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If you have any questions, please contact meetings@oah.org.

Proposal ID
2616

Proposal Type
Roundtable Discussion

Subject Areas
Teaching and Pedagogy

Time Periods
Survey

Solicited by Committee or Association
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Status
Pending Accept

Title
Undermining "Student Success?": How US History Surveys Landed on the Chancellor’s Shortlist for "Low-Success" Courses and What 30 CSU Historians Did About It

Abstract
In 2013, the California State University's Chancellor’s Office labeled U.S. history survey classes “high-demand and low-success bottlenecks.” This was because more than one-fifth of CSU students enrolled in the survey earned a failing grade or withdrew from the class. In the CSUs, such "bottlenecks" affect tens of thousands of students every year—20,000 freshmen earned one or more repeatable grades in the Fall 2015 term alone. Intense institutional scrutiny of
"low success" bottlenecks has followed from detailed data "dashboards." At the moment, history survey courses are viewed as something of a foil to "student success," a political and educational imperative in public universities today. Evidence also suggests that when students fail or must pay to repeat an entry-level course such as US history, there are considerable psychic as well as economic consequences for California's middle-class families. This scrutiny has left historians in the CSU system feeling somewhat vulnerable.

Over the past three and 1/2 years, approximately 30 historians working across 23 separate campuses have worked together to substantially "redesign" both how we teach and what we teach in lower-division US history survey courses. We have also used technology more purposefully, with deeper integration with our course goals. Further, we have been compelled to see these classes as much more than entry-level history courses: They are gateways to college degrees and college "success." We have also delved deeply into what students bring to our classes, both in terms of disciplinary bias and financial insecurity. We are now launching what is perhaps the largest survey and and most rigorous assessment of its kind: A tool to better understand what helps first-year students do well in US history survey classes and what "success" looks like in a course that combines study of American institutions and government over time with close attention to historical thinking skills.

We want to share this critical work because we have some concern that our institutional and political leaders might well find the study of US history at the lower-division level too expensive to sustain for all CSU students. In that worst-case scenario, History Departments at the California State University would be teaching thousands fewer students each year. Our department faculties would further shrink, and the impact on the job market for Ph.D.s and for the field generally would be potentially great. History and the liberal arts generally might not be able to regain that lost ground.

We believe we are finding new ways to demonstrate both the value of such classes, as well as the value students place on them. These classes desperately need close attention now. At this time, more than 30 CSU historians have entirely overhauled the way they teach these classes. We are getting to a better understanding of the consequences of these changes for students and for our institutions. We would like to share that with the OAH in Sacramento, where so many critical decisions about public higher education in California are made.

**Program Abstract**

The program abstract will be included in the Annual Meeting Program.

In 2013, the California State University labeled US history survey classes “high-demand and low-success bottlenecks.” Since then, approximately 30 historians working across 23 campuses have worked together to substantially "redesign" both how and what we teach in lower-division US history courses. Further, CSU historians are now launching what is perhaps the largest survey and most rigorous assessment of its kind to better understand what "success" looks like in a course combining study of American institutions with attention to historical thinking. This roundtable discussion will provide a portrait of dramatic shifts in teaching at the largest and most diverse public university in the nation.

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**Additional Information**

No additional information has been added to this proposal.

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**Participants**

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To add a participant please search for them in the OAH User Portal using the “Add Participant” button. If they do not appear but are members of the OAH please confirm their user profile name, otherwise create an account for them. Please notify them immediately so they can complete their account via the automated email they will receive.

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Professor Bridget Ford — Chair Only — **This participant is a chair.** — Show biography

Professor Christopher Endy — Panelist — Show biography

Professor Cherstin Lyon — Panelist — Show biography

Dr. Brad A Jones — Panelist — Show biography

Dr. Volker Janssen — Panelist — Show biography

Mr. Michael Anthony Henderson — Panelist — Show biography

Ms. Kate Chilton — Panelist — Show biography

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