

**Unpacking the  
Backpack:  
Pedagogy and  
Peregrination in  
the Spanish World**

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**Jason Dyck**

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# I. Teaching Philosophy

## Multiple Voices

“Professor Dyck [used] many different kinds of sources that showed many perspectives.”

– University of Toronto Student (2016)

“I do believe he achieved his goal in having students have a more open mind on different cultures, and to see and understand both sides of the story.” – Trent University Durham Student (2015)

As a student of history I was forced to reconsider my ideas of other cultures, both past and present. Gazing into the eyes of my students, I now see a reflection of my former self; I am reminded of my initial excitement and fascination with difference as I encountered past civilizations for the first time in writing. Hence when I teach history I invite my students to accompany me on a similar journey into the past, one that crosses both chronological and cultural barriers to new lands inhabited by diverse peoples. I emphasize that history—created by men and women from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds—must be presented in a multicultural framework to fully appreciate the complexity of both human actions and historical events. As we study the multiple voices of the past together, I lead my students to the point where they are able to recognize their own forms of ethnocentrism. By learning to appreciate cultural diversity in the past, students are inspired to open dialogue and discussion in the present.

## Responsible Imagination

“The professor placed a lot of emphasis on critical analysis, as well as on how all writers have an argument that they want to get across.” – University of Toronto Student (2016)

“He has taught me the importance of critically engaging documents and not taking them at face value.” – Brock University Student (2009)

This cross-cultural journey into bygone societies is as much about self-reflection and discovery as it is about intellectual development. As an instructor I seek to demonstrate that history—far from being the rote memorization of dates and “facts”—is a creative and imaginative interpretation of the past achieved through both meticulous research and persuasive storytelling. I encourage my students to exercise their own historical imaginations by examining their primary and secondary sources in a careful and critical manner. As they join in the interpretive process, I stress that the work of the historian is by nature incomplete, which means that they can bring new light to historical documents that have been studied for centuries. But as much as I empower them to engage imaginatively with both their written and visual sources, I remind them that they do not have free licence to invent whatever they choose. My goal as a teacher of history is to help my students develop a critical art of reading that challenges both their own assumptions about the world and those of the authors they are investigating. These analytical skills are fundamental to the craft of history, but they also prepare one for life in a digital world where information is available in various forms of media.

## **Co-Learning Environment**

“He is humble; if he didn’t know, he tells you, but also suggestions as to which books could answer the question.” – University of Toronto Student (2016)

“Jason . . . never put down anyone’s idea and instead took them and incorporated them into the lesson.” – Trent University Durham Student (2015)

Stressing the multiple voices of the past and individual creativity implies openness and humility on my part as an instructor. At the beginning of all my classes I emphasize that I am a co-learner together with my students. I always tell them that I am excited about what they are going to teach me in both discussions and in their written work. It is important for students to recognize that no instructor knows everything about any given subject, even if s/he is an expert in that field.

## **II. Teaching Strategies**

### **Personalized Classes**

“I loved how enthusiastic he was about all the material, and how he brought in his own experience (through photos of his travels and occasional anecdotal stories).” – University of Toronto Student (2016)

“Liked when Jason pulled personal experiences, photos into the material. Humanized it.”  
– Brock University Student (2012)

Developing a co-learning environment allows me to personalize both my pedagogy and the past. During each class I introduce myself to individual students, which makes both lectures and seminars more personal and less intimidating. Creating an open atmosphere of intellectual exchange means that I can facilitate learning instead of being a mere presenter of information. Beyond this, I also enhance my interpretation of historical events and ideas with brief anecdotes and photographs from my extensive peregrinations throughout the Spanish world. By drawing upon my own travel experiences, I am able to bring history to life for my students, humanizing it in ways that draw them into the topic under discussion. Not only this, but all students absorb information differently, so the combination of the spoken word with visual material is useful for both communicating ideas and as a mnemonic device for future assignments.

### **Detailed Outlines**

“His lectures were always in a consistent format which made it easier to dissect his arguments.”  
– University of Toronto Student (2016)

“Very organized course structure (weekly lecture outline before lecture) that was thoroughly followed.” – Trent University Durham Student (2015)

To avoid excessive note-taking, I provide detailed outlines for each class that include important names, terms, and dates. I post these outlines on a Learning Management

System the day before lecture so that students can bring them to class or pull them up on their laptops or smartphones. During lecture I incorporate the outlines into my power point presentations, which are enhanced by additional bullet points, quotes, terms, and visual images.

### **Document Exercises**

“[Jason] Dyck’s enthusiastic reading of Document Exercises in almost every lecture really made the authors we read from come to life.” – University of Toronto Student (2015)

“Document exercises were also very helpful in teaching how to utilize primary sources properly.”  
– Trent University Durham Student (2015)

Instead of formally lecturing for the duration of any given class, I complement my interpretations of course material with document exercises. Together with my students we analyze one-page excerpts from an array of different historical sources. These interpretive exercises are a welcomed break for students, they reinforce their critical reading skills, and they transform lectures into discussions. To emphasize the importance of these exercises, I incorporate them into the final exam along with the other course readings.

### **Socratic Questioning**

“When he mediates our seminars he does so without judgement, but responds rather with more engaging questions to students.” – University of Toronto (2016)

“Seminars were engaging and [the] professor fed off student interpretation and questions.”  
– Trent University Durham Student (2015)

Seminars are an important complement to interactive lectures because they provide an intimate setting where ideas can be shared more freely. My overall goal in seminar is to facilitate an engaging discussion of our weekly topic by asking questions in a Socratic fashion. Instead of “correcting” my students when I notice holes in their arguments, I challenge them with further questions. Beyond developing critical reasoning skills, this method forces students to rethink their own theories and to discover answers to problems on their own. Not only this, but it establishes a safe and inclusive setting where all students feel welcome to participate.

### **Relationship Building**

“He’s always willing to answer questions and seems to really care about his students. I don’t feel like I’m just another number in his class.” – University of Toronto Student (2015)

“Jason was an excellent professor who genuinely cared about his students.”  
– Brock University Student (2012)

Beyond breaks during lectures and seminars, I make myself available to my students during office hours, frequently encouraging them to stop by and discuss any questions they might have about my courses. When students approach me after class to tell me

about themes that are of interest to them, I search for articles or book chapters to further stimulate their enthusiasm. I fondly remember when some of my instructors went out of their way to photocopy material for me to read, because they changed my way of thinking without ever having to say a word.

### **Creative Writing**

“He gave detailed feedback on assignments, and detailed instruction on Blackboard, which made performing well on assignments much easier.” – University of Toronto Student (2016)

“Passionate instructor. Always available to meet. Helpful feedback to improve writing.”  
– Trent University Durham Student (2014)

In all my courses I place great emphasis on interpreting primary sources, which is why I favour document reports, photographic reports, and reflective essays. These types of assignments provide students with a unique opportunity to explore their historical imaginations, to exercise their critical reading skills, and to refine their creative writing. I assign them texts or photographs by authors from different ethnic and social backgrounds, which challenge them to enter into the worldviews of diverse peoples and to identify their biases. When appropriate, I use ethnographic assignments to provide students with the opportunity to photograph and take down field notes on their experiences of cultural difference in their own local environments. Stimulating them to reflect upon the relativity of their own worldviews fosters a deeper appreciation for the cultural diversity we encounter in both the past and the present. Research papers are valuable exercises for undergraduates at all levels. When I assign these types of essays, I stress to my students that they need to be passionate about their subjects, always recognizing that writing a university paper is a privilege that few people in the world enjoy. Instead of in-class exams, whenever possible I prefer take-home mid-term or final exams in which students are able to carefully prepare an essay based upon what they have learned throughout the entire semester or course.

### **Student Feedback**

“He was also the first professor I’ve had who personally introduced himself and engaged with students before the beginning of every lecture.” – University of Toronto Student (2015)

“Professor Dyck . . . truly cares about the material and his students because he engages with them during break.” – Brock University Student (2012)

Whenever a student approaches me during class or office hours, I normally ask them how the course is going. I always make a conscious effort to talk with students during break whenever possible, checking to see which parts of my teaching are working for them and others that can be improved upon. Beyond this, I also pass around blank sheets of paper at the halfway point of the semester in search of feedback on what to continue doing and what to change.

# III. Teaching Experience

## Courses Taught

“Very enthusiastic. Makes all the course material more interesting through the way he teaches it. You can tell how passionate he is with the subject.” – University of Toronto Student (2015)

“This course has renewed my enthusiasm for history! An incredibly powerful, motivating instructor – I feel lucky to have had this experience.” – Western University Student (2012)

I have taught several undergraduate survey courses and upper level seminars at the University of Toronto, Trent University Durham, Brock University, and the University of Western Ontario. My survey courses on Latin America stress the multiethnic participation of people from all socio-economic backgrounds in both the formation of colonial societies and modern nations. In my upper level seminars, I have explored cross-cultural encounters in the Iberian Atlantic and Pacific worlds; questions of race, ethnicity, and identity in Latin America from the colonial period to the present; and revolutionary and counter-revolutionary activity from the late eighteenth century to the 1990s. Beyond lecturing on Latin America, I have also delivered courses on the Atlantic world, World History, and the key intellectual debates and cultural developments during the ages of Enlightenment and Revolution. My years as a university instructor have provided me with a wide range of pedagogical experience. I have had the privilege of teaching courses in an interdisciplinary environment, which has challenged me to engage with material beyond the chronology and geography of my specific research.

## Course Responsibilities

“Jason was enthusiastic about the material and accessible during office hours and after class.”  
– University of Toronto Student (2016)

“Availability was great. Most profs won’t be willing to give away [their] personal phone number to help their students at any time.” – Trent University Durham Student (2014)

All of the courses I have taught at the University of Toronto, Trent University Durham, and Brock University were comprised of twelve week semesters. The course I taught at the University of Western Ontario was delivered in the summer every day over the course of six weeks. At all institutions I was responsible for designing syllabi, delivering lectures, maintaining a course site on the Learning Management System, and responding to emails. I also led seminars on weekly topics, held office hours, provided feedback on rough drafts, and graded papers. While at the University of Toronto and Brock University I worked together with teaching assistants, coaching them in their duties and responsibilities.

<b>Course Code/Name</b> <b>F = Fall; W = Winter; S = Summer</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Enrolment</b>
<b>University of Toronto</b>		
HIS 106Y (Natives, Settlers, and Slaves: Colonizing the Americas, 1492–1804)	F/W 2015-16	113
HIS 291H (The History of Colonial Latin America)	F 2015	63
HIS 389H (Historiography)	W 2016	26
HIS 496H (Cross-Cultural Encounters in the Spanish Pacific, 1519–1815)	W 2016	11
<b>Trent University Durham</b>		
HIST 1701H (World History to 1800)	F 2014	42
HIST 1702H (World History 1800 to the Present)	W 2015	44
HIST 2470Y (Introduction to Latin America)	F/W 2013-14	12
HIST 2471H (Introduction to Latin America)	W 2015	5
HIST 4470Y (Multiethnic Identities in Latin America)	F/W 2013-14	18
HIST 4470Y (Revolutions in Latin America)	F/W 2014-15	3
<b>Brock University</b>		
HIST 2P08 (Colonial Latin America)	F 2009	50
HIST 2P08 (Colonial Latin America)	F 2011	51
HIST 2P08 (Colonial Latin America)	F 2012	38
HIST 2P09 (Modern Latin America)	W 2009	49
HIST 2P09 (Modern Latin America)	W 2012	44
HIST 2P09 (Modern Latin America)	W 2013	32
HIST 2P99 (Ideas and Culture before 1850)	W 2012	53
MARS 3V96 (Renaissance Ethnography)	W 2013	9
<b>University of Western Ontario</b>		
HIST 2501E (History of Latin America)	S 2013	29

## IV. Efforts to Improve Teaching

### Teaching Evaluations

“Powerpoints were very helpful with following along in the lecture.”  
– University of Toronto Student (2015)

“I learnt a lot from Jason. Loved the organized power points and the course pack.”  
– Brock University Student (2012)

When it is time for teaching evaluations I always tell my students that their comments are valuable to me. I let them know that my goal is to improve my teaching, and I have been pleasantly surprised by their generous feedback. After teaching for the first time, my students told me that I needed to slow down, cover less material, and move away from my lecture notes. They also expressed interest in PowerPoint presentations and the use of a Learning Management System. In future courses I incorporated many of these suggestions, and I was very pleased by the results. In order to move away from my lecture notes, I began to use document and visual exercises on a weekly basis. These activities were well-received and provided a needed break for my students. Instead of using the reserves in the library for seminar readings, I decided to use online sources (e-Journals and e-Books) and post readings together with lecture outlines and seminar questions on Blackboard. Students have certainly appreciated



the changes I have made in these areas and have given me positive feedback on the structure and organization of my classes. Thanks to helpful suggestions from my students, I have been able to change my teaching style to achieve better results.

### **Teaching Certificates**

“Amazing teacher.” – University of Toronto Student (2015)

“Thank you for being a great teacher and inspiration to aspiring teachers.”  
– Brock University Student (2009)

I have earned certificates in teaching at both Trent University Durham and Brock University. The workshops that I attended dealt with topics such as conflict resolution with students, student development theory, accommodation for students with mental health issues, and the integration of international students into university life.

- Student Support Certificate, Office of Student Affairs, Trent University, 2014.
- TA Program in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education Certificate, Centre for Pedagogical Innovation, Brock University, 2013.

## **VI. Teaching Evaluations**

### **Numerical Scores**

“Professor Dyck is clearly passionate about the subject and puts a lot of effort into his lectures.”  
– University of Toronto Student (2016)

“Jason put all his abilities into making the class excellent and ensuring those in attendance had the resources and materials they need to succeed.” – Trent University Durham Student (2015)

I have synthesized my teaching evaluations into individual tables for the courses I have taught at the University of Toronto, Trent University Durham, Brock University, and the University of Western Ontario. The tables for the first three institutions include the following information: (1) the name of the course, (2) the total number of students enrolled in the course, (3) the total number of students who filled out teaching evaluations, (4) the total number of students who gave written comments on the teaching evaluations, and (5) the average scores out of six or five for each category of the teaching evaluation. I have provided the summary of my teaching evaluations from Western as it was given to me by the History Department. When I have taught a course on more than one occasion, my averages have gone up in all categories. This confirms for me that I am taking steps in the right direction to modify my teaching practices to meet student needs and realities. My teaching scores at all four universities demonstrate that I have been able to successfully transfer my pedagogical methods to new institutions with similar results.

**UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO**

HIS 106Y = Natives, Settlers, and Slaves: Colonizing the Americas, 1492–1804 (full credit) HIS291H = The History of Colonial Latin America (half credit) HIS 396H = Historiography (half credit) HIS 496H = Cross-Cultural Encounters in the Spanish Pacific, 1519–1815 (half credit)  A Great Deal = 5; Mostly = 4; Moderately = 3; Somewhat = 2; Not At All = 1 Requirements = Projects, Assignments, Tests and/or Exams	HIS 106Y 2015–2016	HIS 291H 2015	HIS 396H 2016	HIS 496H 2016
<b>Total Number of Students Enrolled</b>	113	63	26	11
<b>Total Number of Student Evaluations</b>	42	30	17	7
<b>Total Number of Student Comments</b>	26	21	15	5
<b>Course Evaluation</b>				
I found the course intellectually stimulating	4.1	4.2	3.8	3.9
The course provided me with a deeper understanding of the subject matter	4.5	4.5	3.9	4.2
The instructor created an atmosphere that was conducive to my learning	4.6	4.6	3.9	3.6
Course [requirements] improved my understanding of the course material	4.2	4.1	3.9	3.7
Course [requirements] provided opportunity for me to demonstrate an understanding of the course material	4.2	4.1	3.9	3.9
Overall, the quality of my learning experience in this course was	4.1	4.1	3.6	3.4
The instructor generated enthusiasm for learning in the course	4.7	4.7	4.0	4.0
Compared to other courses, the workload for this course was	3.6	3.6	3.2	3.7
I would recommend this course to other students	4.2	3.9	3.6	3.3
The course instructor explained concepts clearly	4.6	4.5	3.9	3.9
The course material inspired me to learn more about the subject matter	4.2	3.9	3.5	3.6
The course improved my writing skills	3.9	3.4	3.2	3.3

**TRENT UNIVERSITY DURHAM**

HIST 1701H = World History to 1800 (half credit) HIST 1702H = World History from 1800 to the Present (half credit) HIST 2470Y = Introduction to Latin America (full credit) HIST 2471H = Introduction to Latin America (half credit) HIST 4470Y(a) = Multiethnic Identities in Latin America (full credit) HIST 4470Y(b) = Revolutions in Latin America (full credit)  Excellent = 6; Very Good = 5; Good = 4; Average = 3; Poor = 2; Very Poor = 1	HIST 1701H 2014	HIST 1702H 2015	HIST 2470Y 2013-2014	HIST 2471H 2015	HIST 4470Y (a) 2013-2014	HIST 4470Y (b) 2014-2015
<b>Total Number of Students Enrolled</b>	42	44	12	5	18	3
<b>Total Number of Student Evaluations</b>	36	28	9	4	12	2
<b>Total Number of Student Comments</b>	32	24	7	3	12	2
<b>Course Evaluation</b>						
Organization of course	5.3	5.6	5.5	6.0	5.5	5.5
Clarity of requirements and expectations	4.8	5.3	5.6	5.7	5.3	5.5
Difficulty of workload	4.0	3.8	4.6	3.2	4.5	4.5
Relevance of required readings	5.1	4.9	5.6	6.0	5.0	6.0
Assignments returned in a timely manner	5.0	5.2	5.6	6.0	5.5	6.0
Comments on written work were helpful	5.3	5.6	5.8	6.0	5.2	6.0
Classes met regularly as scheduled	5.8	5.8	5.8	6.0	5.9	6.0
Instructor's availability for consultation outside class	5.5	5.7	5.6	5.7	5.8	6.0
Ability to communicate knowledge of subject	5.7	5.7	5.8	6.0	5.8	6.0
Instructor's ability to engage students	5.4	5.6	5.4	6.0	5.0	6.0
Instructor's encouragement and guiding of discussion	5.6	5.6	5.7	5.7	4.9	5.5
Instructor treated students with courtesy and respect	5.7	5.9	5.8	6.0	5.7	6.0
Instructor fostered an inclusive learning environment	5.5	5.6	5.8	6.0	5.5	6.0
Overall rating of course	5.2	5.3	5.2	6.0	5.3	6.0

<b>BROCK UNIVERSITY</b>								
HIST 2P08 = Colonial Latin America (half credit) HIST 2P09 = Modern Latin America (half credit) HIST 2P99 = History of Ideas and Culture before 1850 (half credit) MARS 3V96 = Renaissance Ethnography (half credit)	HIST 2P08 2009-2010	HIST 2P08 2011-2012	HIST 2P08 2012-2013	HIST 2P09 2008-2009	HIST 2P09 2011-2012	HIST 2P09 2012-2013	HIST 2P99 2011-2012	MARS 3V96 S012-2013
Very Good = 5; Good = 4; Moderate = 3; Poor = 2; Very Poor = 1								
<b>Total Number of Students Enrolled</b>	50	51	38	49	44	32	53	9
<b>Total Number of Student Evaluations</b>	38	30	29	36	23	22	38	7
<b>Total Number of Student Comments</b>	14	14	12	21	10	19	23	7
<b>Course Evaluation</b>								
Course objectives were clearly defined	4.6	4.4	4.8	4.5	4.7	4.8	4.5	4.5
Course requirements and methods of assessment were clearly defined	4.5	4.2	4.8	4.4	4.6	4.8	4.5	4.5
Rate the pace and workload of the course	4.1	4.0	4.7	3.6	4.0	4.5	4.5	4.8
Rate the course material (texts, handouts, audio-visual aids, etc.)	4.3	4.4	4.8	4.0	4.5	4.8	4.5	4.7
You gained an appreciation and understanding of the subject through this course	4.6	4.0	4.9	4.1	4.6	4.8	4.5	4.4
<b>Evaluation of Instructor</b>								
Instructor's enthusiasm	4.9	4.9	5.0	4.8	4.8	4.9	4.9	N/A
Instructor was organized and prepared	4.8	4.9	4.9	4.9	4.9	4.9	4.8	4.8
Instructor was interesting and stimulating	4.8	4.6	5.0	4.0	4.7	4.8	4.6	4.7
Instructor communicated ideas clearly	4.6	4.5	4.9	4.3	4.6	4.8	4.4	4.7
Instructor was impartial	4.7	4.8	4.9	4.6	4.7	4.9	4.8	4.7
Instructor was available for consultation	4.7	4.8	4.9	4.5	4.8	4.9	4.8	4.7
Rate instructor overall	4.7	4.7	4.9	4.4	4.7	4.9	4.7	4.7

<b>UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO</b>											
HIST 2501E = History of Latin America (full credit)											
Outstanding = 7; Very Good = 6; Good = 5; Satisfactory = 4; Borderline = 3; Unsatisfactory = 2; Very Poor = 1											
Question	# of Responses	Distribution of Responses							Mean	Std.Dev.	Median
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
Displays Enthusiasm	25	0	0	0	0	2	4	19	6.7	0.6	7
Well Organized	25	0	0	0	1	2	4	18	6.6	0.8	7
Explains Concepts Clearly	25	0	0	1	0	3	8	13	6.3	1.0	7
Encourages Participation	25	0	0	0	0	2	6	17	6.6	0.6	7
Responses Clear and Thorough	25	0	1	0	1	6	6	11	6.0	1.2	6
Interesting Presentation	25	0	0	0	2	3	6	14	6.3	1.0	7
Shows Concern	25	0	0	0	1	1	6	17	6.6	0.8	7
Available for Consultation	24	0	0	0	0	1	6	17	6.7	0.6	7
Communicates Well	25	0	0	0	0	2	12	11	6.4	0.6	6
Adheres to Course Objectives	25	0	0	0	1	2	5	17	6.5	0.8	7
Relates Topics Well	25	0	0	0	1	3	8	13	6.3	0.9	7
Provides Fair Evaluations	24	1	0	0	1	3	8	11	6.0	1.4	6
Grades Work Promptly	25	0	0	0	1	5	7	12	6.2	0.9	6
Good Motivator	24	0	0	0	1	4	9	10	6.1	1.0	6
Overall Effectiveness	25	0	0	0	1	2	5	17	6.5	0.8	7
Course as Learning Experience	25	0	0	0	2	2	7	14	6.3	0.9	7

## VII. Future Teaching Goals

### Website Development

In the spring of 2014 I launched my professional website, which includes my biography and curriculum vitae; a description of my research along with links to my publications and conference abstracts; my teaching philosophy, current syllabi, teaching tools, and assignments; a selection of photo essays and travelogues; and

several links to other websites. I have started to use my website to introduce myself in class, but I want to search for other ways to incorporate its content into my courses.

### **Photography**

A major difference between students today and even ten years ago is that virtually all of them have cameras. Many take pictures on a daily basis and construct narratives through their phones, Facebook, Twitter, and other forms of social media. I have recently incorporated assignments with photography in my courses, but I want to further explore ways in which students can engage with this visual medium. Traditional essays are still fundamental for a degree in the humanities and the social sciences, but there are other forms of “writing” that students need to learn how to “read,” “write,” and interpret.

### **Student Supervision**

Another goal of mine is to gain experience supervising both undergraduate and graduate students in research projects. I have learned much from coaching students in essay writing, but the next step is to guide aspiring researchers through larger theses. After years of performing archival work, I am eager to share these experiences with students and to learn from their excitement for new approaches to research.