A "Bill of Rights" for Students and Teachers in History Courses at the University of Georgia

We—students and teachers of history—are engaged in a collective effort to gain interpretive skills and master a body of information. The skills and information are not neutral or objective, like those in a laboratory course, but neither are they scattered or personal prejudice. They are part of the larger, ongoing effort within the discipline of history to better understand the past. To attain our mutual objectives within the university setting, we need to observe some ground rules. In many ways, they are simply extensions or adaptations of the single precept to treat others according to their merits, with respect, as you would like to be treated.

1. All instructors at the university are not only well trained and highly educated, they are creative teachers and scholars. As such, they are learning all the time, often from their experiences in the classroom. They welcome the opportunity to improve their teaching, and will be available at office hours or other times by appointment to discuss appropriate questions and respond to appropriate comments about student work and course materials.

2. As part of students' participation in this course, in and out of the classroom, they must subscribe to the university's culture of academic honesty. They must not take others' work as their own, seek or give assistance to others in the class when it is not appropriate (for example during an examination), or consciously undermine others' ability to study or perform in the class.

3. As a general rule, students should not disparage others' opinions in the class, but treat others with the politeness they expect in return, even when there is a sharp disagreement over an issue. Comments should always focus on the statement, not the speaker. Intellectual exchanges rather than personal vituperation are essential in a community of learning such as ours.

4. Student contributions will be weighed and student assignments and examinations graded on the basis of the student's command of relevant course materials, reasoned argument, and correctness and clarity of presentation (including spelling and grammar), whether or not the student's views agree with those of other students or the instructor in the course.

5. In particular, instructors will not evaluate students on the basis of their backgrounds, ancestry, regional identity, gender, or other personal attributes or beliefs, but students must be prepared to defend in a reasoned fashion what they say or write for course assignments when questioned or critiqued by the instructor. Such dialogue is an essential part of liberal arts education, and necessary in the grading process.

6. While time constraints and intellectual considerations will often make it impossible to introduce all perspectives on issues treated in the course of study, instructors will make every effort to include a variety of views in class materials, lectures, and discussions, particularly when leading historians disagree in their interpretations.

7. Students can expect instructors to introduce their own reasoned conclusions on events and their meaning, but instructors will not press these views on individual students and student conformity to them will not be used as the yardstick to measure student accomplishments. The purpose of history courses is not ideological indoctrination, but instructors must be free to assess the value, strengths and weaknesses of varying interpretations according to their own expertise.

8. Students will be given the opportunity to evaluate every course. These confidential evaluations should focus on the course as a whole, including the quality of the instruction and how much the student has learned, rather than just on the students' personal feelings about the instructor.

Prof. Peter Charles Hoffer, May 10, 2004
THE "QUICK START METHOD" TO SUCCESS IN HISTORY 2112

1. READ YOUR SYLLABUS CAREFULLY. Attend class and your discussion groups.

2. Read and actively interact with your text.

3. Put yourself on a reading schedule like the ones we will distribute and stick to it. Nothing is more brain numbing than having to read four chapters of history in one evening.

4. As you read, stop and think about key ideas. For Dr. Leary that will mean you should focus on: (a) events, (b) people, and (c) laws. Think about whys, controversies, and the significance of events.

5. Take detailed lecture notes each day of class.

6. Immediately after class or sometime before attending the next class, take some time to review and think about your lecture notes. Ask yourself what would make a good essay question over what you have learned thus far.

7. Tie your lecture notes and readings together by analyzing and thinking about concepts, events, people, laws, etc. Look for overlap between the lecture and readings and highlight areas where there is no overlap.

8. Finish your readings at least 3 days before the test. The schedule we distribute for each test should help you do this. You need the last 2-3 days to practice writing outlines or answers to your predicted essay questions.

9. Be prepared to think about history in a different way. High school history is very different from the kind of thinking that Dr. Leary will expect of you on your exams.

ACTIVELY READING YOUR TEXTBOOKS--SOME SUGGESTIONS

1. To improve your concentration, divide up your assignments into smaller chunks. For example, most people concentrate better when they read 10-15 pages in one sitting.

2. Write as you read. Never read for History 2112 without a pen or pencil in your hand.

3. To improve your concentration and remembering you can either:
   a) Write in the margins of the text
   b) Write on post-its (those little yellow "sticky" things)

   NOTE: FOR MOST STUDENTS, HIGHLIGHTING IS A WASTE OF TIME BECAUSE IT DOES NOT IMPROVE THEIR STUDYING AND REMEMBERING

4. Group related events, people, bills, laws, etc. together for easier learning and remembering. For example, what people, events, etc. are related to the "New South?"

5. Constantly identify what you know and what you do not know or understand.

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TEST PREPARATION SUGGESTIONS

1. Identify the key concepts. Identify the key concepts that are discussed in class and in your texts. By key concepts I mean things like the corruption during the period of Grant and what symbolized corruption, NOT the facts about Grant.

2. Think about relationships, significance, and symbols. After you have identified the key concepts, think about what people, events, etc. are related to or symbolize that concept. Remember that you must concentrate on the significance of the term that you will be asked on the test, so as you read, listen to the lecture, and review your notes, THINK SIGNIFICANCE AND THINK ABOUT SYMBOLS. For example, Dr. Leary will probably mention that credit mobilier symbolized the corruption during the presidency of Grant. Thus, you should be asking yourself what other people, events, etc. could be linked to corruption.

3. Organize the information. In order to keep all the ideas clear in your memory, you will need to organize the information in some way. Notecards or charts might be the best ways to do this.

4. Predict questions. You should do this on a daily basis as you read and as you take lecture notes. However, two days before the test you should make sure you have a list of possible questions.

5. Practice. Dr. Leary and the TAs expect specificity and organization in your essay answers. Hence, you must practice by outlining the answers to possible essay questions, talking through ideas with classmates, and actually writing answers. DO NOT, HOWEVER, LEAVE THIS PRACTICE TO THE LAST FEW HOURS BEFORE THE EXAM BECAUSE IT MAKES LONG TERM MEMORY RETRIEVAL MORE DIFFICULT.

FINAL NOTE: I WILL DISCUSS IDEAS LIKE THESE IN MORE DETAIL DURING THE SEMESTER.