and methods of assessment in HE need to be robust and transparent to deal with the range of issues. Erica reminded us that there is room for new assignment tasks, in addition to academic writing—leading seminars, document reports, writing articles for journals—and a range of reliable assessment methods to go with them.

The following sessions, run in parallel, discussed the rise in eLearning and blended learning and the increasingly pressing concerns of first year transition. The extremely interesting session on the use of digital technologies in the teaching and learning of History began with Richard Hawkins providing a review on his History Subject Centre-funded project exploring the use of Nineteenth Century British Library Newspapers Online in undergraduate history teaching.

Richard explained that he and his colleague, Keith Gildart, had incorporated the use of this digitized repository of national and regional newspapers as a mandatory requirement for one of the two assignments for their Level 2 History module entitled *Victorian Britain*. By providing a framework of the skills necessary for the effective use of digitised resources, this presentation highlighted both the benefits and difficulties associated with the use of online resources, such as the skill of being able to choose accurate search terms for correctly identifying appropriate sources. Richard showed that some of his students had produced interesting and innovative pieces of work, including

the use of a Google Map to identify the locations of events from newspaper reports in Wolverhampton, which emphasised the excellent potential for “data mashing” that this type of research provides. However, he did note that some students only used one article for their research and that some students were confused by the chronology of the essay. Richard concluded by saying that whilst students introduced to this resource may require a significant amount of guidance in order to make the most effective use of it, the digitized resources provided students with an excellent opportunity to engage with primary sources in a way that would have previously been difficult.

Continuing this theme of accessing online materials, the next presentation of the session, led by Lisa Lavender and Rob O’Toole, provided a detailed account of the background and uses of the HumBox Project. This impressive online repository of teaching materials for the humanities is one of the JISC/HEA pilot Open Educational Resources (OER) projects, and is designed to encourage sharing, collaboration and peer review of teaching and learning materials within the Humanities community. Rob began the presentation by highlighting the wealth and diversity of materials available on the site and the ease of accessing this repository. He showed how the potential developments and advancements in technology in the next decade (such as the introduction of the iPad) will require an equally innovative use of resources amongst the Humanities community. Lisa then showed delegates the benefits of using HumBox and explained how they could easily upload and share their own work and resources. By highlighting the achievements of the project which includes over 1000 individual learning resources being published online so far, Lisa emphasised the benefits of continuing to develop, learn and share new techniques and resources.

In the final presentation of the session, Katherine Holden and Steve Poole discussed their experiences on the use and value of discussion boards in the teaching of their History masters programme. Combined with face-to-face and online teaching and learning, this blended learning approach was considered because of the large number of part-time and distance students that were enrolled onto this primarily evening and weekend course. Using discussion boards was hoped to provide an open-ended collaborative learning environment that would help improve the communication between students and enable reflective learners (and the quieter members of the group) to contribute in a more effective manner.

In relaying student and staff responses to the use of discussion boards, Katherine and Steve noted that it was generally positive feedback, highlighting student comments on the increased access it gave to tutors and how it provided a continuing forum for debate and analysis of primary materials. They observed, however that some students felt that the boards could be dominated by postings by certain students (those with the most time to post) and that it was no replacement for face-to-face teaching. Lecturers also emphasised the concern that monitoring, reading and commenting on postings would become increasingly time consuming. Katherine and Steve summarised that the use of discussion boards worked best when specific questions were used to stimulate discussion and when the discussions themselves were tied into a formal assessment. The session effectively showed the increasing importance of utilising the widening world of digital and online resources in the teaching and learning of history.



Befuddled, bothered and bewildered?

Study skills, first year transition and the Oxford Essay

Freyja Cox Jensen

History Networks: Connecting Higher and Secondary Education

Julian Wright

History Virtual Academies

Arthur Chapman

Adding Value: Improving the Numerical Skills of History Undergraduates

Roger Lloyd-Jones, David Nicholls and Geoff Timmins

Angels on the Curriculum: angelology as a Historical Subject

Edina Eszenyi

The Place of Finding: Enquiry-Based Learning in Archaeology

Jolene Debert

Kicking off the discussion of first-year transition, Freyja discussed teaching and learning at the University of Oxford. Working with individual undergraduates and small groups of two or three, Freya discussed the particular issues surrounding first-year transition to Oxbridge style tutorials and the difficulties faced by her students and herself. Because of the particularly strong focus the University of Oxford places upon independent study, and without the structured support of a large peer group in the form of weekly tutorials, many of her students struggled to cope with the change from secondary to higher education, regardless of their academic background. Freya then opened the room to discussion of how best to implement the wide variety of teaching methods proposed at this year's and previous conferences within the structure of an Oxford undergraduate course. The discussion which followed offered a wide variety of suggestions to support first year students, within Oxford and elsewhere. Most notable was the suggestion that while many students have sufficient contact hours with their lecturers and tutors, informal peer support structures were often lacking leading to a significantly more difficult transition experience. When mid-sized seminar groups were not generally prescribed, encouraging these connections might aid in retention and productivity.

Julian continued the discussion of transition by describing his collaborative work with secondary schools. He discussed the divergent values held by university historians and the secondary history curriculum, a consequence of the independent development of both sectors. He noted that many felt that the valuation of independent learning and intellectual enquiry and innovation had suffered owing to increasingly rigid marking scaffolding of exams. He then went on to describe his current project to try to develop a new, 'grassroots' network of history teachers, connecting them to the University of Durham's history department to find areas of common ground. After his initial description of the project, Julian queried the other delegates as to their experiences and opinions regarding connections between academic historians and their counterparts in secondary schools. It was generally felt that such a network would be greatly beneficial but that it relied heavily about the enthusiasm of individuals involved. Overall, the session highlighted again and again the need for flexibility by lecturers in providing for the varying needs of their first year students and developing a network of mutual support.

The following parallel sessions offered delegates a chance to discuss, first, the development of key transferable and academic skills in history students, and second, the role of cognate disciplines in HE history. In the first talk of the former session, Arthur Chapman presented on his Teaching Development Grant-sponsored project on History Virtual Academies. Running over the Easter holidays from 2007 to 2009, the project had three defined aims: to build links between academic historians at university and sixth form students studying A-levels, to provide a challenging learning experience to increase students' knowledge of historical interpretation and to explore the differences between the historical understanding of school and university students.

Arthur provided a detailed analysis of the method involved in the teaching of the History Virtual Academies, which was conducted via online discussion boards. Students were then asked to read and analyse two historical accounts on the same past event that said very different things about it. Students were required to explain why the accounts were so different, to enable them to fully understand why historians write and to develop their own analytical skills through the use of more than one type of source material. Arthur explained that, from the analysis of feedback from the students and teachers involved so far, the History Virtual Academies had been worthwhile and participants had gained good experience. Areas for improvement were identified (such as scheduling the Academies at a different time of year) but these will be drawn out in a fuller analysis that will be published shortly. Further details can be found at the History Subject Centre website.

In the second presentation, Roger Lloyd-Jones, Geoff Nicholls and David Timmins presented on the culmination of their three-year investigation into the numeracy skills of undergraduates. They explained that the project had highlighted some interesting trends and identified that, in general, students were not engaged with the need to improve their numeracy skills. They stated that detailed findings would be published in a report from the HEA in July this year. This was an extremely interesting session that prompted much debate and discussion with the audience.

In the parallel session, the History Subject Centre was proud to host scholars in cognate disciplines, Angelology and Archaeology, to make their case for the inclusion of their fields in the history curricula. First, Edina Eszenyi spoke on the field of Angelology, a discipline that bridges the divides between history, art history and comparative literature. Providing delegates with an overview of Angelology's current relegation to theological studies, she made a compelling case for its importance in medieval and renaissance history. The depictions and cults of Angels provide historians a rich source of information on the peoples who painted and worshiped them throughout Europe. Edina then laid out an example course syllabus, demonstrating the relevance of this emerging field to undergraduate history courses in the UK.



Next, Jolene Debert offered listeners a variety of examples of how to integrate enquiry-based learning into historical teaching. Her descriptions of fieldwork, currently more common to Archaeology than History courses, offered student testimonials to the personal and intellectual satisfaction they received by being able to put their classroom knowledge into practice and by actually experiencing the spaces they were investigating. Jolene also offered examples of how to integrate enquiry-based learning into more traditional classroom settings, such as

the lecture. By using hyperlinks within her PowerPoint presentation, Jolene was able to interact with her students, altering the course of the lecture based on student responses. This Choose-Your-Own-Adventure style of lecture allowed her students to fully engage with the material, in this case discovering the cause of death of Ötzi the Iceman. In the end, her students demanded the lecture be extended in order to allow them to put forth their own interpretations of the evidence. Both these speakers reminded listeners of the importance of cross-disciplinarity in the advancement of the scholarship of teaching and learning.

**The Resilient Historian
Richard Hall
Graduate Students of
Colour Teaching History
to Underrepresented
College Students**

*Maria Duarte and
Kimberly Stanley*

**'Making an Exhibition of
Yourself':
Employability and History
at the University of
Greenwich**

*June Balshaw and Sandra
Dunster*

**The Assessment of Work-
based Learning**

Harvey Woolf

**Peer Dialogues: A new
approach to developing
feedback practices?**

*Sarah Richardson, Ian
Gwinn and Samantha
McGinty*

The conference reconvened in the afternoon for a stimulating and challenging session in which 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. Beginning his session with a short presentation explaining the themes surrounding his idea, Richard acknowledged that not everyone might agree with him but that it is crucial that historians begin to accept the importance of recognising the question. By utilising the skills developed by teaching and learning history, Richard argued that historians are ideally placed to contribute to the development of the 21st Century in a way that other disciplines are not. Because of this, the scholarly pursuit of History remains relevant in today's world. He explained that it was important for historians to actively engage with social issues, contrasting and comparing them with historical events or by using their analytical skills to provide a detailed breakdown of events. Richard asked the delegates to break into groups to discuss three questions relating to his idea of social contribution and how best we could undertake this. These group discussions were both impassioned and thought-provoking with many individual debates on the application, feasibility and merit of the idea. Overall, the challenge presented by the session was well-received by delegates and provided a stimulating launch-pad for the development of an interesting and increasingly relevant idea.

After Richard Hall's engaging discussion, the conference separated into parallel sessions. The first was led by Maria Duarte and Kimberly Stanley of Indiana University, Bloomington. Drawing from their experiences as female postgraduates from minority backgrounds, Maria and Kimberly explored the difficulties they faced in teaching students who often turned to them for maternal care as much as academic enlightenment. In contrast to their male colleagues, both women felt they had to be more explicit when discussing appropriate behaviour from their students, notably in regard to how they should be addressed and which personal issues they were able to assist students with. Kimberly, in particular, was often seen as a surrogate mother by her students, who often sought her approbation or guidance for personal decisions. Likewise, as Latina and African-American tutors, they found that students from minority backgrounds often turned to them for increased pastoral care as they coped with their first semester on the predominately-white campus. Overall, Maria and Kim raised many key issues faced by lecturers working with culturally diverse colleagues and students and widened our understanding of the importance of cultural competencies beyond discussions of overt internationalisation.

The other parallel sessions began with June Balshaw and Sandra Dunster providing a review of the work placement scheme they run at the University of Greenwich. Offered as an optional assessed module of the History degree, it provides students with an opportunity to undertake work in a number of local businesses and organisations. Giving the example of three students who worked at the local public records office, June and Sandra detailed how effective the students found their placement and that the organisation they worked for were so impressed with their efforts that they were given the chance to complete an exhibition on the work they had undertaken. By structuring work placements around a reflective log, work-based project and project report, it was considered to be an effective way in which students could gain real-world experience whilst raising the profile of the university in the local community. June and Sandra explained that student comments on the experience had been positive, with many advocating it as a realistic alternative to the production of a dissertation in their final year.



Harvey Woolf continued this theme by presenting on the challenges of effectively assessing work-based learning. In this informal session, he discussed the complexities inherent in the use of ‘traditional’ assessment because of the variety of individual workplaces and roles. By emphasising that these issues stretched across all disciplines, Harvey explained how these differing methods can be applied to the assessment of skills and capabilities of undergraduate historians. He highlighted that it was challenging but crucial to ensure that ‘academic’ achievement was graded as well as more practical skills. Recognising that there was no easy or clear answer to this question, Harvey reiterated his point that “If we fail assessment, we fail the course”. Both sessions showed the benefits of work-based learning and highlighted the practical difficulties that need to be considered when structuring work placements.

In the final plenary of the day, Samantha and Ian led a session that involved a strong element of group discussion and feedback, reflecting the focus of the three year project, on reconceptualising feedback practices from a transmission process to a student-to-student or student and staff dialogue. Following a thorough explanation of the methodological issues, groups were asked to consider four key issues: feedback, its purpose and existing practice; dialogue, particularly peer dialogue, as a way of improving and enhancing feedback; constraints on creating dialogue and implementing new approaches (e.g. time, staff, programme design and modularisation); and student-staff cultures, in particular the culture of history as a professional practice and academic discipline, and how that filters into the delivery of feedback.

The discussions proved thoughtful and extensive, reporting considerations such as the importance of understanding the purpose of feedback to students, and shaping our delivery to match or reshape their expectations.

'Our Research Journey: Student Involvement in "Spaces and Stories of Higher Education, a Historical Investigation"'

Laura Evans, Hannah Lever and Laura Moorhouse

What are they Thinking? Using the Anonymous Essay Question to Access Student Thought

Andrew Koke

'Cathedrals and Society': A Case Study Integrating Fieldwork into Undergraduate Modular History Programmes

Ian Cawood

Excursions in History Teaching at Swedish Universities

David Ludvigsson

THURSDAY

The first session of the morning took 'audience participation' to a new level, not only including on-the-spot questionnaires and feedback, but a move *en masse* half way through from Talbot Hall to the Old Library, for a practical demonstration on the use of space and the value of anonymous responses.

At last year's conference, the 'Spaces and Stories' team leaders introduced their planned research and aims of the project: exploring the continuity and change of the relationships between pedagogy and learning space in higher education, using Warwick as a case study. This year, the undergraduate researchers gave the presentation themselves, revealing the high level of independent research they have achieved in 12 months, in a professional and informative presentation; their dissemination skills spoke for themselves. Their images and interview findings highlighted the local aspirations held for this new university in the 1960s and how the thought behind planning learning space has developed, but so often remained the same, over the decades. Perhaps more importantly, the thorough approach to research, collation of evidence and dissemination of findings by the three undergraduate researchers revealed the true value of the project: the ability and desire amongst undergraduates to immerse themselves in research and gain added value from their time as students. This is an area of study that needs to be encouraged.

A one-dimensional talk was never going to be on offer from Andrew Koke. Knowing in advance that he would be presenting alongside undergraduate researchers, and what their project involved, Andrew brought together ideas from both talks to make some effective points. Before the first presentation in the session, all delegates were asked to anonymously consider and feed back their thoughts on the room as an effective teaching and learning space. Before giving his talk, the session decamped to the Old Library and asked for their thoughts on the subject again. Whilst Laura, Hannah and Laura looked through the feedback, Andrew talked about the logistics and value he had found in using an anonymous essay assignment as part of a course on the understanding of Hell. With a potentially sensitive topic, he found it an effective way of getting to know more about the students as a cohort, without intruding on their personal beliefs. The essays were honest and forthright – engaging with the topic arguments rather than simply writing what they believed the tutor wanted to hear. Finishing with a few examples of feedback on the conference rooms, delegate thoughts were revealed honestly in their anonymity ... and particularly positively about the Old Library!



In the first presentation of the following parallel sessions, Ian Cawood offered his approach to tackling the issue of integrating fieldwork into undergraduate modular history programmes. Ian said that the lack of fieldwork in the teaching of undergraduate history was a problem not easily addressed, but that it enables the use of history to be seen in the public domain and outside of the classroom environment. Whilst he acknowledged that fieldwork can be bureaucratic, time-consuming and expensive, he emphasised that by getting the students to lead the tours themselves as part of an assessed exercise meant that this lightened the work-load on lecturers and gained a greater level of participation from the students. By incorporating anonymous and constructive feedback from other students on each presentation, students were able to reflect on their learning and take a greater level of understanding from the work.

In a similarly themed paper, David Ludvigsson examined the use of excursions in the teaching of History in Swedish universities. He said it was crucial to make excursions an integral part of courses as it enables students to meet and value physical source materials (something David called the 'wow' effect of using architectural design to reinforce theory). In a survey of other Swedish universities, David learned that excursions were only used sporadically, with individual teachers having to take the initiative and fieldwork not forming any part of a formal assessment. Agreeing with Ian, David stated that it was important that students did not simply go on a 'Cook's Tour'; whereby they would simply stand around looking at historical sites rather than actively engaging with them. Only by allowing students to interact with the environment in which these historical sites exist, David explained, could students really begin to develop their 'historic eye' and identify the social and cultural links that co-exist with history.

This session strongly advocated the greater use of excursions in the teaching of history and that, in spite of the greater level of initial work involved in their planning and execution, they can be a useful method by which to engage students in the learning of history.

**E-learning: Webcasting in
History Teaching**

*Sandra Brakhof and
Daniel Potts*

**Duelling with Dixie:
Some Online Perils of
Teaching American Civil
War History**

Howard Fuller

Closing Plenary Workshop

*Alan Booth, Keith
Erekson and Sean
Brawley*

Up in the Old Library, Sandra Brakhof and Daniel Potts opened the session on blended and distance learning with a discussion of the using webcasts in history teaching. Hoping to provide more flexible contact hours, and a wider range of lecturing, the University of Plymouth has been exploring the use of webcasting. Unlike podcasting, which provides archived lecture material for review, the aim of this project was to see if live webcasting (in addition to archived podcasts) would benefit the students learning experience. Sandra provided delegates with a wide-ranging view of their research and student and staff opinions on the viability of the project. In general, they found that while both staff and students found the concept appealing, there were many concerns regarding technical difficulties, especially regarding bandwidth. Moreover, many of the students wanted webcasts in addition to traditional lecturing and seminar groups, rather than a replacement. While the convenience of being able to review lectures and seminar discussion was seen as a positive contribution, most appreciated the face-to-face contact seminars provided and did not want that diminished. From the questions raised by the delegates, it was clear that this approach warranted experimentation, and they looked forward to hearing if the project, once implemented, was successful.

Howard Fuller, on the other hand, shared his experiences using technology in a distance learning environment, where there was no face-to-face interaction between him and his students. While working for the University of Maryland University College's online programme, he became engaged in an academic duel with one of his distance learners for the hearts and minds of the rest of the class. Unlike face-to-face seminars, where the tutor can more definitely steer the discussion toward peer-reviewed historiography and primary evidence, or directly confront a disruptive student, online courses enable determined students to flood the discussion with their own opinions. In essence by sheer force of word count, they can pre-empt the tutor and direct the conversation to their own (unsupportable) point of view. The crucial point Howard raised in his discussion was that, unless the student broke established protocols regarding abusive language, there was little the tutor could do to reprimand him. Instead, the tutor must either give up, and resign himself to being overshadowed by the student, or challenge the student's prolificacy. Howard chose the latter and matched the student's efforts to flood the discussion boards with evidence and managed to counter the student's argument point by point, thus reigning in his influence over the other students.

Both of these papers highlight the crucial role that face-to-face interaction with peers and the tutor plays in higher education history. Although blended and distance learning greatly increase student capacity, they have many

pitfalls that need to be addressed to ensure that students still receive an education comparable to that of traditional course structures.

Late Thursday morning, the conference reconvened for its final plenary of the year. “It is a conference that has many unique features” was Sean’s initial comment at the start of the session. He was pleased to note the ongoing focus of the annual conference has a role to play, and an increased grounding in the development of teaching and learning pedagogy. The collective presentations and discussions of delegates and speakers provided 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 importance of expanding history’s pedagogy, admitting to failure as well as success and a continuing their own passion for teaching, it was clear that the three days had raised far more questions than they had provided answers, but that that was the value of the conference. Many of the delegates expressed the desire to take on the suggestions and musing of other presenters at their own universities and return next year with their own experiences of blended learning, anonymous essays and choose-your-own-adventure lectures.



For more information about the 12th Annual Teaching and Learning in History Conference, including materials from the workshops and discussions, please visit the History Subject Centre eLibrary at <http://www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/elibrary>

Reflections of a Delegate to the 12th Annual Conference

Presentation skills are incontestable in teaching conferences, filled with instructors per definitionem experienced in speaking in a way that grabs attention. Actually enjoyable presentations are however not the only, and certainly not the main reason why present and future historians should from time to time squeeze methodological conferences into the always busy schedules. Focusing, for a change, less on our research but rather on how it is and how it should be presented is an essential yet easily overlooked responsibility. This self-reflective component can provide help for the historian with finding a place in society, and so it happened at this year's Annual Teaching and Learning History Conference of the Higher Education Academy in Oxford.

The traditional and traditionally beautiful site of Lady Margaret Hall once more hosted an impressive number of international scholars aiming to discuss the current situation of the field and share their visions of the future. Participants agreed that an increased level of resilience might be necessary on the part of historians these days in order to face the uncertainties caused by the perils of the current economic situation. Disruptions of the practice of history teaching call for new abilities on an individual, institutional, and also a disciplinary level.

The conference tried to suggest, therefore, possible steps towards the enhancement of the current situation. "How does history enable the 21st century to address disruption?" and "How do historians support the development of ideas?" are just two examples of fundamental questions debated at the workshops. Participants emphasized the strategic importance of engaging with the world outside the professional community. This now, perhaps more than ever, calls for active participation, integration into society and reconsidered relationships with other disciplines such as sociology, international relations, or political studies.

Another recurring issue was the diverse cultural identities of academics in a world where history is still associated with nationalism. Students, as well as their teachers, represent an ever-widening spectrum of racial, ethnic, social, and cultural backgrounds in the age of globalization. Such factors, but even gender and age, influence everything from problems of first year transition to authority issues in the classroom. Historians automatically took on the responsibility of shaping the self-identification of students simply by teaching (or not teaching) the history of ethnic minorities and underrepresented groups. At the same time, it is still often these history courses where the background of participants is not as diverse as it should be.

Theoretical considerations did not squeeze out practical steps of moving forward, a distinctive issue among which was the integration of the Web into history teaching. Online history networks, debate forums, virtual learning environments, online databases, open educational repositories – the list could continue. Besides the development of the traditional numerical and writing skills, new skills such as digital literacy and the effective use of search engines are required for the effective handling of the online material, and the fast flow of information often demands sharp critical thinking.

Other methodological presentations discussed, for instance, blended and work-based learning. Suggestions regarding forms and methodology of assessment referred, among other things, to unintentional plagiarism, and generally called for the clarification of module expectations. Feedback practices were also intensively disputed, and similarly high interest surrounded the whys and ways of fieldwork both as an experience of a different learning space and as a source material that many students have little chance to experience. Finally, the conference also took courage to address the issue of failure, and participants could hear about bizarre challenges like the enthusiasm of a single student jeopardizing a course.

At the closing plenary, participants were asked to make suggestions: what would they like to see more or less of in the next annual conference? Immediate reflections included more case studies of module organization, the age-old problem of bridging secondary and primary level history teachers with Higher Education colleagues, and also feedback about the implementation of practices learnt at this year's conference. Participants also agreed that the dangers hovering above the field and the interactions they require are likely to provide more food for thought in a year's time as well. As critical remarks regarding this year, it was mentioned that some presentations were left without time for questions and debate.

Student participation at the conference was also underlined as a positive feature, celebrating the openness of the event. As a postgraduate student, I indeed found that the conference has provided valuable insights and new points of view which could serve a deeper understanding of academic life. Nevertheless, it would be fake piety to identify any of these aspects as a personal favourite. What I appreciated the most about the openness of the conference was the chance it gave to my field of research, and angelology could have been introduced as one of the possible future components of history curricula. What fruits this talk will bring, as well as the accomplishments of this year's self-reflection, the future – perhaps next year's conference – will tell.

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