TEACHING STATEMENT

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Critical reasoning emerges out of a balanced sense of the power and the frailty of serious thought. This perspective motivates the way I organize my courses: around awe-inspiring theories as well as the statistical trends that both support and complicate them. I might begin a lecture by summarizing Malthus's powerful theory of the clash between the geometric growth of the population and the arithmetic growth of the food supply, but I follow this summary by providing evidence of humanity's escape from the Malthusian trap. I want students to marvel at a world in which half of the global population, more than 3.5 billion people, lives in cities and depends on others to grow their food. What made this world possible? Organizing courses around such fundamental questions helps students understand the stakes of historical and comparative arguments.

In 2018, I taught an upper-division undergraduate course on the global history of unemployment, which asked students: how should society respond to unemployment? Students came into the course believing that unemployment is a simple economic category, applicable in all times in places. Over the course of the quarter, they developed a sense for the category's complex historical construction, as well as for the variety of ways societies have responded to jobs deficits. By the end of the course, I had helped students conduct research projects on a range of topics including: a historical study of unemployed workers' committees in 1930s Chicago; a comparative study of welfare regimes in East Asia; a review of recent research on informal workers' organizing in India; and a historical study of UN policies regarding the right of refugees to work.

In teaching, one of my primary goals is to nurture a strong relationship between critical thinking and writing. Students often feel that writing is simply a means of proving what they already know. Instead, they should see writing as one among a number of tools they can use to think through and evaluate complex ideas. The interrelation between critical thinking and writing is best brought out by teaching students to think of themselves as participants in a wide-ranging scholarly conversation. Intervening into that conversation requires that they articulate not only their own views, but also the views that other participants in the conversation have already taken. That is true whether students' interlocutors are the great thinkers of the past, like Karl Polanyi and Simone de Beauvoir, or their own peers. To encourage students to develop a positive relationship to writing, I provide all my students with a dossier of writing techniques and strategies. Such strategies become especially important when students begin to do independent research.

Over time, I have altered my teaching methodology to create more space for students to connect course materials to their diverse experiences, since, when students are willing to share their family histories in the classroom, it brings course content to life. The results of can be rewarding. In my own classroom, discussing patterns of migration from Southeast Asia to the Middle East was made more real and relevant when a young Filipino woman talked about her aunt, who had made that journey as a maid. The connections students draw to their lives can also raise difficult questions. In discussing the drug war in Mexico, a student was once moved to describe her family's experience with cartel-related violence. My teaching process broke down in this moment, when real suffering was revealed in the classroom. I am still learning how to bear witness to these sorts of experiences. After all, violence, as much as the escape from it, is the very stuff of history.