

Teaching Portfolio

Content

- 1) Pedagogical Approach and Teaching Methods
- 2) Teaching Experience, Supervision, and Exams
- 3) Curriculum Development
- 4) Teaching Materials and Formal Pedagogical Training
- 5) Reflections and Evaluations
- 6) Examples of Syllabi

1. Pedagogical Approach and Teaching Methods

At the core of impactful university-level research is the ability to develop good ideas and credibly communicate good stories. At the core of impactful research-based teaching is the ability to foster critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration.

To achieve these ends, the classroom environment must be conducive to deep and sustained engagement with course materials and I have therefore coordinated a pedagogical "Device conscious" approach across a range of entry-level American Studies courses for the fall of 2017 and 2018. The research-based thinking behind "device conscious" teaching, meaning a classroom where laptops and mobile phones are used only for instructor-directed active learning purposes, is to increase student engagement with class material through note-taking, discussions, peer activities, and "one minute papers" in class.

Working from the research-based premise that "writing-to-learn" enhances learners' reflection, I ask students in my classes to contribute writing related to the course readings throughout the semester. The thinking behind this approach, as Bangert-Drowns et al. note, is that "one can expect enhanced effects of writing" because the process of writing scaffolds the "metacognitive reflection on learning processes."

Additionally, the writing-to-learn exercises create peer-to-peer interaction in the classroom or online and provide helpful rehearsals before written exams. When explaining the rationale behind this approach to students, I connect it to the phrase "writing is thinking" – a core principle of my pedagogical approach. Closely related to a successful "writing is thinking" approach is the idea of "collaborative learning."

Using peer instruction through student presentations of carefully posed questions related to class themes, students' sense of collaboration is strengthened. Additionally, I encourage my students to read and comment on each other's work outside of class and, according to course evaluations, the learners who have taken this approach to heart have experienced significantly better understanding of class material. Moreover, I incorporate buzzing, meaning talking briefly in pairs, and group work to prepare the students for active participation in classroom discussions by giving them time to reflect in small groups over a specific question such as: What is Eric Foner's main argument in "Why does Reconstruction still matter"? My use of collaborative learning in the classroom is inspired by the term "Scenius." Coined by composer Brian Eno, "Scenius" emphasizes that most great composers, writers, nuclear scientists etc., have been part of a larger scene, which nurtured their development. Such a collaborative environment is what I strive for in the classroom and a mindset I encourage my students to adopt from the first day of class. "Genius is individual, scenius is communal," says Eno. To make sure that my aims for the class align with students' expectations, and vice versa, I evaluate any given course at three different points during the semester and hand out a grading rubric to enhance transparency in the evaluation process. Lastly, my pedagogical approach aims to minimize the gap between what students can do by themselves and what students can do with instructor assistance – what Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky called the "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD). A key part of Vygotsky's work on advancing students' ZPD was related to the concept of "scaffolding," which in my adaptation means encouraging participation, providing exemplars, and giving students a sense of agency through peer-instruction and adequate instructor support. At its most successful, this approach takes students "more quickly up a learning curve," and helps them learn course material through presentations, class discussions, and, most importantly, actual writing.

As evidenced by my adaption of the "device conscious" pedagogical approach, I am committed to continually developing my teaching approach to maximize active student participation and forced by circumstances in 2020 moved much of my teaching online through the use of Kaltura and Zoom. By incorporating the latest research-based best practice in the classroom, I work to overcome what I perceive as the biggest challenge to my pedagogical approach, namely student reluctance towards writing-to-learn going forward as well. Teaching diverse student bodies requires constant experimentation and personal pedagogical progress in order to achieve maximum engagement.

In class, my approach has been to acknowledge good examples of student writing related to class themes to spur motivation and recognize students' efforts. Additionally, I have made use of both visual and auditory tools to help learners connect to points from the texts. Through the energy I bring to class, and the energy I put into written feedback outside of class, I aim to lead the students by active learning example. Constantly evaluating my ability to maintain such successful classroom collaboration is part of my future teaching goals and the resources offered through SDU's Centre for Teaching and Learning (SDU Universitetspædagogik) a central part of this sustained development. Concretely, co-teaching with Sarah Hentges in the spring of 2019 and with David Nye in the spring of 2014, coupled with discussions about pedagogical practice, and my ability to bring in colleagues for "Introduction to American Studies" has helped me further develop my own classroom pedagogy.

2. Teaching Experience, Supervision, and Exams

Since 2006, I have taught and supervised students from several different continents, regions, and nations, spanning China, India, West Africa, the Middle East, Panama, Mexico, Canada, and Scandinavia at universities in Denmark and the United States. At the University of Southern Denmark, I have been responsible for several 5-20 ECTS courses in American Studies and Journalism ranging in size from 20 to 100+ students. I have supervised more than 50 BA-level research projects and dozens of MA-level theses. Additionally, I have organized several lecture series at "Folkeuniversitetet," participated in numerous others, and given more than 25 invited talks on American politics and American history to audiences ranging from high school students to retired genealogy enthusiasts. Consequently, I have learned to adapt my teaching and presentation style based on the audience and the feedback has generally been

enthusiastic (“exciting,” “great satisfaction,” “excellent”). Below I detail my experience with teaching and supervision.

Spring 2022 On Carlsberg Monograph Stipend Fellowship

Fall 2021 On Carlsberg Monograph Stipend Fellowship

Spring 2021 Communicating American Studies (MA level) American Business (BA level)

Fall 2020

American Studies in Practice (MA level)

Topics in American History (MA level, co-teacher)

Introduction to American Studies (BA level)

American History (BA level, co-teacher) Supervision: 4 BA-projects

Spring 2020

American Business (BA level)

Supervision: 5 MA-thesis

Fall 2019 American Studies in Practice (MA level)

Introduction to American Studies (BA level) Supervision: 10 BA-projects

Spring 2019

Critical Themes in American Studies (MA level, Center for American Studies)

American Business (BA level, Center for American Studies)

American Sports: Identity and Cultural Warfare (elective, Center for American Studies)

Supervision: 5 MA-theses

Fall 2018

Introduction to American Studies (BA level, Center for American Studies) American History (BA level, Center for American

Studies) Reporting America, Class, Race, and the Art of Literary Journalism (elective, Center for American Studies) Guest

lecture online in “Cultural Politics of Sport” at the University of California-San Diego.

Supervision MA-thesis: “Fall from Grace: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the O.J. Simpson Murder Case and the Bill

Cosby Sexual Assault Case.”

Fall 2017

Teaching Introduction to American Studies (BA level, Center for American Studies)

American History (BA level, Center for American Studies)

Spring 2017

Guest lecture Narrative Nonfiction at SDU’s Center for Journalism

Supervision “Thesis seminar” directed by Robert Boynton (MA level, Institute for Journalism, New York University),

advisory thesis supervision as Fulbright Visiting Scholar.

Fall 2016

Supervision: “Introduction to Literary Reportage” directed by Robert Boynton (MA level, Institute for Journalism, New York

University), preliminary thesis supervision as Fulbright Visiting Scholar.

MA thesis: “Danish Military Pension Applications and Correspondences with Relation to the U.S. Civil War Pension

System 1861-1907.”

Spring 2016

American Business (BA level, Center for American Studies)

Supervision MA thesis: “The Role of Debates in the 2016 Presidential Election Cycle.” “Den stille protest: En historiske diskursanalyse af Black Power demonstration ved de Olympiske Lege i Mexico 1968. (The Quiet Protest: A Historical Discourse Analysis of [the] Black Power Demonstration at the Olympic Games in Mexico 1968)”

Fall 2015 American Business and the Market (BA-level, Center for American Studies)

Fall 2014 Introduction to American Studies (BA level, Center for American Studies) American Business and the Market (BA

level, Center for American Studies) American History (BA level, Center for English) Supervision: BA-level research projects

(Center for American Studies and Center for English)

Spring 2014 Class, Race, and the Art of American Narrative Nonfiction (Elective, Center for American Studies) American

Business (co-taught with Professor David Nye) (BA level, Center for American Studies) Supervision: BA-level research

projects (Center for American Studies and Center for English)

Spring 2013 Guest lecture on Narrative Nonfiction at the Center for Journalism

Fall 2012 American History (BA level, Center for American Studies) American Studies (BA level Business, Language, and

Culture) Supervision: BA-level research projects (Center for Journalism).

Fall 2011 Supervision: MA-level thesis: “Take Back America: Bag om Tea Party-bevægelsen. (Take Back America: Behind the Scenes of the Tea Party Movement).” BA-level research projects (Center for Journalism).

Spring 2009 The Journalistic Toolkit: Historical Methods (Center for Journalism) Guest lecture about Comparative Analysis at SDU’s Center for Journalism.

Fall 2008 The Journalistic Toolkit: Historical Methods (Center for Journalism) Guest lectures about Americanization, Cultural Diplomacy, Sociology of News at the University of California-San Diego.

Spring 2008 The Journalistic Toolkit: Historical Methods (Center for Journalism)

Fall 2006 American Studies (BA-level Business, Language, and Culture)

3. Curriculum Development

With research-based knowledge about the value of “writing-to-learn,” coupled with practical experience from American universities, I have helped bring more continuous writing exercises into our curriculum at the Center for American Studies and strengthened the center’s interdisciplinary profile.

Most recently, our American Fulbright Professor (a literary scholar) created a collaborative class around “Critical Themes in American Studies” where we brought the fiction, nonfiction, movies, songs, poems, guest lectures (e.g. by an Iraq war veteran), and yoga classes together to create an interdisciplinary learning experience for our students under the

overarching umbrella of “Minds, Bodies, and Movements”.

Moreover, as history courses at American universities usually require several written assignments throughout the semester: responses to readings, book reviews, mid-term exams, published field/research notes, etc, I have adapted these approaches to fit the American Studies program at SDU with the help of colleagues.

As such, I helped rewrite the curriculum for Introduction for American Studies and American Business to maximize student incentives (e.g., written assignments throughout the semester and thus a smaller workload at the semester’s end) for a more even engagement with course material over the course of the academic term.

Additionally, I helped link the two semesters of American Business courses together conceptually and thematically while giving the second semester a more contemporary focus. The success of this approach, in place since 2014, is apparent in the teaching evaluations.

4. Teaching Materials and Formal Pedagogical Training

I organize my class around course themes and questions that have been presented to the students on the syllabus ahead of the semester’s beginning, and which are further specified ahead of each class meeting. My classes typically start out with a brief lecture that connects class themes to bigger questions and ideas, before moving to specific examples, often supported by visual or auditory aids. I often incorporate brief TV features, music videos, TED talks, or NPR podcast segments into my classes as a lead-in to a round of student “buzzing” and subsequent open discussions of class texts.

The second half of class frequently involves a student presentation, group work, textual analysis, or writing exercises. A concrete example from my American Business course is an exercise related to Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats (SWOT) analysis of the American publishing industry. Having already read a SWOT analysis of The New York Times ahead of class to “scaffold” their ability to carry out the exercise, students use this method to analyze the brick-and-mortar bookstore chain Barnes & Noble in relation to electronic commerce company Amazon.

The success of my multipronged and multimedia approach shows in the student evaluations, from external exam readers, and the feedback I have received from academic peers. Based on a year of regular classroom observation, an external teaching consultant pointed out that my classes incorporate “a good mix of lecture, group-work, and discussion, using an array of techniques” and added that my well-structured lectures, avoided the students becoming “passive spectators.” In the following sections, I provide some examples of how my teaching has evolved, reflect on my teaching successes and challenges.

5. Reflections and Evaluations

During the fall of 2014, I taught three separate classes, Introduction to American Studies, American History, and American Business and the Market, cumulatively 12 hours per week, at the University of Southern Denmark while completing the Lecturer Training Program. In all three classes, I encouraged students to submit blogs outside of class to achieve my writing-to-learn objective. I was most successful in Introduction to American Studies, where four short papers were mandatory in order to pass the course. These mandatory written assignments, graded as pass/fail, encouraged active learning by having the students engage with new material themselves. Their learning was additionally “scaffolded” by exemplar texts and through individual written feedback by the instructor, along with general written and verbal feedback in class. The written assignments proved extremely useful to the students and gave me a very concrete opportunity to assess their learning progress. The feedback process, however, was also labor intensive as I graded close to 200 papers (and offered fairly extensive feedback) during the semester. Looking back, the majority of the students, based on a midterm evaluation, were glad to have a low-stakes opportunity to learn academic writing before being confronted with longer and more taxing exams at the end of the semester. The benefit (from the perspective of both the students and the instructor) of the class structure became apparent after the first hand-in when the students, who had only been at the university for three weeks, were asked to write a 600-800 word paper on the prompt, “Why did the Civil War break out?” I prepared a 90-minute session (interspersed with buzzing, discussion, and visual media) on academic writing and the paper topic, supplemented by four brief articles that provided possible answers to the prompt. Additionally, I uploaded a folder called “Resources for Paper Writing,” which contained an excerpt from Lotte Rienecker’s *The Good Paper*, and a few brief texts on how to structure an academic argument. The resources in this folder were meant to contribute to the students’ scaffolded learning by both offering clear guidelines and source material, and by challenging them to improve the quality of their writing. I also posted the exam question with the following guidelines: A good answer should begin with a thesis statement (in this exam I will argue...), contain details, examples, and references to readings as evidence supporting your main claim. A good answer will also clearly answer the question and systematically incorporate references (i.e. using the Chicago Manual of Style) as well as a bibliography. A PIECE OF ADVICE: With broad topics and only 600-800 words (excluding bibliography) to do them justice, try to zero in on one or two key events/themes and broaden your discussion from there. Yet, despite these efforts to “scaffold” the students’ engagement with their first academic paper, I ended up only passing roughly half of the papers (I did offer detailed feedback on each submitted paper). To make sure I did not discourage the students who had not passed, I came into class the following week and offered them an anecdotal example of how I had also failed a midterm writing exercise during my first semester at the university. After that lecture, I received the following email from a student: “Dear Anders, first of all, I would like to thank you for your calming and encouraging words for us that failed the first exam, making it clear that it’s a process we’ll learn over time – and that even you encountered difficulties on your first assignment – I appreciate that.” Such an approach is supported by the research on collaborative learning. Fry et al., for example, note that “part of the tutor’s task is to play down the differences in roles [between students and instructor] and in particular, play down his or her own authority.” By connecting both academically and personally with the students at this particular point in their university learning process, I was able to continue requiring high standards for their writing without discouraging students who had put in a genuine effort for the first exam, but had not achieved the desired level of written prose. From a lecturer perspective, knowing that the students were working continuously throughout the semester also made the classroom much more lively and energetic. The students, in midterm evaluations, described their paper topics as “good,” and one noted – lending direct support to the value of active learning – “the most fruitful ‘events’ for me has been writing the exam papers, because that forces me to make some extra research

and remember the subjects." Trying to encourage students to hand in written work that is not directly aligned with their final exam is, however, one of my central pedagogical challenges. In the spring of 2014, I taught an elective on narrative nonfiction to first and third semester students, and asked my students to write blogs or wiki posts outside of class to create a foundation for understanding the chronology, themes, and methodology of main texts. I emphasized that this would be extremely helpful before their written weeklong exam at the end of the semester, and also pointed out that I would offer feedback which would help them improve as writers inside and outside the university. In the first class, I gave students time to write a brief blogpost in class (on the topic of "what motivates me to learn?"). I only gave the students five minutes, however, and none of the students actually finished their blogpost initially. After four email reminders, approximately 80 percent of the 20 students contributed. The rest of the semester the ratio was closer 10 percent of the class contributing, and the wiki was not updated after the first month of class despite regular reminders. The silver lining of this experiment, however, was that the students who did contribute blog posts found the experience fruitful (and appreciated the feedback as well as the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the collaborative learning environment in writing if they were not comfortable with speaking up in class). One student, who was struggling in the class, was actually able to turn a short blog post into a successful BA project, as I encouraged him to expand on his passion for the web forum Reddit. From a teacher perspective, such experiences motivated me even further to find ways to change students' mindset about active learning. Since 2014, I have worked consciously to cut down text heavy slides and segments of pure lecture. Instead, I have incorporated additional use of study questions, buzzing, and group work to give the students even better opportunities to participate actively in class. Perhaps most importantly, I have tweaked my writing assignments outside of class to be directly related to course readings and the results are reflected in the course evaluations. While only three out of six students in my elective Narrative Nonfiction found the class "very rewarding" or "rewarding," the evaluations changed across the board by the next semester. By fall 2014, 9 out of 10 students in my American History course found the class "rewarding," or "very rewarding." Following the fall of 2014, I have primarily taught courses in American Business, and the results by the spring of 2016 were 93% evaluating the class as "to a large extent" and "to some extent" providing the students with the competences and qualifications needed according to the curriculum (3% did not answer), while 96% felt prepared to take the exam based on the course. The spring 2016 course was accompanied by comments such as: • "The instructor is obviously very fond of the subject and is able to transmit this enthusiasm to the students." • "The assigned readings are very much related to the class therefore it is relatively easy to follow the class." • "I like the way he is teaching." • "Professor is very well prepared and committed. Inspiring. Devoted. Open to communication and advice. Very helpful. Great teacher. And this blog we write is an excellent idea and good exercise." • "Anders is a good, smiling and outgoing fella, which really improves the overall quality of the class. Also the blogging thing is a good idea." • "All around best class." Several additional comments mirrored the points made above, while others pointed to the group presentations as a "nice touch." A handful of students, however, complained about the blog exercises, the amount of reading (40-70 pages per week), and a few students also asked for more group work. While the two first complaints seem part of an almost universal student complaint about too much work, the last comment is one I will weigh more seriously with the aim to find the exact right proportion between active learning and instructor-directed scaffolding. Going forward, I will continue to experiment with my "writing-to-learn" approach by considering how best to structure classes and develop new methods of scaffolding the students' learning. I see teaching and research as mutually reinforcing and draw great inspiration from my students' observations, which at times have informed my own work on Scandinavian immigrants, citizenship, and American empire. The classroom is thus truly a collaborative experience for me and one I look forward to continuing.

6. Examples of Syllabi

If you are interested in examples of syllabi from my classes on "Critical Themes in American Studies," "Reporting America," "American Sports," "Introduction to American Studies," "American Business" or other courses, please email me at ras@sdu.dk