

76

THE TIES THAT BIND: LINKAGES AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOLS, TWO-YEAR COLLEGES AND BACCALAUREATE INSTITUTIONS

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The University of Wisconsin Center-Marathon County in Wausau is a two-year transfer institution that is a fully-integrated unit in the University of Wisconsin System. Center students may complete the first two years of the baccalaureate program and successfully transfer their freshman-sophomore course work to any four-year institution in the state. Most of the thirteen two-year centers in this system are located in the outlying areas of the state, which means their student bodies are often homogeneous in composition, though in part non-traditional. As an open access institution, the university center must often serve the needs of students whose basic skills are either poorly-developed or rusty after years outside the academic life. Simultaneously, UW Center faculties must also challenge some of the brightest students produced by the secondary schools of outstate Wisconsin. Because of their close ties with their host communities, Wisconsin's two-year institutions are uniquely situated to function as community resources in every sense of the word.

As historians providing entry level instruction in introductory courses, Center faculty members have become aware of the reality that significant numbers of students are deficient in the essential skills of critical thinking and writing. At UWC-Marathon, the History Department has concluded that its concerns relating to the preparation of high school graduates can best be dealt with by establishing a collaborative relationship with the secondary school history faculties whose students enter the university classroom on a regular basis.

For the past ten years, a fruitful interaction, at first informal and later more structured, has existed between university historians and secondary school teachers in Marathon County, Wisconsin. Once AHA, OAH, and NCSS joined in 1985 to create the History Teaching Alliance, we moved towards engagement in a formal professional development program by establishing the Marathon County History Teaching Alliance, which is now in its tenth year of operation.¹ Organized with administrative and financial

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¹The History Teaching Alliance was founded with support from the William and Flora Hewlett, Rockefeller, and Exxon Foundations. More recently, it has enjoyed the support of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The Marathon County History Teaching Alliance was formed with initial funding from the national Alliance, Gannett Foundation, the Wisconsin Humanities Council, and the University of Wisconsin Centers.

support from the university, participating school districts, and external funding agencies, the Alliance is formed every spring on the basis of a competitive application process. In a typical year 15-20 pre-collegiate teachers interact on a regular basis with 3-4 UWMC faculty members and an array of guest scholars. Teachers are released from classroom duties in order to take advantage of the Alliance program.

Through annual summer institutes and a regular academic year seminar, the UW Center history faculty and their secondary school colleagues engage in an ongoing and intensive examination of the latest scholarship in their fields. For example, in 1993-1994 we explored the Turner thesis and the impact of the "new western history" on our understanding and teaching of frontier history (see list of topics examined by the Alliance collaborative). Over the years, it has also been possible to explore such important questions as the nature and definition of survey courses, as well as the preparation of students for college-level history.

As a result of this close contact and mutual intellectual renewal, it has been possible to encourage a stronger disciplinary orientation in secondary education and assist pre-collegiate teachers in maintaining their command of the literature (which they have identified as a primary concern). Equally important has been the opportunity to promote the concept that history and history instruction must involve critical thinking more than the simple accumulation of disconnected facts. Anecdotal evidence and classroom experience persuade us that incoming students, therefore, enter the university with a better understanding of both the content and academic standards appropriate to university education.

In short, interaction with high school teachers has helped strengthen the content, course materials, and standards introduced in our feeder institutions, while it has improved our understanding of the techniques employed by pre-collegiate teachers in the preparation of students for the university. It follows that UW Center faculty are better equipped to introduce these students to college-level work in history.

As Alliance leader Kermit Hall has noted, "continued collegial communication and mutual respect" will be the "essential test" of collaborative achievement.² At the UW Center in Wausau and in the Marathon County schools, the sense of mutual engagement in the teaching and learning of history is strong. The History Teaching Alliance has been used to create a firm bond between teachers at all places on the educational continuum, while linking the community, the two-year campus, and pre-collegiate institutions in a partnership that holds promise for the future.³

²Eugene Asher, "Linking Schools and Colleges: The Collaborative Approach to Teaching and Learning," *Network News Exchange*, 11 (Spring 1986), 10.

³For extended treatment of the Marathon County History Teaching Alliance's work, see James J. Lorence, "The History Teaching Alliance: A Partnership in Education," *Teaching Forum*, 11 (May 1990), 4-5, and Lorence, "The Marathon County History Teaching Alliance: A Venture in Community Service," *OAH Magazine of History*, 8 (Spring 1994), 94-96.

But the ties established between two-year faculty and their colleagues in the secondary schools constitute only one component of a complex linkage system. Strong professional relationships with history faculty at baccalaureate institutions are absolutely essential to the maintenance of intellectual vitality and teaching competence among historians at two-year institutions. And while close disciplinary connections must be established, two-year faculty members also must work to improve inter-institutional curricular and transfer coordination in history. It is clear that without the cooperation of colleagues at the comprehensive state universities and research institutions, the primary mission of the two-year colleges will be difficult to fulfill. Nor will the best interests of students be served unless historians commit themselves to greater collaboration.

As an integral element in the University of Wisconsin System, the UW Centers must prepare students for successful transfer into the baccalaureate programs of thirteen diverse state institutions, as well as a myriad of private colleges and universities. Yet because of their size, Center history faculties consist of only two to three persons per campus, which complicates the effort to provide history programming that will ensure full transfer credits for all students. Despite this limitation, faculty must find ways to enable transferring students to meet a variety of general education history requirements, including preparation in American and European surveys, Western Civilization, World History, non-Western culture, and ethnic studies. Historians at two-year campuses must, therefore, be professional generalists capable of providing students with the breadth of curriculum, depth of knowledge, and familiarity with critical thinking and conceptual history that will ease their transition to Level II instruction.

These challenges place a heavy burden on classroom teachers. As providers of introductory courses in history, teachers in the two-year schools bear a responsibility to all historians at baccalaureate institutions, an obligation to send them students who think historically, write well, and possess the content material essential to their success as they move to more advanced levels of historical analysis. To students, meanwhile, there is a pressing obligation to offer a sufficient variety of courses to protect their investment in a two-year course of study as a platform for their pursuit of a degree. The task is formidable indeed.

A first step in response to this challenge is to reach out to colleagues at four-year campuses, who in turn should recognize the connective relationship between general education and the major. All historians "need to change the view that general education is just the 'intro-stuff' students do before getting on to what is really important."⁴ Introductory and survey instruction is serious business, particularly when one considers the significant percentage of students for whom these courses are the only courses taken. The introductory course is our opportunity to entice students into a meaningful engagement with the past and the crucial decisions of men and women of other generations. Creative teaching at the

⁴Lee E. Grugel and Lucia Harrison, "Hard Lessons Learned from General Education Reform," *Perspectives: General Education Revisited*, 22 (Fall 1992), 73.

freshman-sophomore level can also lead to expanded enrollments in more advanced history courses; hence, self-interest mandates that four-year institutions and their history faculties demonstrate a lively interest in the needs of their colleagues in two-year schools.

Once two and four-year history faculties acknowledge the validity, intellectual substance, and importance of Level I instruction, we can more easily cooperate to resolve the problems confronting our students. We need to explore together such issues as:

1. Who has responsibility for general education? Or more to the point, what should the general education requirement in history consist of, and what is its place in a freshman-sophomore program?
2. What is the relationship between general education requirements and the major?
3. Should there be any effort to establish guidelines for the content of introductory history courses? Or are such efforts to be avoided?
4. What emphasis should be placed on breadth as opposed to depth? What is the place of inquiry method and the development of critical thinking skills?
5. What is the place of writing and communications skills in history instruction?
6. How can pre-professional and pre-major requirements be satisfied in the two-year institution so that the needs of students will be met?⁵

To confront these problems, historians at two-year institutions must insist upon a strong professional relationship with their colleagues at all levels and function as full partners in intellectual dialogue. As a practical matter, they also must be advocates for students, as they seek to prepare them for what lies ahead. Few surveys are taught as they were a generation ago, and it is vital that history teachers in two-year programs contribute to student success at baccalaureate institutions by providing state-of-the-art instruction. And curricular coordination must be achieved to avoid unnecessary problems for students. For example, in Wisconsin at least two four-year comprehensive universities in the UW System have moved towards a world history requirement, while the curriculum of the two-year centers has been slow to respond to this shift. How will affected faculties react to changes in the way our discipline is conceived and taught?

One recent study of the articulation problem has concluded that two factors are significant influences on the success of articulation agreements: the geographic proximity of the institutions that are parties to a transfer relationship and the success of community college articulation officers in establishing a positive relationship with the receiving

⁵Grugel and Harrison, 73-74.

institution's transfer officer.⁶ To these may be added an emphatic third: the strength of historian to historian (or teacher to teacher) relationships. Knowledge of our counterparts' work as scholars and teachers can be a powerful factor in easing transfer for students and assisting faculty at baccalaureate institutions in the development of course equivalencies in history. Closer collaboration might lead to the development of quasi-contractual agreements covering transferability of history courses.

One possible approach emerges in James C. Palmer's and Marilyn B. Pugh's detailed study of the community college contribution in baccalaureate instruction in Virginia. Recognizing that a growing percentage of undergraduate instruction occurs in Virginia's two-year colleges, Palmer and Pugh recommend the strengthening of links between the two and four-year institutions. They propose "joint work involving university and community college faculty in the development of arts and sciences courses (or general education curriculum) leading students to commonly defined outcomes." While ease of transfer would be an important goal, an even more significant objective involves "shared expectations"⁷ at all levels of instruction. By working collaboratively, faculties can ensure that history students are held to the accepted standards of the profession.

A second avenue to access, currently being employed within the University of Wisconsin System, involves aggressive transfer and articulation policies. As has been true in many states, the University has attempted to guarantee that the Associate Degree will meet general education requirements at receiving institutions.⁸ While this represents a positive step, it is widely recognized that pre-professional, pre-major, and other program requirements tend to undercut the transfer policy's intent. Without better coordination among historians students will continue to be caught in the cross-fire.

In the final analysis, then, responsibility for serving students devolves upon us as two and four-year history faculty. It is we who must agree on requirements, equivalencies, course content, and expectations. In this light, contacts at all levels become essential: department to department, chair to chair, historian to historian, person to person. We must make the effort to communicate, and professional organizations are duty-bound to strengthen the ties among their members.

⁶Arthur M. Cohen and Jan M. Ignash, "The Total Community College Curriculum," in *Probing the Community College Transfer Function: Research on Curriculum Degree Completion, and Academic Tasks* (Washington: American Council on Education, 1993), 37.

⁷James C. Palmer and Marilyn B. Pugh, "The Community College Contribution to the Education of Bachelor's Degree Candidates," in *Probing the Community College Transfer Function*, 55.

⁸Palmer and Pugh note that there may be ways to permit non-Associate Degree students to make better use of their "less-structured" use of the community college curriculum as they work towards baccalaureate degrees. They cite a 1991 proposal in Virginia to develop 35-unit modules of liberal arts courses, to be offered throughout the state's community college system and accepted by four-year institutions, as an illustration of new approaches to the transfer problem. Palmer and Pugh, 55.

Whether forward to baccalaureate institutions or backward to pre-collegiate institutions, linkages among historians and teacher-scholars are crucial to the advance of effective, meaningful, and practical history instruction. Such cooperation can only grow from visible evidence of mutual respect for all practitioners of the historian/teacher's craft. Teachers at two-year institutions are strategically located as the key link in the educational chain. But the chain will remain incomplete unless all historians recognize the primacy of the teaching function and commit themselves to collaboration in the interests of undergraduate students. On this commitment the future of the profession depends.

HISTORY TEACHING ALLIANCE SEMINAR TOPICS

- 1986-1987 Warfare as a Constitutional Problem: An Historical Perspective
- 1987-1988 The United States' Constitution in Comparative Context
- 1988-1989 The United States and the Soviet Union in Comparative Perspective, 1917-Present
- 1989-1990 The Worker Response to the Industrial Revolution: A Comparative Perspective
- 1990-1991 The Role of Religion in the Teaching of History
- 1991-1992 The Protection of Rights in a Global Context
- 1992-1993 Red, White, and Black: The Columbian Exchange and Cultural Interaction, 1450-1800
- 1993-1994 The Turner Thesis as a Framework for Analysis: Interpreting the Frontier, Past and Present
- 1994-1995 Literary and Cinematic Texts in Twentieth Century History: Primary Sources as Teaching Resources
- 1995-1996 Immigration in Historical Perspective: The Path to Diversity