

The End of the History Survey Course: The Rise and Fall of the Coverage Model

Joel M. Sipress and David J. Voelker

Over the past several decades, history instructors have faced what one scholar has called “a steady enlarging of what historians have included as history,” a phenomenon that has pushed our textbooks and courses to “the breaking point.” When Thomas Mendenhall made this observation—in 1944—the diversification of historical scholarship was just beginning, yet the most popular history textbook of the time already ran to over five hundred pages. Since the 1960s, the rise of many new subfields, from social history to women’s history to world history, has generated a running debate over which history is most fitting for general education. One result has been what Gilbert Allardyce aptly characterized as “the fall of the Western Civilization course,” a class that has been replaced by world history as the default introductory course at many universities.¹ While this debate has sometimes been profitable, it rests upon a questionable assumption: that the top priority of the introductory history course should be to “cover” a particular body of historical knowledge.

The dominant approach to teaching the history “survey” (as the introductory college history course is revealingly called) has long been a “coverage” model that emphasizes the transmission of knowledge from professor to student. In some cases, this knowledge is little more than a body of factual information presented in lectures and a textbook. More often, the knowledge covered includes a set of themes and concepts to be demonstrated in more analytically sophisticated exercises, such as papers and essay tests. In either case, the coverage model casts the professor (and his or her chosen texts) in the role of historical authority, with students assigned the task of absorbing and reproducing expert knowledge.

In recent years, a growing body of historians has begun to challenge the dominance of this coverage model. Articles with titles such as “Constructing the Syllabus: Devising a Framework for Helping Students Learn to Think like Historians” and “The Survey, Again” have appeared with increasing frequency in such publications as the *OAH Magazine of History*, the *History Teacher*, and the American Historical Association’s *Perspectives on History*. In 2006 this challenge reached the heart of the professional community with the publication

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¹ Thomas C. Mendenhall, “The Introductory College Course in Civilization,” *American Historical Review*, 49 (July 1944), 681–84, esp. 681, 683. Gilbert Allardyce, “The Rise and Fall of the Western Civilization Course,” *ibid.*, 87 (June 1982), 695–725.

of Lendol Calder's "Uncoverage: Toward a Signature Pedagogy for the History Survey" in the *Journal of American History*. Citing the work of cognitive psychologists, Calder argues that the coverage model, with its "facts first" approach, is "wrongheaded" and a failure even on its own terms. As an alternative, Calder suggests in a 2002 article, an "uncoverage" model centered on "a deliberate attempt to lay bare for students the central assumptions, forms of inquiry, and cognitive habits that transform data into knowledge for practitioners of our discipline." Sam Wineburg sums up the thrust of this pedagogical countermovement by arguing that it is *historical thinking* itself, rather than a particular body of historical knowledge, that should be the emphasis of history education. Students should learn to think like historians, and to accomplish this goal they must actively *do* history—not just "learn" it.²

Contemporary pedagogical reformers, however, are largely unaware of the degree to which their work echoes earlier critiques of the coverage model. Criticisms of coverage-oriented history teaching have abounded for over a century. An 1898 American Historical Association (AHA) document, for instance, stated that "the chief purpose [of historical education] is not to fill the boy's head with a mass of material which he may perchance put forth again when a college examiner demands its production." In 1912 the Columbia University historian James Harvey Robinson critiqued the emphasis on chronology and the memorization of facts in the teaching of history. "A sensible carpenter or plumber does not constantly carry a saw in his hip pocket, or a coil of lead pipe over his shoulder, in order to be ready for a distant emergency," wrote Robinson, comparing content knowledge to the materials and tools of a craftsman. Rather, Robinson noted, "He very properly goes to his shop and his tool chest for his tools and materials." The most innovative general education history courses of the interwar and post-World War II periods, created at institutions such as Columbia, the University of Chicago, and Harvard University, prioritized the cultivation of critical engagement and analysis over comprehensive coverage. And in the late 1960s and early 1970s, several campuses implemented experimental introductory "history laboratory" courses.³

Given this history of dissent and experimentation, it would be tempting to view the current pedagogical countermovement as simply the latest in a long string of futile efforts to dislodge the coverage model from its hegemonic position within the historical profession. The current reform effort, however, has been strengthened by the development of a disciplinary infrastructure rooted in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), an academic movement in which faculty engage in the systematic study of student learning using methods and approaches that are appropriate to their respective disciplines. SoTL

² Todd Estes, "Constructing the Syllabus: Devising a Framework for Helping Students Learn to Think like Historians," *History Teacher*, 40 (Feb. 2007), 183–201; Julie Roy Jeffrey, "The Survey, Again," *OAH Magazine of History*, 17 (April 2003), 52–54; Lendol Calder, "Uncoverage: Toward a Signature Pedagogy for the History Survey," *Journal of American History*, 92 (March 2006), 1358–70. Lendol Calder, "Looking for Learning in the History Survey," *Perspectives*, 40 (March 2002), 44. Lendol Calder borrows the term and concept of uncoverage from Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design* (Upper Saddle River, 2006). Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia, 2001).

³ Andrew C. McLaughlin et al., "The Study of History in Schools, Being the Report to the American Historical Association by the Committee of Seven," in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1898* (Washington, 1899), 474; James Harvey Robinson, *The New History: Essays Illustrating the Modern Historical Outlook* (New York, 1912), 6–7; David Owen, "Harvard General Education in Social Science," *Journal of General Education*, 5 (Oct. 1950), 17–30. William R. Taylor, "A Laboratory Course in American History," *Journal of Higher Education*, 39 (1968), 497–505.

provides present-day reformers with a scholarly apparatus and a disciplinary peer group that earlier dissidents lacked. While the pedagogical reform efforts of the 1960s and 1970s, for instance, tended to be localized and, when shared publicly, appeared as soon-to-be forgotten descriptive pieces in professionally marginal journals, today's pedagogical reformers have constituted themselves as a group of scholarly peers who critique, evaluate, and build upon each other's work. In doing so, they have established a scholarly literature and discourse that has at its core a critique of the coverage model. This disciplinary infrastructure has allowed the challenge to coverage to reach the center of the discipline. As Calder hopefully noted in 2006, "Change is coming."⁴

The coverage model is so deeply embedded within the culture of our profession that its ultimate objectives (those that transcend particular courses) are rarely discussed. From the beginning, the coverage model rested upon the assumption that students lacked the historical knowledge to engage in serious historical thought and that this deficiency had to be remedied before students could move on to more sophisticated forms of historical study. Over time, the profession came to see the introductory class as a vehicle to provide college students, most of whom would take only one history course, with the cultural knowledge deemed necessary for responsible citizenship. With the rise of the various "new" histories, the knowledge considered necessary for citizenship has changed and expanded dramatically. Nonetheless, the belief that there are certain things about the human past that an educated person simply must know persists, as does the assumption that the main purpose of an introductory history course is to remedy deficiencies of cultural knowledge. Reformers, although clear in their critique of coverage, have for the most part failed to articulate their own view of the ultimate goals of the introductory course. This failure has impeded efforts to develop a coherent alternative to the coverage model. To move beyond the debates of the past, the goals and purposes of the introductory course must be made explicit and placed at the center of the pedagogical discussion.

The time thus seems ripe not simply for a reconsideration of the coverage model but also for a serious disciplinary examination of alternatives to coverage. The perspective that we offer here is deeply influenced by SoTL and, in particular, by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe's concept of "backward design." Backward design is an approach to curriculum development that begins by asking what we want students to "know, understand," and, crucially, "be able to do." Having first identified clear goals for a given course or curriculum, the instructor then designs a set of learning experiences that will systematically move students toward mastery of the requisite skills and knowledge.⁵ We argue that historians need to apply this backward design principle to the introductory history course to develop effective alternatives to the coverage model.

⁴ On the scholarship of teaching and learning in the discipline of history, see Joel M. Sipress and David J. Voelker, "From Learning History to Doing History: Beyond the Coverage Model," in *Exploring Signature Pedagogies: Approaches to Teaching Disciplinary Habits of Mind*, ed. Nancy L. Chick, Aeron Haynie, and Regan A. R. Gurung (Sterling, 2009), 19–35; Lendol Calder, William W. Cutler III, and T. Mills Kelly, "History Lessons: Historians and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning," in *Disciplinary Styles in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: Exploring Common Ground*, ed. Mary Taylor Huber and Sherwyn P. Morreale (Washington, 2002), 45–67; Robert B. Bain, "Into the Breach: Using Research and Theory to Shape History Instruction," in *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, ed. Peter N. Stearns, Peter Seixas, and Sam Wineburg (New York, 2000), 331–52; and David Pace, "The Amateur in the Operating Room: History and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning," *American Historical Review*, 109 (Oct. 2004), 1171–92. Calder, "Uncoverage," 1362.

⁵ Wiggins and McTighe, *Understanding by Design*, 17.

A Genealogy of the Coverage Model⁶

The origins of coverage as the default pedagogy for the introductory history course lie in the American historical profession's infancy, a time when relatively few colleges and universities employed full-time historians and history occupied a marginal place within the undergraduate curriculum. Neither deliberate curricular planning nor systematic investigation into teaching and learning played much role in the rise of the coverage-based course. Rather, the coverage model developed from a "facts-first" approach to student learning that maintained that basic factual and conceptual knowledge was a prerequisite for more sophisticated forms of historical study. The facts-first approach emerged as early as 1883—just one year after Yale University and Johns Hopkins University granted the first Ph.D.'s in history in the United States and one year before the establishment of the AHA—when a number of prominent historians contributed essays to a volume entitled *Methods of Teaching History*. The University of Michigan's Charles Kendall Adams (a future president of both Cornell University and the University of Wisconsin) wrote that the object of introductory history coursework was to remedy students' lack of "possession of a sufficient number of important historical facts" and their lack of familiarity with the "methods and laws of historical development." Though Harvard's Ephraim Emerton issued a blistering critique of the "dreary mass of facts, dates, and events" that characterized much history teaching and called for the introduction of German-style seminar instruction into the American history curriculum, he shared with Adams the assumption that basic factual knowledge was a precondition for advanced study and suggested that the seminar be limited to a few hand-picked students. A decade later Emerton explicitly declared that the "acquisition of facts" and the "proper understanding of facts" must precede the "discovery of new historical truths."⁷

A discussion of the "source method" of instruction—the use of primary sources in undergraduate teaching—at the December 1897 meeting of the AHA was similarly tilted toward the coverage model and the facts-first assumption upon which it rested. The *American Historical Review* reported that the general view of the participants was that the proper use of sources was simply "as a vivifying adjunct to text-books, lectures and the reading of authoritative historians." Professor J. A. Woodburn of Indiana University argued that the top priority of undergraduate history courses was "to obtain a broad general notion of [great historic] movements" and that "[a student] must content himself with accepting the direction and findings of the best authorities who have gone before him." Woodburn denied that the typical undergraduate could "become an investigator," because "He has not the time, nor the opportunity, nor the aptitude, nor (most emphatically) the scholarship,

⁶ We label this account a genealogy rather than a history because it traces the discourse of stated intentions for the introductory history course but does not investigate historical evidence of classroom learning. Our account is based on readily available sources, such as published conference proceedings and articles in history periodicals. This account is somewhat impressionistic, but any attempt to generalize about thousands of courses at hundreds of institutions of higher education over the course of a century will necessarily be so.

⁷ Charles Kendall Adams, "On Methods of Teaching History," in *Methods of Teaching History*, ed. G. Stanley Hall (Boston, 1883), 169–81, esp. 179; Ephraim Emerton, "The Historical Seminary in American Teaching," *ibid.*, 191–200, esp. 196; Herbert B. Adams, "Report of the Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1896* (2 vols., Washington, 1897), I, 16. For the early development of the historical profession in the United States, see John Higham, *History: Professional Scholarship in America* (Englewood Cliffs, 1965), 6–25; and William B. Hesselstine and Louis Kaplan, "Doctors of Philosophy in History: A Statistical Study," *American Historical Review*, 47 (July 1942), 765–800.

to make the attempt profitable.” The assumption that content mastery must precede historical investigation and analysis, though dominant, did not go unquestioned. The University of Nebraska’s Fred M. Fling, for instance, offered a dissenting voice during the 1897 discussion of the source method. Citing the effective use of primary sources in Nebraska’s secondary schools, Fling called for making source work “the staple of historical instruction.” The following year, in the AHA’s first comprehensive study of history instruction in secondary schools, the organization’s Committee of Seven contended “that the accumulation of facts is not the sole, or perhaps not the leading, purpose of studying history.”⁸

By the turn of the century, the decline of the classical college curriculum and its replacement with academic majors, elective coursework, and general education programs had given birth to the modern history curriculum, including the large-enrollment first-year course aimed primarily at non-history majors. As the first-year history course grew in importance, so too did professional dissatisfaction with the coverage model, largely because the course could no longer be seen as merely preparatory for advanced study in the field. In 1905 the AHA sponsored a session at its annual meeting to discuss the first year of college work in history. In opening the session, Harvard’s Charles H. Haskins declared the first-year course to be the “most difficult question which now confronts the college teacher of history.” The course, he explained, was expected to introduce students not merely to college work in history but also to college work in general, and it was expected to achieve both goals with, in some cases, as many as four hundred students. Haskins and representatives from six other prominent universities, public and private, proceeded to describe the goals and methods of their respective first-year courses.⁹

Strikingly, the participants in this 1905 AHA discussion emphasized the importance of introducing first-year students to historical methods and historical thinking. While some presenters did discuss coverage, they all gave equal or greater priority to the development of historical skills and habits of mind. Frank M. Anderson of the University of Minnesota, for instance, declared that the first history course should “lay an especially strong emphasis on training in proper methods of historical study.” Lucy M. Salmon of Vassar College could barely contain her disdain for the coverage model. “An intelligent understanding of the tools of historical study and a knowledge of how to use them,” she wrote, “would seem to be essential to the young student even if such knowledge is gained at a sacrifice of some of the details of the Hundred Years’ War, the War of the Roses, the struggles of Francis I and Charles V, or even the interminable struggles between the various Ottos and the contemporary Popes.” In his concluding remarks, Haskins noted that virtually all the speakers had emphasized issues of historical method over those of historical content.¹⁰

Although the 1905 presenters (like present-day critics of the coverage model) stressed the need to promote historical thinking among the broad mass of undergraduates, their understanding of historical thinking reflected the “scientific” presumptions of the early American historical profession. Rather than viewing history as a contested discourse, they defined the discipline by a set of technical methods through which truth could be

⁸ “The Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association,” *American Historical Review*, 3 (April 1898), 405–17, esp. 406–7. McLaughlin et al., “Study of History in Schools,” 474.

⁹ Charles H. Haskins, “Report of the Conference on the First Year of College Work in History,” in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1905* (2 vols., Washington, 1906), I, 149.

¹⁰ Haskins, “Report of the Conference on the First Year of College Work in History,” 161, 157, 174.

objectively pursued. “While the topics studied by my first-year class do give detailed knowledge of an important period of European history,” explained Fred Fling, “that is only incidental; my chief aim is to teach them the process by which we attain historical truth—in other words, to teach historical method,” by which he meant the critical evaluation of documentary sources. Others stressed library research, including bibliographic methods and note-taking techniques. Salmon underscored the importance of accurate citation of authoritative sources, “an accuracy,” she declared, “that has in it something of the German spirit that ‘would cross an ocean to certify a comma.’”¹¹

While the participants in the 1905 AHA session unanimously supported teaching the methods of scientific history to introductory students, within the broader historical profession no such consensus emerged. In 1916, for instance, a similar AHA session devolved into a debate between rival camps, with some advocating coverage and others emphasizing historical thinking. By that year, though, both sides had begun to move beyond the scientific assumptions of the earlier discussion. Vassar’s James F. Baldwin, for example, described an approach to coverage that aimed to “inculcate” certain broad historical concepts and themes (such as “internationalism” and “a sense of time”), as opposed to simply transmitting a body of factual knowledge. Meanwhile, the critics of coverage had begun to broaden their definition of historical thinking. Henry R. Shipman of Princeton advocated a problem-based approach through which the student “develops a questioning attitude so that he will not be as prone to accept whatever he reads or hears without first examining its probability and without desiring to hear the other side.” The goal, Shipman explained, was to “develop thoughtful citizens.” Nevertheless, the lines between the advocates and opponents of coverage were clearly drawn. The coverage position rested, as it had from the beginning, on the assumption that novice students were not ready for more sophisticated forms of learning. Rejecting the view of those who stressed historical methods, Wilmer C. Harris (Ohio State) declared: “We may enjoy and derive benefit from a meal without knowing the arts of kitchen; so the freshman may derive intellectual nourishment from his history without knowing the technique of the historian.” For critics of coverage, by contrast, a broader historical- and critical-mindedness was precisely the intellectual nourishment they wished undergraduates to derive from the study of history. “Will the student catch ‘historical-mindedness’ from his instructor like the mumps?” wondered Lawrence H. Gipson of Wabash College.¹²

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, discussions of the introductory history course thus focused primarily on student capabilities (emphasized by advocates of teaching historical thinking) and limitations (emphasized by advocates of coverage). After World War I, however, the attention of history educators shifted to what later generations would term “cultural literacy.” The Great War helped trigger a wave of anxiety regarding the basic education necessary to sustain democracy in a world that had recently proven so

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 167, 156. On the “scientific” presumptions of the early U.S. historical profession, see Higham, *History*, 92–103; and Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (New York, 1988). The idea that the study of history centered on the accumulation of facts probably contributed to the rise of the coverage model, with its emphasis on surveying a breadth of factually demonstrated material.

¹² “Field and Method of the Elementary College Course: Official Report of the Conference Held at the American Historical Association Meeting at Cincinnati, December 27, 1916,” *History Teacher’s Magazine*, 8 (April 1917), 115, 122–23, 124, 128.

menacing to peace and stability.¹³ This new focus on citizenship education, combined with concerns about overspecialization in the universities that had been mounting since the advent of the free elective system, gave rise to the general education movement. Within newly created general education programs, the coverage-oriented history survey came to be the dominant mode of introducing students to the study of history.

At many colleges and universities across the country, general education programs aimed at educating citizens emerged directly out of wartime efforts to train soldiers. About 540 colleges and universities voluntarily participated in the War Department's Student Army Training Corps, which was created in 1918 to train soldiers and identify officers for the army. The training included a War Issues course that addressed "the historical and economic causes of the war, the problems of government which have played so important a part in it, and the national ideals of the various countries engaged in the struggle."¹⁴ Among many educators, the courses fostered awareness of a need to promote citizenship in order to protect the future of democracy. Columbia University's dean of political science, philosophy, and pure science, Frederick Woodbridge, for instance, explained the implications of the course as follows: "Born of the consciousness that democracy needs to know what it is fighting for, [the War Issues course] has awakened a consciousness of what we, as a people, need to know if our part of the world today is to be intelligent, sympathetic and liberal."¹⁵ Columbia's Contemporary Civilization course, which evolved out of the War Issues course in 1919, became an important model for other universities around the country.¹⁶ The first year of the course focused on the historical and cultural roots of the modern world, while the second year, added as a requirement in 1929, explored contemporary social problems. The historical component of the course was explicitly presentist, emphasizing "those aspects of the events of recent history which have a bearing on the origin of the problems which the American citizen of today must face." Herbert Hawkes, dean of the college at Columbia University at the time, explained that although the course was not meant to indoctrinate students, he hoped that it would "enable a man to meet the arguments of the opponents of decency and sound government," thereby "making him a citizen who shall be safe for democracy."¹⁷

¹³ Ernest L. Boyer and Arthur Levine, *A Quest for Common Learning: The Aims of General Education* (Washington, 1981), 54–55.

¹⁴ Frank Aydelotte, *Final Report of the War Issues Course of the Students' Army Training Corps* (Washington, 1919), 9–10, 15. According to this report, 125,000 students participated in the War Issues course. See also Carol S. Gruber, *Mars and Minerva: World War I and the Uses of Higher Learning in America* (Baton Rouge, 1975); David O. Levine, *The American College and the Culture of Aspiration, 1915–1940* (Ithaca, 1986), 24–32; and Allardyce, "Rise and Fall of the Western Civilization Course," 706.

¹⁵ Aydelotte, *Final Report of the War Issues Course of the Students' Army Training Corps*, 7. Frederick Woodbridge, "Report of the Dean," in *Columbia University Bulletin of Information: Annual Report of the President and Treasurer to the Trustees with Accompanying Documents for the Year Ending June 30, 1919* (New York, 1920), 148.

¹⁶ Levine, *American College and the Culture of Aspiration*, 97; Aydelotte, *Final Report of the War Issues Course of the Students' Army Training Corps*, 18. Frederick Rudolph also attributes the emergence of the general education movement out of Columbia University to the War Issues course. Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History* (New York, 1968), 455.

¹⁷ H. E. Hawkes, "A College Course on Peace Issues," *Educational Review*, 58 (Sept. 1919), 143–50, esp. 144, 145–49, 150. Allardyce, "Rise and Fall of the Western Civilization Course," 708; W. B. Carnochan, *The Battleground of the Curriculum: Liberal Education and American Experience* (Stanford, 1993), 68, 71–72, 76–78. Rudolph says that Columbia's Contemporary Civilization course was "widely copied." Frederick Rudolph, *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study since 1636* (San Francisco, 1977), 256.

The postwar interest in citizenship education seemed especially urgent because of a tremendous, unprecedented growth in college and university enrollments, with the number of undergraduates nearly doubling in the 1920s. By 1920, Arthur M. Schlesinger Sr. of the State University of Iowa already perceived that “vast hordes of students” were entering the colleges. Writing in *Historical Outlook*, Schlesinger noted that history departments were beginning to focus on meeting “the needs of a maximum number of students with subject-matter that should serve to convert them into intelligent citizens of the republic and of the world.” The next year, J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton of the University of North Carolina argued that universities needed to educate students to address “ignorance of fundamental facts and principles upon which to base wholesome conduct and sound economic, social, political and intellectual attitudes,” a “lack of critical capacity,” and “the lack of social or civic consciousness.”¹⁸ Although both Schlesinger and Hamilton discussed the need to foster independent thinking, the introductory history courses that they described nonetheless focused on providing students with a body of “fundamental facts,” with the assumption that this knowledge would prepare students to be informed citizens.

The coverage-based surveys of U.S. and European history that had proliferated by the early 1940s generated criticism from those who believed that disciplinary methods held more importance than factual knowledge. In an insightful 1944 review essay of Walter T. Wallbank and Alastair M. Taylor’s textbook *Civilization—Past and Present* (1942), Thomas Mendenhall of Yale University explained the rise of what he called “the basic survey course in history.” Mendenhall noted that “Textbooks . . . are necessary evils, born of the inexorable logic of the past twenty-five years, when the swiftly mounting college enrollments have combined with the new vogue for social sciences to force history departments to offer large lecture courses,” which seemed to make it incumbent upon historians to provide the “background” knowledge that college students had “missed” in their previous schooling. “The so-called survey course,” Mendenhall explained, responded to this problem: “Either in hasty discussions of a general text or by means of a lecture, students at the freshman or sophomore level have been taken on a Cook’s Tour of ancient, medieval, modern, English, or American civilization.” Like earlier critics, Mendenhall believed that the most serious problem with the coverage model was that “the role of history as a method and a discipline” was largely “ignored.” Mendenhall urged that introductory students be required to practice the basic skills of doing history—including “weighing evidence” and formulating interpretations—through “an integrated historical laboratory as vital to the whole course as the chemistry laboratory is to the chemistry lecture.”¹⁹

¹⁸ *Historical Outlook: A Journal for Readers, Students, and Teachers of History* (1918–1933) was the successor to *History Teacher*, which had been founded in 1909. Its editors were appointed by the American Historical Association (AHA), and the journal provided an important venue for professional historians and history educators to discuss these postwar developments. In 1934 the journal was renamed *Social Studies*. On the postwar enrollment boom, see Levine, *American College and the Culture of Aspiration*, 38–42. Arthur M. Schlesinger, “The History Situation in Colleges and Universities, 1919–1920,” *Historical Outlook*, 11 (March 1920), 103–6, esp. 103. Arthur M. Schlesinger Sr.’s essay was informed by a questionnaire that was completed by over two dozen “leading universities” and colleges. J. G. de R. Hamilton and E. W. Knight, “Education for Citizenship,” *Historical Outlook*, 12 (June 1921), 197–208, esp. 197–98, 204.

¹⁹ *Civilization—Past and Present* became one of the most successful history textbooks of the twentieth century. Walter T. Wallbank and Alastair M. Taylor, *Civilization—Past and Present* (Chicago, 1942). Mendenhall, “Introductory College Course in Civilization,” 681–84, esp. 681–82, 684. “A Cook’s Tour” refers to Thomas Cook, a nineteenth-century English travel agent who founded a very successful company that was ultimately bought by American Express in the 1990s.

Such criticisms of the coverage model, however, were soon overshadowed by a coverage-oriented call for content standards. Leading the charge was the historian Allan Nevins of Columbia, who chastised American schools and colleges for failing to instruct students adequately in the basic facts of American history. In a blistering *New York Times* piece in May 1942 revealingly titled “American History for Americans,” Nevins called for “a basic set of requirements” for the schools. The “grim times,” Nevins argued, necessitated “a thorough, accurate, and intelligent knowledge of our national past—in so many ways the brightest national record in all world history.” A follow-up survey conducted by the *New York Times* resulted in a front-page story that declared that “College freshmen throughout the nation reveal a striking ignorance of even the most elementary aspects of United States history.” The article accompanying the survey expressed surprise and dismay that students were “extremely misinformed” about “straight factual” matters. Although the survey was neither the first nor the last to demonstrate the historical ignorance of American youths, the brouhaha raised by Nevins and the *New York Times* nudged the AHA, the Mississippi Valley Historical Association (the predecessor of the Organization of American Historians), and the National Council for the Social Studies to create a committee to study the problem. The resulting report, *American History in Schools and Colleges* (1944), occupied a middle ground between Mendenhall and Nevins by calling for a balance between content coverage and instruction in “historical skills.”²⁰

Post–World War II discussions of general education and the role of history within it reflected the new synthesis that called for the integration of content knowledge and historical thinking. Two landmark committee reports published in 1945 and 1947 helped set the stage for a decade of general education reform. The first, published just before the end of World War II, was commissioned by Harvard president James B. Conant in anticipation of the postwar enrollment boom and with an eye toward protecting the future of American democracy, as indicated by its title, *General Education in a Free Society* (also known as the *Redbook*). The second influential report, *Higher Education for American Democracy*, was commissioned by President Harry S. Truman in 1946 in response to swelling college enrollments and increased government support of higher education. While both reports identified an important role for history in general education, they downplayed the significance of coverage for its own sake. The *Redbook* noted, “The systematic survey of chronological completeness succeeds only in finishing the course as marked out in the syllabus, while dulling the student’s interest in history and limiting his understanding to the narrow confines of a textbook.” Likewise, the Truman Commission report argued, “History can be a memory exercise unconcerned with human values, a

²⁰ Allan Nevins, “American History for Americans,” *New York Times*, May 3, 1942, p. SM6; Benjamin Fine, “Ignorance of U.S. History Shown by College Freshman,” *ibid.*, April 4, 1943, pp. 1, 32–33. The test, it should be noted, generated controversy. The *Harvard Crimson*, for example, claimed that “many students answered the questions facetiously,” and some of these preposterous responses were then reported in the *New York Times* article as evidence of ignorance. See “History Survey Praised, Criticized,” *ibid.*, April 8, 1943, p. 15. For additional context regarding Allan Nevins and the *New York Times* survey, see Ian Tyrrell, *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History, 1890–1970* (Chicago, 2005), 111–12, 132–35. For a brief history of surveys that reveal historical ignorance, the first of which dates to 1917, see Sam Wineburg, “Crazy for History,” *Journal of American History*, 90 (March 2004), 1405–6. “American History in Schools and Colleges—1944,” *American Historical Association*, http://www.historians.org/pubs/archives/AmericanHistory_1944/index.cfm. See also Robert B. Townsend, “American History in Schools and Colleges: The View from 1944,” Aug. 25, 2008, *American Historical Association: AHA Today*, <http://blog.historians.org/from-archives/586/american-history-in-schools-and-colleges-the-view-from-1944>.

mere roll call of names and events; or it can illumine the origin of the social institutions we prize and live by, and clarify the practice as well as the theory of democracy.” Yet even as they questioned the inherent value of coverage, both reports reflected the deeply held and persistent concern that deficiencies of cultural knowledge among students threatened American democracy. As the *Redbook* put it, “It is impossible to escape the realization that our society, like any society, rests on common beliefs and that a major task of education is to perpetuate them.” The Harvard report, in fact, helped bring into academic usage the phrase “cultural literacy” to describe this common education.²¹

Although the most innovative general education history courses that emerged after both world wars at leading institutions such as Columbia, Harvard, and the University of Chicago envisioned content coverage as secondary to the higher purpose of cultivating historical and critical thinking to promote democratic citizenship, these courses were unable to dislodge the dominant coverage model. At best, the postwar ferment perhaps encouraged the spread of what might be termed “coverage-plus”—an approach in which discrete analytical activities were integrated into survey courses that remained organized primarily around chronological coverage. One historian described the “traditional college-level survey course” that had become hegemonic by the 1960s: “A lecture-discussion format, an ample textbook with occasional paperbacks and library readings, a lock-step chronological approach, a factual compendium, and a superficial overview.”²² Booming postwar enrollments and the dominant textbook style encouraged this kind of coverage-based course, which was intellectually justified by an appeal to the inability of students to do history until they had mastered sufficient background information. Clearly, the post-World War II efforts to reform the introductory history course had fallen short.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a crisis within the historical profession sparked renewed interest in reforming the introductory course as a number of historians began to identify the shortcomings of the survey as a cause of declining history course enrollments and the discipline’s lost standing within general education programs. In his 1974 presidential address for the Southern Historical Association, Gilbert C. Fite, president of Eastern Illinois University, observed, “We have descended into what some consider the dark age of declining enrollments, professional unemployment, and a growing rejection of history by many students who seem to agree with Henry Ford that history is ‘bunk.’” Fite placed part of the blame for this problem on history survey courses that were “the ugly ducklings of most departments.” He explicitly critiqued the coverage model: “If we are

²¹ On the general education reform of the post-World War II period, see Alston Chase, “The Rise and Fall of General Education: 1945–1980,” *Academic Questions*, 6 (Spring 1993), 21–36. On the role of history in general education, see James B. Crooks, “History’s Role in General Education,” *JGE: The Journal of General Education*, 31 (Summer 1979), 109–21. The Harvard University committee was chaired by the historian Paul H. Buck and also included Arthur M. Schlesinger Sr. Committee on the Objectives of a General Education in a Free Society, *General Education in a Free Society: Report of the Harvard Committee* (Cambridge, Mass., 1945), 46–47, 134–35, 142, 213–14, esp. 46, 142. President’s Commission on Higher Education, *Higher Education for American Democracy: A Report of the President’s Commission on Higher Education*, vol. I: *Establishing the Goals* (Washington, 1947), 59. See also Chase, “Rise and Fall of General Education,” 22, 27–28. On the new social science requirement that Harvard created based on *Redbook* recommendations, see Owen, “Harvard General Education in Social Science.”

²² Like Harvard’s revised curriculum of the 1950s, the renowned “Chicago plan” of the 1940s and early 1950s prioritized the analysis of primary sources and emphasized the civic functions of historical knowledge. See Staff of Social Sciences I at the College of the University of Chicago, eds., *The People Shall Judge: Readings in the Formation of American Policy* (Chicago, 1949). Robert A. Waller, “The United States History Survey Course: Challenges and Responses,” *History Teacher*, 8 (Feb. 1975), 199–207, esp. 199.

going to have any real impact on individuals or society, we must do something besides just cover the material.” Myron A. Marty of Florissant Valley Community College sardonically noted in 1976 that the dominant trend was nevertheless “to do what has been done”—“to teach as we have been taught, and then, in turn, to teach as we have taught: ragged notes, maybe with multicolor interlinear revisions, films on a fixed schedule, two book reviews or a term paper required, two exams and a final.”²³

Motivated by this sense of crisis, several history departments in the late 1960s and 1970s made efforts to create alternatives to the coverage model of the introductory history course, the most radical of which was the history “laboratory course.” The history laboratory course arose from a collaborative effort supported by the U.S. Office of Education between 1965 and 1967 and piloted at Smith College and the University of Wisconsin. Proponents of the laboratory course recited the litany of problems with the standard survey course, in which “the student, in effect, is taken on a conducted tour of a succession of presidential administrations and quaintly named epochs” without learning that “history is, among other things, a way of thinking about society, a way of conceiving of social change,” rather than an inert “body of knowledge about a period or a geographical area that has to be ‘covered.’” According to William R. Taylor, who documented the project at Wisconsin, the course planners decided that they wanted students to learn about “the ‘doing’—of history.” Eschewing coverage altogether, the lab courses allowed students to explore primary sources on tightly focused topics, such as the Salem witch trials and a Wisconsin Fourierist community. The description of a 1973–1974 iteration of the course is revealing of its priorities: “This course . . . is based upon the premise that it is less important to transmit information to students than to lead them to draw their own conclusions from historical sources. It is, therefore, a course which stresses *doing* history rather than *learning about* history, and it aims at developing the students’ capacities for creative and critical thought.”²⁴

As an introductory general education course, the history lab proved a fleeting experiment, and even its proponents quickly came to conclude that it had “a function distinct from that of the period-area surveys.” While some lab-style courses are still being offered or have been revived in recent times, they have tended to be repurposed for majors or have become one option on a list with more standard survey courses. One answer to Nancy Shoemaker’s 2009 query in the AHA’s *Perspectives*, “Where is the history lab course?” is that

²³ Gilbert C. Fite, “The Historian as Teacher: Professional Challenge and Opportunity,” *Journal of Southern History*, 41 (Feb. 1975), 3–18, esp. 3, 15–16. Myron A. Marty, “Trends and Trendiness in Teaching Undergraduate History,” *Teaching History*, 1 (Fall 1976), 41–47, esp. 41. Other discussions of this perceived crisis include Ronald Ridgley, “Will the History Survey Be Salvaged?,” *Social Studies*, 64 (Dec. 1973), 313–15; Scott Edwards, “Western Civ after the Revolution,” *JGE: The Journal of General Education*, 25 (Oct. 1973), 163–71; Hugh B. Hammett et al., “Can the Teaching of History Survive 1984?,” *History Teacher*, 10 (Feb. 1977), 229–48; and William McNeill et al., “Beyond Western Civilization: Rebuilding the Survey,” *ibid.* (Aug. 1977), 509–48.

²⁴ Other institutions participating in the laboratory course experiment included the State University of New York, Albany, the State University of New York, Stony Brook, the University of Chicago, the University of Massachusetts, Reed College, and Wesleyan University. Taylor, “Laboratory Course in American History,” 497–505, esp. 498–500. The idea of the history laboratory was not entirely new. See A. C. Wilgus, “The Laboratory Method in the Teaching and Studying of History,” *Historical Outlook*, 12 (Jan. 1921), 23–27. Thomas C. Mendenhall had likewise called for a lab course in 1944. Mendenhall, “Introductory College Course in Civilization,” 684. For another approach to “doing history” from this period, see Alan W. Brownsword, “Doing History: A Skills Approach,” *History Teacher*, 6 (Feb. 1973), 251–66. Richard Sewell, History 291 syllabus, “A Laboratory Approach to the Study of American History,” https://mywebspace.wisc.edu/groups/History/web/syllabi_archive/history291/history_291_spring_1974.pdf. Emphasis in original.

a number of departments have tried lab courses but that they have not endured as substitutes for the introductory course. The experimental ferment of the 1970s no doubt enhanced the standard history survey course and encouraged the use of supplementary readings and more creative assignments. The dissidents of that period, however, were no more successful than their predecessors at replacing coverage as the dominant organizational principle for the introductory course.²⁵

The Contemporary Critique and an Emerging Alternative

Despite over a century of critique, the assumption that knowledge of a large body of historical facts must precede historical thinking continues to shape how students encounter the discipline. Stephen D. Andrews has noted that the “traditional pyramidal structure” in which history students are expected to move from “broad acquisition of information toward mastery of a particular subject” remains the norm for college and university history curricula.²⁶ Within this curricular structure, the coverage-oriented survey course typically serves to introduce potential majors to college-level work in history while also fulfilling a general education requirement for nonhistory majors. Most students, for whom the “survey” will likely be their only history course, will not have the opportunity to move from the acquisition of basic knowledge to more sophisticated forms of historical study. Their understanding of history as a discipline and a way of knowing will be shaped fundamentally by their experience in the introductory course and exposure to the coverage model.

Much of the professional discussion of the introductory course continues to focus on the question of what students should know rather than how students should think. A 2001 round table discussion of the survey course published in the annual Textbooks and Teaching section of the *Journal of American History*, for instance, centered largely on the issue of thematic and factual content. While many of the eleven participants made significant nods to the importance of teaching historical thinking, most were simply unable to let go of deeply rooted concerns over deficiencies in student knowledge. Lamenting his students’ lack of factual knowledge, Douglas Egerton of Le Moyne College declared, “I suppose my first priority is content, although I wish it didn’t have to be.” Douglas C. Sackman of the University of Puget Sound, after asserting that coverage was not his priority, nonetheless admitted his shock to discover that less than 30 percent of college seniors

²⁵ Taylor, “Laboratory Course in American History,” 505. An article about an experimental lab course at Southern Methodist University (SMU) was introduced with the following hyperbolic tagline: “Under relentless pressure from critics, the traditional history survey courses are slowly disappearing. Here is another promising idea for a substitute.” See Glenn Linden, “Teaching U.S. History through Inquiry: The S.M.U. Experiment,” *History Teacher*, 5 (Jan. 1972), 28–33. SMU still offers first-year seminars in American, European, and non-Western history. Nancy Shoemaker, “Where Is the History Lab Course?,” *Perspectives on History*, 47 (Jan. 2009), <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2009/0901/0901tea2.cfm>. Nancy Shoemaker’s course resembles the University of Wisconsin laboratory course of the late 1960s in its focus on the Salem witch trials. Daniel J. Cohen, “By the Book: Assessing the Place of Textbooks in U.S. Survey Courses,” *Journal of American History*, 91 (March 2005), 1405–15. Daniel J. Cohen found, for instance, that 60% of U.S. history survey courses included a book in addition to the textbook and primary source reader. *Ibid.*, 1408. Efforts at substantial reform did continue through the 1990s. See, for example, Ralph W. Goodwin and Harry E. Wade, “Doing More by Doing Less: An Island Approach to American History,” *History Teacher*, 31 (May 1998), 407–8.

²⁶ Stephen D. Andrews, “Structuring the Past: Thinking about the History Curriculum,” *Journal of American History*, 95 (March 2009), 1094–101, esp. 1095.

could correctly identify Reconstruction on a multiple-choice test. "I begin thinking that some way of drilling content, content, content into the students' minds must be pursued," he wrote. Underlying the content orientation of the discussion was a concern for issues of cultural literacy and citizenship education. Elisabeth Perry of Saint Louis University explained: "In selecting material, I ask myself: What do students 'need' to know about the past in order to function as informed citizens in today's world?" While the factual and thematic knowledge assumed to be necessary for effective citizenship has changed markedly since the 1920s, the assumption that the introductory course must remedy presumed deficiencies in cultural knowledge clearly persists.²⁷

The current pedagogical countermovement echoes a century of dissent from the coverage model, the facts-first approach, and the emphasis on cultural literacy. The contemporary critique of coverage, however, goes much deeper than earlier reform efforts. Informed by SoTL and its attention to the learning process, contemporary reformers have challenged the fundamental assumptions upon which the coverage model rests. Earlier discussions of the introductory course centered largely on the appropriate balance between content knowledge and historical thinking, a discourse that certainly encouraged instructors to incorporate discrete analytical activities into their introductory courses but which left coverage as the central course design priority. Today's reformers, by contrast, reject the notion that significant content knowledge can develop in the absence of meaningful historical thought. Citing the work of cognitive psychologists, Calder and Wineburg take direct aim at what they term the "attic theory" of historical learning, in which students are assumed to gather knowledge in much the same way that a homeowner might collect furniture in an attic for later use. They point out that knowledge develops in the context of questions and problems. By emphasizing content knowledge as an end in itself, Calder maintains, the coverage model leaves students with neither an understanding of the discipline of history nor a base of historical knowledge. He thus concludes that "coverage-oriented surveys," which are "built on wobbly, lay theories of human cognition," "must share in the blame for Americans' deplorable ignorance of history." The coverage model, Wineburg argues, has never achieved its purported goal of encouraging cultural literacy because it simply cannot do so: "A sober look at a century of history testing provides no evidence for the 'gradual disintegration of cultural memory' or a '*growing* historical ignorance.' The only thing growing seems to be our amnesia of past ignorance." Wineburg concludes: "Students could master and retain the piles of information contained in 1917 or 1943 textbooks no better than they can retain what fills today's gargantuan tomes."²⁸

Put simply, present-day reformers insist that facts do not and cannot come first. The widespread embrace of the facts-first assumption within the discipline of history helps explain why, despite a century of drilling content into the minds of high school and college students, so many such students remain woefully ignorant of the knowledge that

²⁷ Gary Kornblith and Carol Lasser, eds., "Teaching the American History Survey at the Opening of the Twenty-First Century: A Round Table Discussion," *Journal of American History*, 87 (March 2001), 1409–41, esp. 1418, 1412, 1416. The one participant in the round table to break fundamentally from the coverage model was the University of Mississippi's Charles W. Eagles, who noted: "The basic objective of my classes is to help students learn to read and write more effectively. It is essentially a skills development approach that almost incidentally uses American history." *ibid.*, 1417.

²⁸ Calder, "Uncoverage," 1362; Wineburg, "Crazy for History," 1413, 1405–6. Calder credits the "attic theory" concept to Sam Wineburg.

historians deem necessary for effective citizenship. With the facts-first assumption exposed as a fallacious lay theory of student learning, the entire edifice of the coverage model simply collapses, as does the cultural literacy justification for the introductory history course. The contemporary pedagogical countermovement thus challenges the discipline—in ways that earlier reform efforts did not—to reexamine the ultimate purposes of the introductory history course and to develop a pedagogy that flows from those goals.

Calder has called upon the historical profession to develop a new “signature pedagogy” to replace coverage as the default model for the introductory history course. Such a signature pedagogy would encourage students to think historically by asking them to do, at a novice level, what historians do. The challenge, of course, is to determine exactly which aspects of historical practice to stress, particularly when no agreed-upon definition of historical thinking, let alone how to promote it, exists. Some critics of the coverage model emphasize the discovery of new historical knowledge via independent research. Others stress various critical thinking skills and habits of mind. Calder, for instance, organizes his introductory course around six “cognitive habits: questioning, connecting, sourcing, making inferences, considering alternative perspectives, and recognizing limits to one’s knowledge.” Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke propose the “five C’s of historical thinking”: change over time, context, causality, contingency, and complexity. Alan Booth and Paul Hyland identify ten characteristics of high-level learning in history, a list so long and detailed as to defy concise summary. The absence of both a shared understanding of historical thinking and a pedagogical model that flows from it poses a fundamental challenge to those who hope for a new signature pedagogy for the introductory course.²⁹

Backward design, with its emphasis on clearly articulated learning goals that drive course development, offers an escape from the morass of competing models of historical thinking. The principles of backward design require us to begin by asking why we wish introductory students to learn to think historically at all. Since the 1920s, historians have maintained that the discipline has an important contribution to make to the cultivation of engaged and informed citizens. Though the failings of the coverage model call into question the cultural literacy approach to citizenship education, the promotion of active and engaged citizenship remains the most persuasive argument in favor of history’s central role in the general education curriculum.³⁰

To fulfill the discipline’s commitment to the cultivation of active and engaged citizens in a way that fosters historical thinking, we offer the argument-based model for the introductory course. At the heart of the discipline of history is a process of argument and debate in which scholars subject rival claims and perspectives to critical analysis to arrive at deeper understandings of important questions and issues—questions and issues that center on such matters as the consequences of human actions, the relationship between

²⁹ Calder, “Uncoverage,” 1364; Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke, “What Does It Mean to Think Historically?,” *Perspectives*, 45 (Jan. 2007), 32; Alan Booth and Paul Hyland, “Developing Scholarship in History Teaching,” in *The Practice of University History Teaching*, ed. Alan Booth and Paul Hyland (Manchester, Eng., 2000), 1–13. For more on the “signature pedagogy” of history, see Sipress and Voelker, “From Learning History to Doing History.”

³⁰ As recently as 2006, the AHA’s Teaching Division reasserted the importance of history study and scholarship in the development of globally aware citizens and leaders in a series of position papers designed to persuade both policy makers and the public of the value of the discipline. Patrick Manning, “Presenting History to Policy Makers: Three Position Papers,” *Perspectives*, 44 (March 2006), 22–24.

individuals and society, and the nature of human social relations. This process of debate and argument provides a model of an engaged civic community into which introductory history students can be invited at a novice level. An argument-based history course, particularly when housed within a broader curriculum that emphasizes engaged learning, may encourage students to incorporate historical modes of thinking into their daily lives. They may be more inclined to ask useful questions in the face of practical problems and challenges, whether personal, professional, or civic. And upon encountering a historical claim, such as those that frequently arise in political discussions, they will know how to start asking important questions about context and evidence.

To implement an argument-based model, we must do more than simply subtract some coverage to make room for some argument. Rather, argument must become the organizing principle of the course. While there is no single template for an argument-based course (just as there is no single template for a coverage-oriented course), examples of these courses do share a number of defining characteristics. Such courses are, above all, question driven. Argument-based courses are organized around significant historical questions—questions about which historians disagree. Students are systematically exposed to rival positions about which they must make informed judgments, and they are asked to develop their own positions for which they must argue on the basis of historical evidence.³¹ The shift from coverage to argument thus does not mean the elimination of content from introductory courses or relegating such pedagogical tools as textbooks and lectures to the dustbin. Nor does it require an abandonment of traditional geographic and chronological course designations (such as U.S. History, Modern Europe, or the World since 1945). It does, however, require us to dispense with the notion that content mastery is an end in itself and instead to view historical content as the subject matter about which our students will learn to argue in discipline-specific ways. Under the coverage model, the central challenge of course design was determining the particular content to be covered and the level of detail with which to cover it. In the question-driven, argumentative model, the challenge is to identify a coherent series of compelling historical debates for students to explore, as well as to design assessments that accurately gauge students' depth of understanding and ability to participate in these debates. In the argumentative model, it should be noted, historical content hardly fades into the background: students must be required to apply historical content knowledge to the issues and questions under debate.

The question-driven, argumentative model poses a number of pedagogical challenges. Foremost among them is the fact that historical thinking is, as Sam Wineburg puts it, an "unnatural act." Peter Lee has found that young people's first encounters with history are shaped by the assumption that the past is a given—a useful assumption in daily life, particularly in light of the strong moral distinction between "telling the truth" and "telling lies." Lee thus concludes that historical thinking, with its emphasis on the constructed nature of historical knowledge, is "counter-intuitive," not just for high school students but perhaps also for many adults. Wineburg reaches similar

³¹ For examples of argument-based courses, see Estes, "Constructing the Syllabus"; Barbara E. Walvoord and John R. Breihan, "Arguing and Debating: Breihan's History Course," in *Thinking and Writing in College: A Naturalistic Study of Students in Four Disciplines*, ed. Barbara E. Walvoord and Lucille P. McCarthy (Urbana, 1990), 97–143; and Joel M. Sipress, "Why Students Don't Get Evidence and What We Can Do about It," *History Teacher*, 37 (May 2004), 351–63.

conclusions in a study that contrasts how high school students and professional historians approach historical documents. Lee and Wineburg's findings are consistent with long-established research on the cognitive development of college students. In his classic study of the subject, William Perry found that most students enter college assuming that truth is clear-cut and revealed by authority. Relatively early in their college careers, Perry determined, students come to accept that knowledge is often subject to rival truth claims, but they tend to view such disagreements as matters of mere opinion. Perry found his subjects quite resistant to abandoning this view and embracing the need for truth claims to be justified on the basis of disciplinary criteria of judgment. In fact, Perry found that most of his sample (of primarily male Harvard students) graduated from college comfortably viewing truth claims and expressions of opinion as essentially the same thing.³²

The implications of Perry's work for argument-based historical study are profound. To see history as a contested discourse, students may require little more than to be exposed to rival historical perspectives. More challenging will be to persuade students that such disagreements are not a matter of mere opinion and that historical claims (including their own) must be judged on the basis of logic and evidence. As one study has found, it is not sufficient simply to tell students that they must cite evidence, nor is it enough to explain how to do it. Rather, instructors must foster a process of developmental change in which students come to understand the nature of historical argument and the role of evidence within it. The SoTL scholar Craig E. Nelson urges us not simply to make our disciplinary criteria of judgment explicit but also to require that students systematically apply these criteria when making judgments among rival positions.³³

Reorganizing the introductory course along these lines also poses significant logistical challenges, particularly at institutions where introductory courses enroll large numbers of students. Outside of small liberal arts colleges, the economics of higher education virtually dictate large general education class sizes that can inhibit discussion and place practical limits on writing assignments, particularly where graduate teaching assistants are not available. The challenges of scale, however, can be overcome. Surveys show that numerous history instructors already forego multiple-choice exams in favor of written exams, but many of the preferred essay-exam formats nevertheless reward students for reproducing arguments heard in lecture rather than producing and arguing for their own interpretations. Those kinds of exercises reinforce the erroneous notion that doing history is primarily a matter of getting one's facts straight. Instead, we need more assignments and exams that allow us both to cultivate and to assess the ability of students to formulate and support a historical argument—and to do so in large-enrollment introductory courses, rather than only in upper-level courses. As John McClymer has noted, "Courses are what students do in them."

³² Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*, 63–88; Peter Lee, "Understanding History," in *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, ed. Peter Seixas (Toronto, 2004), 134; William G. Perry Jr., *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme* (New York, 1970). For a summary of William Perry's model that discusses its practical application in the classroom, see Craig E. Nelson, "On the Persistence of Unicorns: The Trade-Off between Content and Critical Thinking Revisited," in *The Social Worlds of Higher Education: Handbook for Teaching in a New Century*, ed. Bernice A. Pescosolido and Ronald Amizade (Boston, 1999), 168–84.

³³ Sipress, "Why Students Don't Get Evidence and What We Can Do about It"; Nelson, "On the Persistence of Unicorns," 171–73.

We need to create and share new methods of guiding students to learn to think like historians.³⁴

As the genealogy above suggests, every decade or two historians wake up to the shortcomings of the coverage model, recognizing it as a failure even on its own terms. Ironically, historians have heretofore failed to carry forward the memory of their episodic discontent with the coverage model. The rise of the SoTL movement, however, provides a crucial opportunity for historians to develop a new kind of introductory history course—one designed from the ground up around significant historical questions to cultivate the skills of historical argumentation. Such courses will no doubt continue to rely upon many of the strategies and resources that history instructors have refined over the past century. But these familiar tools will be redeployed toward a new priority: initiating students into an argumentative discussion about the past. Meanwhile, history instructors must continue to make difficult decisions about what topics and readings to include in their courses, but these decisions will be secondary to the larger design goal of developing students' ability to participate in an interpretative discourse. Breaking the bonds of the coverage model, historians will develop hundreds of different ways of achieving this newly clarified goal and will reinvigorate history as a liberal art.

The defenders of pedagogical tradition may protest that to abandon coverage is to forfeit our responsibility to cultivate cultural literacy. How, they may ask, can we expect our students to think like historians when they know so little? And yet, as long as there have been surveys to gauge the historical knowledge of Americans, there has been a perceived crisis of historical ignorance among the general public and college graduates alike. Proponents of the coverage model have good intentions, but over the past century their preferred pedagogy has come up short again and again. If we truly wish our students to engage in critical thinking and discussion about the past, it is not enough to ask them simply to consume our expert knowledge. Rather, we must invite them into our realm—the realm of historical argumentation—and encourage them to construct historical knowledge and join in historical debate. After all, the first step toward being able to participate in a disciplined discourse about the past is not to know all of the relevant facts but rather to recognize that, as Louis Menand puts it: “Facts never speak for themselves. We speak for them.”³⁵ Facts are easy to come by in the information age. What students need are the tools to assess the validity of facts, to weigh their significance, and to deploy them in everyday discussion and argument about the meaning of the past.

³⁴ For an example of an exam format that can be used in large classes to encourage and assess the skills of historical argumentation, see David J. Voelker, “Assessing Student Understanding in Introductory Courses: A Sample Strategy,” *History Teacher*, 41 (Aug. 2008), 505–18. John McClymer, *The AHA Guide to Teaching and Learning with New Media* (Washington, 2005), 7.

³⁵ Louis Menand, “Peace Now: Was the Good War a Bad Thing?,” *New Yorker*, April 14, 2008, http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/books/2008/04/14/080414crbo_books_menand.