

## “Teaching for Tomorrow?”: Disseminating History in an Era of Fiscal Anxiety

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ACROSS NORTH AMERICA, historians are under heightened pressure to rethink how we do research and teach history. Students and their parents, funding agencies, academic administrators, and news media urge history departments to deliver hands-on, skills-oriented, and immediately applicable curricula. A new academic plan in my own institution, Concordia University in Montréal, declares as its second objective, for example, that faculty members across the university must learn to “teach for tomorrow.” This, among other things, means providing students with “purpose-driven, hands-on learning.” The plan’s third objective instructs faculty members to “get your hands dirty” by supporting experiential learning, community service-learning, field teaching, and “learning through doing.”<sup>1</sup> The document also encourages faculty members to engage the community and the public in which our institution is situated with our research and teaching to amplify the immediate impact of our work.

When I compared notes with other historians working in my field (colonial and nineteenth-century Latin American history) at a recent international conference, each and every person with whom I

raised this matter related that his or her department is under identical pressure. The experience of one colleague teaching at a large public institution in the U.S. South summed up the situation with a graphic illustration. She reported that she had become embroiled in a battle with her university's marketing department over how the history graduate program that she directs would be advertised in a glossy brochure. My colleague had hoped the flyer would feature an image of a captivating historical document. The marketing department, on the other hand, considered such an image too passive and insisted that the brochure feature an image of contemporary people doing things, of "history in action." My colleague's minor victory meant that the marketing department's preferred photograph, one depicting awed schoolchildren gathered in shadow before the Lincoln monument, was relegated to the brochure's second page. The "schoolchildren before Lincoln" image encapsulates what a non-historian might consider the most marketable application of our discipline's central societal contribution: the fomentation of the public's reverence for great narratives about a past that other people have constructed. If this is the best that our discipline has to offer society, at least from a marketing department's perspective, then it is no wonder historians and the departments that house us are experiencing increased pressure to change our practices, to demonstrate our relevancy, and to justify our existence. To be sure, these are not new concerns, but in the context of current fiscal pressures on higher education in Canada and the United States, they have become increasingly pronounced in recent years.

### **The Employability of History Graduates**

Current calls to reform humanities education in order to render it more practical, immediate, and experiential are shaped by our seeming inability to discard the notion that a liberal arts education, although it may be personally rewarding, is practically useless. We joke but also fear that our students will graduate from our programs to face impoverishment, forsaking the point of their educational investments. We picture them leaving our classrooms to take up jobs waiting tables or conducting telemarketing surveys, perhaps enriching themselves in their free time over borrowed copies of *The Brothers Karamazov* or *On the Origin of Species*, but we have

little concrete indication of whether this is what happens after they graduate. My own department's difficulties in addressing the question of the employability of history graduates, as I suspect is the case for humanities units in other large public-sector universities, is partly due to the fact that little research is available on career paths of our specific graduates, although in the broader North American context, as I discuss momentarily, substantial data is available on the earnings trajectories of history B.A.s in comparison to those in other disciplines.

While we would certainly benefit from more information about the post-graduate lives of history majors, it is also clear that in the current climate, it is imperative for historians and history departments to take charge of this discourse. If we do not, the construction of that narrative will continue to be left to the abstractions of state officials, the imaginations of marketing departments, or apparently worse still, the suppositions of columnists, including the likes of Margaret Wenté, a social and cultural critic in Canada's national newspaper *The Globe and Mail*. Wenté delights in perpetuating the notion of the practical uselessness of humanities training in her annual spring column deprecating the value of liberal arts education as it is currently conceived. Most recently, she accomplished this by ridiculing the conference paper titles published in the 2015 program of the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, concluding from these alone that current humanities scholarship is so oriented toward self-indulgence and trivia that "children of new Canadians" are flocking away from it and into "business, science, pharmacy, accounting and other practical studies that will pay off in a good career. They have no time for this rubbish."<sup>2</sup> In her spring 2012 column entitled "Educated for Unemployment," Wenté asserted that such disciplines as history, literature, and philosophy prepared students for nothing other than the preparation of cappuccinos. Further, she contended:

...our faculties of liberal arts and humanities believe that issues such as "relevance" and "employability" are, quite frankly, crass. The purpose of a university education is to cultivate critical thinking, not to churn out robotic, compliant workers for the postindustrial capitalist state.<sup>3</sup>

Here, Wenté offers an analysis common to much current discussion of liberal arts education—that teaching "critical thinking" and promoting "relevancy and employability" in our classrooms are

mutually exclusive activities. Wente thinks humanities educators should do less of the former and more of the latter, and thereby misses the point that teaching “critical thinking” is, in fact, the foundation of the employability of history graduates.

Margaret Wente may be unusual in terms of the degree of sarcasm that flavours her musings, but the substance of her views is reflected in many other contexts. In Canada, a federally funded 2013 study on Humanities education in Canada, the “White Paper on the Future of the PhD in the Humanities,” addressed the “systemic failure” of graduate programs in Canada that see only 10-15% of their incoming cohorts achieve the “principal goal for which the programs were designed”—full-time, permanent employment with the academy.<sup>4</sup> The White Paper recommends that humanities departments should reform doctoral training, “so that it leads to a multiplicity of career paths instead of only one.” The report advises that humanities graduate training “should be reoriented toward active participation in the world, should promote collaborative and interdisciplinary research,” and should also create new “research deliverables”—websites, films, editions, and translations—in addition to books and articles.<sup>5</sup> The White Paper concludes that since many graduates of humanities programs are not finding work as academics, the training they receive in these programs should change to suit the kind of employment they do end up finding. That interpretation is surely ill-founded. If humanities doctoral graduates are finding work outside of academia with the training they currently receive in their graduate programs, does this not demonstrate that such training is already adaptable to other settings? In the broader North American context, a 2013 Summit on Higher Education sponsored by *Time* magazine also concluded that skills acquisition over research should be the point of university education.<sup>6</sup> Here again is the suggestion that “research” and “skills acquisition” must be mutually exclusive when, of course, learning how to conduct and present research are the central skills we impart to our students.

Various recommendations contained in the humanities education White Paper were consistent with the findings of another examination of post-secondary education published six months earlier, funded and executed by the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC). “Degrees of Success: The Payoff to Higher Education in Canada” used 2006 labour force data to analyze the profiles of university

graduates across disciplines to trace correlations between higher levels of education and higher incomes after graduation. The findings of this study have generally been spun as substantiating the idea that humanities education is a poor investment because, as its authors asserted, “students are continuing to pursue fields where upon graduation, they aren’t getting a relative edge in terms of income prospects.”<sup>7</sup> Pursuing such fields as education and social science, commented Benjamin Tal, deputy chief economist at CIBC and the report’s lead author, “do not give [students] the same rate of return” as math, physics, engineering, and “even medicine.”<sup>8</sup> “Degrees of Success” contrasted the experience of engineering bachelor graduates who earned an enviable double the salary of workforce counterparts completing only a high school education with that of humanities graduates who earned only 23% more than high school humanities graduates.<sup>9</sup> One confounding aspect of the study’s conclusions is the notion that a 23% rate of fiscal return on the investment of a post-secondary education, such as it found humanities degrees produced, should be understood as bad news. From a strictly fiscal perspective, such a “return,” while obviously less impressive than the payoff for investing in a B.Sc. in Petroleum Engineering, is nevertheless an investment whose return is surely worth bragging about.<sup>10</sup>

Data supplied from the Canadian federal government’s “Job Bank” website is largely consistent with the CIBC report’s findings, but shows grounds for even more optimism. As well as serving as a job databank, this site publishes comprehensive information on employment trends and career research throughout the country. Its data on post-degree earnings statistics and employment records, based on Statistics Canada’s National Household and National Graduate Surveys in 2011 and 2013, documents high employment rates for history B.A. graduates. In fact, I read with pleasure (and I admit some surprise) that recent history B.A.s in Canada have a higher employment rate than B.A. graduates not only from English departments, but also from both economics and chemistry undergraduate programs, two fields about whose irrelevancy and pecuniary bleakness we do not read regularly in either newspaper columns or bank-funded salary scale reports.<sup>11</sup>

Although appearing to be good news for history graduates, some qualifications are in order here. While the Statistics Canada data

shows that recent history B.A.s have a 7% higher employment rate than do chemistry B.Sc.s, significant differences characterize where they are employed. The three top positions in which recent chemistry graduates are employed are closely related to their field of study: chemists (13.6%); chemical technologists and technicians (13.2%); and post-secondary teaching and research assistants, presumably in the field of chemistry (12%). So the field yields a fairly high success rate of employment within the immediate field of study. While nearly 60% of history B.A. graduates reported they are working in fields “closely” or “somewhat related” to history, the Statistics Canada data does not provide much information about what these positions might be. It is clear, however, that employment options for such students were much more diversified than for chemists: no single field employed more than 3.75% of graduates (that was the percentage of graduates working in the retail sector), and fewer than 2% of the total body of history graduates were represented in most sectors. This suggests that history graduates confront both the challenges and the possibilities of facing a wide array of employment options when they graduate.

In the United States context, the “Human Capital” report generated by PayScale, a research consultancy firm, came to conclusions that parallel both the CIBC education investment report and the Statistics Canada data.<sup>12</sup> PayScale’s 2014-2015 findings show that while history majors may not earn as much as nuclear engineers or actuaries—two of the most lucrative of undergraduate majors—they still earned competitive salaries, with earnings at the start of their careers just slightly behind business management graduates.<sup>13</sup> The same report’s findings also document that history graduates’ average earnings were higher than those in several science and professional disciplines that are not currently facing a pedagogical crisis about the need to reshape their curricula to become more experiential, hands-on, and employment-oriented, including, among many others: biology, health sciences, computer networking systems, forestry, communication, urban planning, accounting, public administration, and psychology.

As I have indicated, while we have extensive data on history majors’ earnings potential, less information exists about the specific jobs in which history graduates actually end up. The most detailed information about this exists for doctoral students. The American

Historical Association (AHA) has compiled the most comprehensive recent data about employment trajectories of Ph.D.s. A 2013 AHA-sponsored report, "The Many Careers of History PhDs," studied a pool of 2,500 students who had completed their doctoral degrees between 1998 and 2009. Maren Wood and Robert B. Townsend, the study's authors, found that just over 50% of graduates from this period were employed on the tenure track at four-year institutions. However, it is likely that this percentage will decline in the coming decade because of the economic austerity universities of all calibre have experienced since that study's conclusion.<sup>14</sup> Beyond employment in academia, 25% of history Ph.D.s who had graduated between 1998 and 2009 had found work in the non-profit and business sectors, in federal and state governments, in K-12 teaching, or in library/museum/archives, among others.<sup>15</sup>

At the undergraduate level, the information is scarce. The United States Department of Labor has a useful introductory page tracking job descriptions that build from undergraduate degrees in history and the AHA has just initiated a new series directed specifically at coaching history majors on entering the workforce.<sup>16</sup> Vanderbilt University's history department reports that it surveyed 450 students who had graduated with B.A.s between 1996 and 2001; of 450 graduates of its B.A. program, 69 responded. Of this group, 30% worked in business; 24% had gone on to law or law school; 17% worked in the field of education; 8% were in graduate school; and 7% worked in the military. A handful of students worked in other areas: museum administration, journalism, editing and publishing, volunteer coordination, archival research and management, counseling, legislative work, data management, and consulting.<sup>17</sup> There is also a tool that users of the career networking site, LinkedIn, can employ to track employment information about graduates from particular disciplines and universities, although it does not differentiate between levels of education achieved. When I examined this site, of 1.25 million users who studied history, the top ten sectors of employment were: education, media and communications, sales, operations, entrepreneurship, law, administration, consulting, research, and marketing.

Many history departments have responded to the current climate of fiscal anxiety about career opportunities for their students by informing them about employment options on their departmental

websites. The University of British Columbia's history department, for example, has an excellent resources page about careers for history B.A.s.<sup>18</sup> Western Illinois University also provides a detailed, thoughtful set of resources to history majors focusing on careers in business and government, teaching, public history, and law.<sup>19</sup> On its site, the department at the University of Toronto provides extensive suggestions of possible career options that history students might pursue, ranging from Advertising Copywriter to Social Policy Researcher.<sup>20</sup> I learned only while writing this article that the career advancement services at my own university has also prepared a useful publication for history students pursuing careers outside the academy.<sup>21</sup>

### **Transforming How We Do and Teach History?**

History students have access, then, to substantial information about both the range of possible career trajectories for which history training can and does prepare them, and to documentation that demonstrates that recent history graduates have a record of faring the job market with considerable success. This suggests that it is not necessary for history departments and individual faculty members, despite the pressure to do so, to engage in a massive transformation of how or what we teach in our classes. I am relieved to hear it, for I confess to possessing both a temperamental and professional proclivity for resisting change (at one of the brainstorming sessions I attended as part of the process of developing Concordia's new strategic plan, I used the magic marker with which I had been supplied to write in large letters across the paper tablecloth: "RESIST THE PRESSURE TO ALWAYS BE NEW"). Further, I identify with faculty members in my own department and elsewhere who object to the pressure to recast history education at the B.A. level and beyond it purely in terms of vocational training. I share philosopher Paul Forster's concerns about negative implications of understanding the main purpose of humanities education as the production of employable graduates. Forster, in responding to the governmental White Paper on humanities education, observed that that study "encourages the misguided ideology, touted by politicians, business leaders and journalists, that investment in education is wasted if it does not have immediate economic payoffs."<sup>22</sup> It turns out that

studying history does an adequate job of preparing students to work in a broad spectrum of careers and that our graduates have a good track record of securing such positions, but this is, of course, not the reason why most people choose to pursue the study of the past.

Studying history is both personally and societally enriching. Unlike many of the programs that both the CIBC and PayScale have identified as more lucrative educational investments (and that for courtesy's sake shall in this paragraph anyway remain nameless), the study of history is inherently fascinating. History explains the perplexing. It furnishes us with the most complete portrait available of both the most laudable and depraved achievements of humanity. History equips its students with the cultural literacy necessary, among other things, to evaluate what Margaret MacMillan calls the abuses of the past, that is, when our contemporaries use particular representations of the past to legitimize particular political or social ends. Its acquisition also humbles us before the realization that future generations will understand what we currently take to be indisputable truth as the distortions we now attribute to many past constructions of science, ethics, and politics.

Whatever else it can do for us, however, history's "payoffs" rarely involve enacting the most commonly articulated justification for the discipline's existence: that we study the past in order to avoid repeating its mistakes in the present. We must steer conversations about the relevancy of studying the past as far away from this idea as from the notion that historians' most important task in the "real world" is to encourage awe in schoolchildren clustered before statues of Abraham Lincoln. As Adam Gopnik commented in a recent *New Yorker* article:

The advantage of having a historical sense is not that it will lead you to some quarry of instructions, the way that Superman can regularly return to the Fortress of Solitude to get instructions from his dad, but that it will teach you that no such crystal cave exists. What history generally "teaches" is how hard it is for anyone to control it, including the people who think they're making it.<sup>23</sup>

As Gopnik observes, one of the things we learn from history is that "we are far more likely to be made by history than to make it." However if historians' purpose is not to instruct present populations, either from our Fortresses of Solitude or from the massive stone armchairs of nineteenth-century state-making superheroes, then

how can we do it, teach it, and even market it as active, immediate, socially relevant, and useable without simultaneously compromising the substance of our historical knowledge?

Even as I reject the ideas that history graduates are currently ill-prepared for the job market, and that history curricula are in need of a complete overhaul, as both a faculty member and as my department's current chair, I am sympathetic to the practical pressures and abstract concerns that students at all levels of our programs nevertheless face about their post-degree lives. Even when armed with charts summarizing earnings potentials for our graduates, I am less prepared than I would like to be to inform individual students about how they will secure those positions. A few years ago, moments after successfully defending her M.A. thesis, a student turned to us, her examining committee. "What comes next?" she said. "What do I do now? Where do I go from here?" We, the four faculty members in the room, out of a sense of helplessness rather than indifference, virtually and literally shrugged our shoulders. We did not know what to tell her because we had never left "here."

Most faculty members have neither training nor experience in orienting students like this one on how to pursue a career that uses history outside of academia, although I will say that in my own department, a number of my colleagues had already responded to the call to make history more participatory, hands-on, and career-oriented even before they were urged to do so by our current academic plan. My department houses three research centres: the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (COHDS), the Montreal Institute for Genocide Studies (MIGS), and the Centre for Ethnographic Research and Exhibition in the Aftermath of Violence (CEREV), each of them engaged in various forms of using, presenting, and creating history in public realms. There is an honours program in Public History, which among other items requires students to undertake internship positions in non-academic institutions including museums, film and television companies, non-profit companies, and state institutions. Some of my colleagues have also created entire courses and others have designed individual assignments that require students to become proficient in the use of new media through the creation of short films, audio podcasts, virtual museum exhibits, and web materials, including Wikipedia entries. Two colleagues who teach the history of Montréal, where our department is located, take

students on historic walking tours; another has developed historic audio landscape walks that students themselves helped construct from local residents' recorded memories of the transformation of one of Montréal's post-industrial neighbourhoods.<sup>24</sup>

This is exciting, creative pedagogy and I am glad to work amongst faculty that engage in it. I do not seek to replicate it, however, first because I do not see the benefit of providing options that others are already effectively offering to our students, and second because such practices are not easily adaptable to classes whose subject matter is far removed in time and space from the context in which they are taught. How can I engage in "purpose-driven, hands-on learning" that does not do injustice to the ideas I strive to communicate in lectures, discussions, and assignments on colonial Latin America? How can I create community-immersed experiential learning for Montréal students today that would not involve the most peripheral and superficial handling of my subject matter? Can students "get their hands dirty" in Spain's 1521 conquest of Mexico or in the gendered connotations of honour in late colonial society? When I have tried to explain (as I have been asked to do) what impact my research on the birth and anti-conceptive methods of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Mexican women might have on the lives of twenty-first-century Quebeckers, the most honest answer I can provide is: none. A direct application of Mexico's remote past to our differently situated present does not exist beyond the broad observation that we suffer from generational hubris when we assume that women in our own era have the greatest autonomy women have ever experienced in making personal reproductive choices. How, then, do faculty members teaching pre-modern Chinese history, early modern Britain, or in my case, colonial Latin America, meaningfully engage in the directives we are now being encouraged to adapt in either our research or our teaching?

The shortest (and perhaps smuggest) way is to simply keep doing what we are doing, as long as what we are doing is emphasizing that what students are learning in our classes is not the content of history, whatever the period, place, and subject, but rather the skills, practices, and aptitudes entailed in thinking historically. Teaching historical thinking, rather than teaching, say, how Latin America sought independence from Spain beginning in 1810, is the most useful thing I can teach, but students cannot learn the former without

learning the latter. “The Historical Thinking Project,” a Canadian non-profit educational initiative aimed at secondary school history instruction, but applicable in the post-secondary environment, identifies historical thinking as: the ability to establish historical significance, use primary source evidence, identify continuity and change, analyze cause and consequence, take historical perspective (understand through the point of view of historical actors), and understand the ethical dimension of historical interpretations.<sup>25</sup> A sister organization in the United States presents much the same view, but emphasizes the importance of assessing multiple perspectives on the past, as well as the imperative of both understanding through historical context, and making interpretive claims through evidence.<sup>26</sup> Historical thinking, as both groups acknowledge, is only possible simultaneous to the acquisition of substantial content—the stuff of much of our lectures and the readings we assign.

Of course, the idea that the effective teaching of history means imparting an approach to thinking rather than a body of knowledge *per se* is not a new idea. Stéphane Lévesque points out that as early as 1899, the American Historical Association instructed its members that good teaching involved “not an accumulation of information, but the habit of correct thinking.”<sup>27</sup> Neither is the idea marginalized in current pedagogical practice. An emphasis on historical thinking, I would wager, appears explicitly or implicitly on every history syllabus in circulation today in history departments across North America. Rather than transforming what or how we teach, the change we historians need to make involves doing a better job of educating primarily our students, but eventually also their parents, our administrators, the education ministries who fund us, and the media who write about it all, that this is our central pedagogical mission.

### **History Skills Training in the Classroom**

Within this context, I sat down this summer to rethink two courses I will teach in the coming academic year: a survey introducing colonial Latin America to a group of ninety, mainly first-year students with little to no prior knowledge of the subject, and a small upper-year historical methodology seminar. I focused on the question of how I might respond effectively and realistically to my university’s

mandate to teach “active” history and to teach it “for tomorrow.” In my colonial survey class, I apply this mandate by focusing on the development of the skills required for historical thinking, for, as discussed above, these are the very aptitudes that prepare history students for future employment. In the coming year, for the first time, I have the opportunity to teach my introductory survey course in conjunction with one of two core “History Skills Workshops” (HSWs) required of all our undergraduate program students. These are small teaching-assistant led conference groups that meet weekly to work through a series of exercises aimed to develop historical thinking that are complementary to the course lectures and assigned textbook material. I have designed my HSW around four short writing assignments, each aimed at training students in historical thinking, and each building in complexity on the skills developed in the previous exercise. For their first assignment, students will write a documentary analysis of late sixteenth-century Quechua chronicler Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala’s depiction of the Inca state’s pre-conquest legal code as described in his 1621 text, *First New Chronicle and Good Government*, a text he completed nearly one century after the Spaniards’ arrival in the Andes. Students will be directed to consider how authorial intent, audience, and context influenced Guaman Poma’s representation of the operation of justice, the perception of insurrection, and the nature of women in his portrait of Inca law. The idea here is to introduce students to the idea of reading beyond a text’s superficial content in order to discuss the inexplicit forces that shaped how Guaman Poma presented reality.

The second assignment requires students to evaluate the reliability of two sources that depict the same event from divergent perspectives. Using some of the sources Nancy Fitch has amassed on the AHA’s excellent “Teaching and Learning” site that treat the conquest of Mexico, students will be asked to evaluate the reliability of Mexica and Spanish accounts of both the Spanish siege of the city of Cholula and Hernán Cortés’s first meeting with emperor Moctezuma in 1519.<sup>28</sup> Students must consider the variations between the two accounts, the most notable of which is Hernán Cortés’s omission of all discussion of Nahua-Spanish communication barriers in the version of events he directed to the Spanish monarch in contrast to Mexica informants who emphasise the central diplomatic role played by the Castilians’ chief cultural

and linguistic translator, the indigenous woman Malintzín. Their third assignment invites students to use evidence they uncover in the legal records of an eighteenth-century creole slave's legal suit for manumission to assess the validity of an argument historian Michael Scardaville presents in his treatment of justice in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century New Spain.<sup>29</sup> The latter presents a counter-intuitive interpretation of the operation of justice in the Spanish empire that challenges many of my students' *a priori* assumptions about the black legend-infused operation of the law in this imperial context. In this exercise, students learn to identify the argument a current historian renders from the primary source materials he has studied and to assess its validity based on their own reading of a small selection of similar documentation. The final assignment involves an application of the idea that 90% of good writing is rewriting. For this exercise, students will resubmit revised versions of their third writing assignments, incorporating the feedback they receive on this exercise and augmenting their conclusions with the use of an additional and appropriate secondary source that they have located on their own using pertinent library finding aids.

These are the concrete ways my class will help students to develop the skills involved in developing historical thinking. In substance, the HSW does not differ dramatically from the skills-oriented approach to teaching the colonial survey that I have attempted in the past, although I am hopeful that the small-group conference framework and coincident team of teaching assistants that I will have access to this year will increase the effectiveness of the effort. The main change I will make in this year's edition of the survey will be to highlight to students themselves the direct applicability of the skills they are acquiring. The ability to critically read, interpret, and frame arguments about texts are applicable in a wide range of personal and public contexts, including evaluating legal and business contracts and assessing candidates' competing claims of authenticity in the lead-up to a federal election.

Most concretely, however, I plan to adopt a practice that one of my colleagues, Max Bergholz, has told me he has used to motivate students to consider how the work they are doing will apply to their future professional qualifications. Rather than speaking only in general terms about the varied applications of critical thinking in extra-academic environments, he directs their attention to actual

job ads that demand from candidates the very skills students acquire in history classes. I spent some time this spring locating relevant positions for which graduates of our program could apply. Recently advertised relevant positions on the federal government's Canada "Job Bank" included a position paying \$28-\$35/hour working as a "Program and Policy Advisor" for the Government of Saskatchewan.<sup>30</sup> Duties for this position included developing program standards, recommending policy requirements, and researching, interpreting, and developing program policy manuals from guidelines for various financial assistance programs. The Canadian Museums Association Careers webpage is another site with many relevant postings for history B.A. and M.A. students.<sup>31</sup> The duties of a "Social Science Researcher" advertised there and employed by a private market research firm included identifying and assessing economic, demographic, and social developments; reporting on the implications of these for the framing of housing policy; and presenting conclusions at conferences, workshops and symposia. Both positions involved the application of the analytic, argumentative, and communicative skills developed in such classes as the HSW conferences and in the exercise of historical thinking more broadly. I plan to list such positions on the website affiliated with my course and to periodically direct students' attention to them. Although apparently only a tiny proportion of the positions advertised on web-based job banks are filled via online applications, such listings nevertheless provide valuable concrete examples to students (and others) who may not perceive the utility of performing the tasks we set for them.

While the announcement of such positions to students in my survey class with its affiliated History Skills Workshop conference sections is one way in which I can incorporate the imperative of providing "hands-on" applications of historical thinking in the coming year, there is more scope for responding to my university's call to "Teach for Tomorrow" in my historical methodology seminar. This class, a requirement for our honours program students, is an introduction to the practice of doing history. It presents the ethical, intellectual, and practical problems historians confront and covers such topics as research standards, methods for designing research problems, and using various source materials including published texts, archival documents, and visual and oral sources. As well as

preparing students for doing historical research, I want the class to further students' preparation for the dozens of jobs and careers for which historical thinking prepares them.

I have taught this seminar twice before, and in this year's version of the class, I will retain some of the elements from earlier versions, including my practice of inviting a panel of speakers to address students on their professional experiences of using history in settings outside of academia. I invite each speaker to present their own professional biography outlining their career trajectories and I ask them to discuss how they have used their training in history in their current professional lives. Past speakers have included a curator from Montréal's McCord Museum, a community organizer who works in the arena of affordable housing, a researcher at the human rights institute housed at Concordia, a journalist, and a researcher for a regional archives who also operates her own historical consultancy business. Students commented to me that they were motivated and reassured by speakers' discussions of both the range of options they discovered were available to them upon graduating and the diverse trajectories and the different rhythms the speakers followed in arriving at their current positions.

In the next iteration of this class, I have chosen to make the application of historical thinking to extra-academic environments a central component of the class. Several small assignments, and students' larger semester research project, will all be organized around competencies and research topics related to students' choice of one of three jobs advertised this spring for which students graduating from our program could apply: a director of programming for a historic plaques program, a researcher for a litigation support company, and a research and policy coordinator for a national charity. The course will require students to perform the kinds of research and writing assignments I have included in previous iterations of the seminar, but will organize these around concrete examples and exercises to which students could refer when facing the job market upon graduation. One assignment, for example, will require students to write a two-page application letter and CV in which they highlight how the skills they have acquired with their history degrees prepares them to undertake the tasks specified in one the advertised positions.

The responsibilities of Heritage Toronto's "Program Coordinator: Plaques and Markers" include researching and overseeing research

of plaque subjects using archival, academic, and community resources and writing and editing engaging and accurate plaque texts. Students interested in this position will have to complete several short assignments that build to the production of a fully developed proposal for the creation of a historic plaque about a person, place, or event of their choice. Optimally, they will research a topic that has not already been acknowledged with a public marker. However, they will also have the option of proposing a different version of a plaque already in existence as long as they can adequately justify the shortcomings of the existing public marker.

Several shorter assignments will help students build toward their final proposal. First, they will produce an analysis of the current state of historiography surrounding one aspect of the subject they wish to treat. A student, for example, might choose to present a critique for his or her project on the plaque erected in the centre of the Tlatelolco Plaza in Mexico City acknowledging the Spanish conquest of Mexico. The plaque reads: “On 13 August 1521 Tlatelolco, heroically defended by Cuauhtémoc fell into the power of Hernán Cortés. It was neither a triumph nor a defeat. It was the painful birth of the mestizo people that form the Mexico of today.” An obvious choice for the relevant historiography a student could address here, rather than focusing on the military history of the conquest, would treat how race mixing and race negation have figured in the construction of Mexican nationalism (note that the plaque makes no mention of Afro-Mexicans present at the conquest and in the forging of the nation).

Students also will be required to visit a physical or virtual archive and locate a primary source or sources that will inform their treatment of the historical subject treated in the plaque of their choice. I strongly encourage them to visit a physical archive they can access, but this will not be possible for all projects. Two assignments are based on students’ archival visit. First, they are called to reflect upon how the structure, extent, and organization of the archive they used, including in particular its finding aids, inform the research it is possible to generate from the collection. Alternatively, they can present on the process by which they made choices to select the particular documents they examined from these collections and to narrate how they arrived at the readings they made of these sources. This exercise asks them to address what Daisy Martin and Sam

Wineburg identify as the “problem problem”—the process by which professional historians find “problems” in the issues they investigate where “none are generally thought to exist.”<sup>32</sup> Students reflect upon the historical or historiographical context that encourages them to ask particular questions, or to ask them of particular texts. They think about how the thought processes—acquired knowledge, current preoccupations, and even personal predilections—might provoke their curiosity about a particular issue of scenario, question, or individual source. The third short assignment relating to the project is a writing exercise in which they produce an interpretation of the source they have selected.

A fourth short exercise with which I experimented the last time I taught this seminar will be adapted to the class’s present version. It asks students to reflect on the particular insights that historical thinking brings to the examination of a concrete case study. Speaking at a conference on the future of humanities education in May 2015, Normand Labrie, professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and former director of the province of Québec’s Social Sciences research funding agency, commented that one of the major societal transformations affecting scholars today is that until very recently, universities retained an almost exclusive claim to producing reliable knowledge. Today, however, Labrie commented that scholars have to rethink both how they share and use knowledge that originates outside of academia.<sup>33</sup> While true enough, it benefits students to consider how interpretations that are enriched by historical research and analysis provide valuable perspectives that are often overlooked in non-scholarly treatments of historical topics. To highlight this issue in my class, I instructed students the last time I taught the methodology seminar to prepare short presentations in which they compared an interpretation of a historical personage or event advanced by one scholarly and one extra-academic source—a website, popular history, film, or television show. This year, I will adjust the assignment so that students working on the Historic Plaques project will choose a subject related to the plaque they have chosen to research.

The final term project, for students opting to concentrate on the “Program Coordinator: Plaques and Markers” position, will build on all the elements students have developed throughout the semester. It will require students to develop a full proposal for the

plaque they have researched that will include the discussion of the merit of the subject, the issues the plaque would address, and the argument or interpretation it will advance. The proposal will also suggest a possible location for the marker and provide the text and visual description of the marker. Ideally, the proposal would also include a list of possible sponsors who might provide funding for its development and a description of the communities for whom the plaque would be significant.

Students will also have the option of organizing their semester's assignments around a second advertised position, a researcher with Canadian Development Consultants International (CDCI), a large research management and litigation support company that sought to hire a history B.A. to "conduct primary records research and report writing, particularly in the area of aboriginal history." Students choosing to focus on this position would undertake the same exercises as those working on the Historic Plaques position, but these would be instead oriented around the topic of either aboriginal land claims or the history of residential schools. Finally, students will have the option of orienting their assignments throughout the semester toward the subject area of a third advertised position, a "Research and Policy Coordinator" advertised by the Egale Canada Human Rights Trust. This candidate's professional responsibilities included compiling, producing, and communicating research and tools for the promotion of the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans people in such venues as school boards, corporations, and public policy documents. Students who chose to orient their assignments around this position would research a historic public education campaign (a provocative choice would be the history of language laws and their reception in Québec) and assess its successes and shortcomings, suggesting within realistic parameters of the campaign's historical context how the policy or implementation might have been handled more effectively.

## Conclusion

I realize that in this paper, I convey something of the habits of a moribund agnostic who denies existence of a god in life and then prays anyway at death, just in case. Let me conclude by attempting to explain why adopting such seemingly inconsistent attitudes about

the idea of “Teaching for Tomorrow” and “Doing Active History” does not trouble me. I began by refuting the notion vocalized in both public and private venues that it is necessary or desirable for history departments to dramatically reform how they do and teach history. I showed that history graduates (news columnists notwithstanding) currently experience considerable career success upon graduating, whether they opt to pursue work within or beyond the setting of the university campus. This suggests, among other things, that learning to think historically, which is what historians are trained to teach, is applicable and adaptable to students’ employment prospects upon graduation. My article concluded, nevertheless, with a discussion of various concrete initiatives that the climate of skepticism about the value of humanities training has provoked me to undertake in the coming year, particularly with respect to my organization of a historical methodology seminar. I am open, indeed I am enthusiastic, about making such modifications because they seem to me at once cosmetic and profound. They are cosmetic in the sense that demonstrating to a variety of audiences, but primarily to our own students, that the skills and knowledge they acquire in their history classes have immediate application in the workforce upon graduation. This does not require me or any other historian to dramatically transform what or how we teach, nor does it compromise the abstract intellectual growth possible through a history education that also offers students more tangible results. Such modifications are profound, however, because historians, along with our peers across the humanities and social sciences, continue to confront the vociferous notion that we believe that matters such as “relevance” and “employability” are beneath us. In truth, far from representing crass concerns beneath our attention, such matters should be, can be, and in many ways already are essential to our pedagogical mission.

## Notes

I acknowledge the input of Karl Jaffary, Ed Osowski, Bianco Premo, and Robert Townsend, who all made helpful suggestions on this piece.

1. Concordia University, "Strategic Directions," 5-6, <<https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/concordia/docs/strategic-directions/strategic-directions-2015.pdf>>.

2. Margaret Wente, "Adventures in Academia: The Stuff of Fiction," *The Globe and Mail*, 1 June 2015, <<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/adventures-in-academia-the-stuff-of-fiction/article24731318/>>.

3. Margaret Wente, "Educated for Unemployment" *The Globe and Mail*, 15 May 2012, <<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/educated-for-unemployment/article4179127/>>. David Silbey advances an argument similar to mine in "A Crisis in the Humanities?" *The Edge of the American West* [blog], *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 10 June 2013, <<http://chronicle.com/blognetwork/edgeofthewest/2013/06/10/the-humanities-crisis/>>, in which he shows that, despite the current language of humanities enrollment crises, statistically speaking, no crisis currently exists. Silbey sees an entrenched discourse of humanities under threat as itself is responsible for the widespread perception that such a crisis is real.

4. Institute for the Public Life of Arts and Ideas, "White Paper on the Future of the PhD in the Humanities," McGill University, December 2013, 7, <[http://www.acfas.ca/sites/default/files/fichiers/1536/white\\_paper\\_on\\_the\\_future\\_of\\_the\\_phd\\_in\\_the\\_humanities\\_dec\\_2013\\_1.pdf](http://www.acfas.ca/sites/default/files/fichiers/1536/white_paper_on_the_future_of_the_phd_in_the_humanities_dec_2013_1.pdf)>.

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6. Nicholas Lemann, "The Soul of the Research University," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 28 April 2014, <<http://chronicle.com/article/The-Soul-of-the-Research/146155/>>.

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8. CBC News, "Get More Bang for Your Buck with Post-Secondary Degrees," 26 August 2013, <<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/get-more-bang-for-your-buck-with-post-secondary-degrees-1.1370259>>.

9. Tal and Enenajor, chart 9, 4.

10. *Fortune* magazine reported that Warren Buffet's third most successful investment of all time, in mortgage insurance firm Freddie Mac, returned an annual compounded rate of 24%. Stephen Gandel, "Warren Buffet's Six Best Investments of All Time," *Fortune*, 31 October 2014, <<http://fortune.com/2014/10/31/warren-buffett-best-investments/>>.

11. According to the Government of Canada data, 87% of recent B.A. graduates in history are employed; another 7.28% are not looking for work; and 6% are unemployed. For English, 85.23% are employed; 8.54% are not looking; and 6.82% are unemployed. In economics, 85.01% are employed; 8.87% are not

looking, and 6.77% are unemployed. In chemistry, 80% are employed; 14.77% are not looking, and 6% are unemployed.

12. PayScale, “2014-2015 PayScale College Salary Report,” <<http://www.payscale.com/college-salary-report/majors-that-pay-you-back>>. I am grateful to Robert Townsend, who directed me to this and several other useful resources tracking the career trajectories of history B.A.s.

13. In 2014-2015, history B.A.s earned an average starting salary of \$40,500 and a mid-career salary of \$72,300, while business management graduates began with a salary of \$40,800 and earned a mid-career salary of \$72,700.

14. L. Maren Wood and Robert B. Townsend, “The Many Careers of History PhDs: A Study of Job Outcomes, Spring 2013,” A Report to the American Historical Association, 1, <[https://www.historians.org/Documents/Many\\_Careers\\_of\\_History\\_PhDs\\_Final.pdf](https://www.historians.org/Documents/Many_Careers_of_History_PhDs_Final.pdf)>.

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16. United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Occupational Outlook Handbook: Historians,” <<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/life-physical-and-social-science/historians.htm#tab-7>>; Loren Collins, “Entering the Job Market with a BA in History,” *AHA Today* [blog], American Historical Association, 12 May 2015, <<http://blog.historians.org/2015/05/entering-job-market-ba-in-history/>>.

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24. See Center for Oral History and Digital Storytelling, Concordia University, “La Pointe: On the Other Side of the Tracks,” 2015, available at <<http://postindustrialmontreal.ca/audio>>.

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26. Daisy Martin, “What is Historical Thinking?” [blog], Teaching History.org, <<http://teachinghistory.org/nhec-blog/24434>>.

27. Stéphane Lévesque, *Thinking Historically: Educating Students for the Twenty-First Century* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 14.
28. Nancy Fitch, "Contrast and Comparison Exercises," Teaching and Learning, American Historical Association, <<http://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/classroom-content/teaching-and-learning-in-the-digital-age/the-conquest-of-mexico/contrast-and-comparison-exercises>>.
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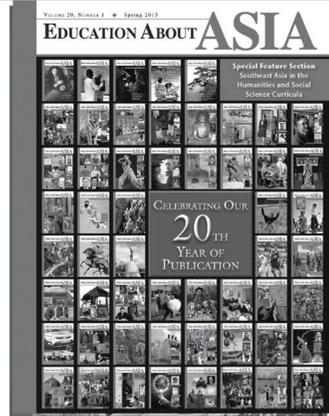
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