

BOOK REVIEWS

P. Sven Arvidson. *Teaching Nonmajors: Advice for Liberal Arts Professors*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008. Pp. 128. Paper, \$17.95; ISBN 13: 978-0-7914-7491-4.

Teaching non-majors can be a tedious task in the liberal arts college. Students might not engage academically and instead treat the course as "a waste of time." Differing attitudes fill the classroom and might cause interruptions, passive-aggressive behavior, or absenteeism. *Teaching Nonmajors: Advice for Liberal Arts Professors* addresses many roadblocks non-major students can create in the classroom. However, the text directs instructors to teach non-majors in a logical, positive, and student-centered manner. Author P. Sven Arvidson does not start with the student, but the professor. He addresses essential guidelines professors incorporate into the syllabus, classroom environment, pedagogy, and professional development.

According to *Teaching Nonmajors*, the foremost "goal ... is to encourage [non-majors'] interest in our discipline and to see how it relates to their daily lives, their future, and the discipline they have chosen for their major." Arvidson asks the question, "What do we do?" He answers the question in eight chapters starting with "Give Better Lectures." Chapter 1 emphasizes the passion of teaching and connecting with the students. He challenges professors to "be themselves," alter pedagogy to surprise students, know content knowledge, and establish time for question and answers. Chapter 1 also includes avoiding the lecture trap, strategies to improve lectures and discussion of a course notebook. Chapter 2, "Break Up Lectures," provides relevant methods to keep the lecture moving in continuity but presenting different opportunities to discuss content, create disequilibrium and reflection time for students to generate their own knowledge. Adding methods that "break up" the lecture creates an efficient classroom teaching approach. Chapter 3 highlights discussions and "how to" produce constructive discussion in the classroom environment. Debriefing and student presentations conclude the chapter emphasizing advance preparation of the professor. Chapter 4 or "The Art of Assignments" stresses designing reflective assignments to maintain the flow of the course and make "grading less painful." The chapter reviews techniques for constructing reading, writing, written exams, and oral assignments. Chapter 5 or "Sensible Policies" encourages professors to familiarize and construct the course syllabus with university policy. Hints and suggestions to produce a well-balanced syllabus include communication, attendance issues, and plagiarism. Chapter 6 focuses on problems with professors and students. It gives examples of disruptive student behavior in class, broken university/classroom policies, shy students, and students with disabilities. One important message is to inform the dean of conversations with problem students and provide documentation. Chapter Seven or "Understand and Improve Student Ratings" once again charges the professor with the responsibility to know the rating system and encourages secondary written evaluations to improve teaching strategies. Chapter 8, the conclusion, reminds professors to plan opportunities for students to leave the course asking questions about course content and reflecting on their personal life and future. Students should leave "with the intellectual tools and

cognitive lenses of that course's discipline to start to connect that horizon to the ground which they walk."

Teaching Nonmajors: Advice for Liberal Arts Professors is a versatile tool for professors at a liberal arts college. I would highly recommend this to seasoned professors but especially new professors. Working at a university is challenging with all the demands on a professor professionally, but the added work of engaging non-majors is a struggle. This text provides solid guidelines to equip a professor for a successful and less stressful academic year.

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John Tosh. *Why History Matters*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. Pp. 192. Paper \$19.95; ISBN 978-0-230-51248-3.

In his fascinating book on the place of history in modern society, John Tosh, a social historian at Roehampton University in the United Kingdom, begins with the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Blithely ignorant of the historical forces and precedent in that region, Anglo-American citizens later would be surprised by Iraq's turmoil in the months and years that followed an apparently easy conquest. Other than the 1991 Gulf War, few had any inkling of past interventions or knowledge that British troops had fought their way to Baghdad during the First World War and, in the process of establishing its mandate, took heavy casualties in a series of revolts and insurgencies. The legacy to the modern world was an artificial state with Kurdish and Shiite majorities controlled by a Sunni Islam minority, multiple coups against dictatorial governments, and the ultimate dictator in Saddam Hussein. In Tosh's view, those watching speeches by Tony Blair and George W. Bush were generally unaware of the narrative of Iraqi history. Without this perspective, citizens of these democracies were unable to participate rationally in the political debate. What makes Tosh's message especially interesting is that he places much of the blame for the uninformed citizen squarely on the backs of modern historians who "are strangely reluctant to adopt the role of expert" in ongoing political debates.

The author explores the value of history to the democratic process. In an interesting observation, he notes that modern politicians and those who make up the governing class are "less minded and less qualified to draw on the lessons of history than were any of its predecessors." Yet, this absence of perspective has not prevented modern politicians from Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, to Tony Blair and George W. Bush, from using their own versions of national history to drum up popular support for their political programs. Tosh artfully illustrates the disconnect between fact and fiction by demolishing Thatcher's use of the Victorian age as a model for late twentieth-century social and economic programs. Rather than a golden age, especially for the family as Thatcher alleged, the Victorians lived in an age of economic insecurity, crime, prostitution, unplanned pregnancy, as well as child and wife abuse. Most citizens