

Teaching Philosophy

As an educator in religious history, I observed firsthand how culture and history take on new dimensions when viewed through varied lenses. Beyond merely examining ancient artifacts and texts, it is about understanding cultural norms, traditions, and lifestyles in a renewed context. When I teach religious history, for instance, students learn about religious rituals by not only studying its textual origins but also by exploring its modern-day adaptations in different East Asian communities. My teaching is anchored in three foundational pillars: text, tradition, and community. Text unveils the development of societal thoughts, tradition provides a canvas of enduring cultural values, and community brings forward the engagement of applying classroom knowledge into the real world. With this triad as a guide, I connect historical wisdom with modern insights by encouraging students to see how their own backgrounds and experiences can breathe new life into cultural narratives. This belief has led me to design a teaching framework with emphasis on promoting diverse perspectives, built on three central pillars below.

1. Using Digital Humanities for Enhanced Learning in Primary and Secondary Sources

In the digital age, teaching culture and history is enriched by the integration of technology, making primary and secondary sources more accessible and engaging to students. With digital humanities tools and methods, we can breathe life into these texts, allowing students to not only understand the content but also visualize and engage with the communities these texts represent. For example, when studying murals and manuscripts of the Dunhuang caves, traditional textual sources provide foundational knowledge. By integrating VR/AR tours, students can virtually traverse the caves, deepening their understanding of the cultural exchanges and artistic expressions of the time. This immersive experience complements primary sources, offering a holistic understanding of the site's significance. Similarly, while scholarly secondary sources provide in-depth analyses of religion in Nara Period (710-794) Japan, clips from relevant anime bridge the gap between academic discourse and lived experiences, offering students a tangible insight into its religious and societal history. When teaching Asian material culture, I incorporated:

- 3D printing: demonstrate the evolution of printing technology by 3D printing the printing blocks in different time periods, provide a hands-on experience.
- Video game references: using popular games include Civilization or Dynasty Warriors to illustrate how East Asian inventions develops its civilization.
- GIS platforms: provide students with a visually appealing overview of trade or religious pilgrimage routes that can be observed with its topographical surroundings.
- VR/AR devices: allow students to virtually visit specific sites for teaching and assignment purposes, bridging the gap between theoretical learning and experiential understanding.

These digital tools not only enhance the teaching and learning of primary and secondary sources but also illuminate the communities these texts engender. My approach seeks to highlight how texts, when enriched with digital humanities, can provide a deeper understanding of the communities they depict and the dynamics within them.

2. Cultivating Historical Consciousness through Interdisciplinary Pairings

In the humanities, students' learning transcends mere historical knowledge acquisition; it encompasses understanding the myriad insights stemming from diverse values—a principle acknowledging that diversity enriches our perspectives. My classroom reflects a melding of cultures and academic backgrounds that resonate with the global multicultural society we are part of. In my course in East Asian history and violence, I paired history majors with students from

sociology and art disciplines. While exploring gender dynamics in early history, students discuss gender representations with sociological perspectives on how the society influenced gender and art students interpret how images of Buddhist deity change gender reflects inequality. Drawing from works like Beata Grant, Dorothy Ko, and Chun-fang Yu, we discussed debates and tensions surrounding gender inequities. The discussions that ensued were multifaceted, with students often expressing astonishment at the fresh perspectives their peers brought to familiar topics. This exercise effectively showcased the depth that interdisciplinary pairings can bring, reaffirming my belief that incorporating varied viewpoints greatly enriches the learning process.

3. Bridging Historical Study with Real-World Relevance in Undergraduate Research

I firmly believe that students engage more deeply with historical materials when they directly relate it to their local community or cultural context. To realize this, I incorporate real-world relevance, striving to achieve common learning objectives that resonate across different academic disciplines. Instead of seeking common ground solely within these diverse fields of study, I take advantage of local resources to enrich the curriculum. This includes organizing site-specific field trips, such as visits to local temples when covering religious traditions, or archival research at public libraries and museums. In my World Buddhism survey course, I arranged field visits to both Buddhist temples and Christian churches near campus. These excursions provided students with a tangible experience of diverse religious ceremonies and rituals. By witnessing firsthand the differences and similarities in practices between the two traditions, students were challenged to critically analyze and compare their observations. This active engagement fostered a deeper understanding of the nuanced interplay of doctrine, tradition, and cultural adaptation in religious ceremonies, making the theoretical concepts discussed in class more vivid and relatable. This approach serves a dual purpose: it not only makes the subject matter more immediately relatable but also provides students with the tools to reconstruct regional historical contexts, fostering curiosity and independent thinking, better preparing students for future pursuits.

Recognizing that the more diverse the student body, the more effective and profound the exploration of culture becomes, I ensure that each student finds its unique place and purpose. By valuing diverse lenses and continuously seeking innovative ways to reinterpret culture and history, I endeavor to make learning a dynamic, inclusive, and enriching journey for every student.