**Teaching Statement**

Statement on Teaching | Shannan Catherine Mason

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History classes should be vibrant spaces for ongoing conversation and engagement with the past, both in the classroom and beyond. My early experiences in public history, digital archives, and preservationist work have shaped my commitment to fostering historical thinking at both the collegiate and professional levels. To achieve this, I emphasize skill reinforcement, interdisciplinary methodologies, and public-facing historical work. At its core, my teaching prioritizes accessibility and hands-on, student-centered learning through primary source analysis, digital tools, and experiential methods. In a world where digital literacy and public engagement are integral to civic literacy, I design my courses with the belief that students learn best when they actively construct and contribute to historical knowledge.

After engaging with traditional sources and lectures, I prioritize active learning through collaborative projects, digital storytelling, and public history initiatives, in person and online. My emphasis on primary source analysis and digital methodologies is rooted in the idea that history should be taught as both a method and a public practice. In all my courses, students work with primary documents, oral histories, digital archives, and multimedia tools and site visits to develop historical thinking skills while learning how to communicate history effectively to diverse audiences. Whether through digital mapping projects, virtual exhibits, or community partnerships, students learn to see history as an evolving conversation, one they actively shape and share.

In my Early US Survey course for example, I have students explore professionally curated collections of [revolutionary war objects](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/arid/hd_arid.html) to demonstrate through narrative as much as object; how and why materials as much as rhetoric mattered during the lead up to the American Revolution. As we learn about the war students undertake walkthrough’s of spaces like [Washington’s encampment](https://tent.amrevmuseum.org/?_gl=1*106u98c*_gcl_au*MTYyNzYxNTcxNS4xNzI1OTE4Nzk5*_ga*MjAwNDI5NzY4NC4xNzI1OTE4Nzk5*_ga_Y0765X22CH*MTcyNTkxODc5OS4xLjEuMTcyNTkxODgyMi4zNy4wLjA.) to understand the basics of camp life, or at a larger scale gain a stronger understanding of the combatant side of the revolution through [story mapping](https://storymaps.esri.com/stories/revolutionarywar/). These self-directed explorations further student understanding of historical events by encouraging them to consider the past in real spatial, evidentiary and temporal contexts. I believe this not only shows student’s the historians craft but encourages them to make connections between things like the built environment and ecology, or in this instance when paired with lecture, connect material conditions to morale and potential war outcomes.

My courses always involve summative or capstone projects that bridge history with other fields, studies and encourages technical competencies. Students examine the intersections of ecological change and human history through multimedia resources, case studies, and physical as well as digital archives throughout the semester to collectively generate a narrative style podcast on a topic of their collective choosing over the course of the semester. I use diverse teaching techniques tailored to multiple styles of preferred learning to create an inclusive classroom with multiple means of engagement and demonstrations of knowledge including quizzes, communication (oral and written), and project-based learning. I employ multimedia resources, such as social media posts, podcasts, documentaries, short student-made vlogs and digital exhibits, to engage students and develop critical literacy and interpretive skills as essential skills of the historian. Experiential learning projects also have the benefit of reaching out and contributing to a larger community as well, such as oral history interviews and digital exhibition assignments, which push students connect the stories of their local community with broader historical narratives – connecting themselves to the wider events of the world as they learn professional best practice, by for example, generating deeds of gift and asking participants to donate their stories to local libraries or historical organizations. My approach helps students participate in the genesis of history as an active, ongoing process of interpretation and engagement with the past as idea, object and space. fostering a sense of relevance and personal connection that enhances motivation and learning well beyond the history classroom.

In terms of graduate level guidance, my teaching philosophy emphasizes developing varied and advanced research skills, fostering independent scholarly inquiry of the students choosing, and encouraging professional development through modeling. While graduate school often centers reading and writing, Graduate students must not only engage with historical content, methodologies, theory, and critical analysis but be able to convey that information in a variety of modalities in collaborative as much as independent formats. My goal is to prepare graduate students to become well connected innovative scholars, effective educators, and hungrily engaged public intellectuals who seek to contribute meaningfully to the field of history as much as community. My mentorship-based approach prioritizes frequent discussion and collaboration, alongside intensive reading and writing to explore their own research interests deeply while situating their work within broader historical and interdisciplinary frameworks. They will be well practiced listeners, thinkers, writers and speakers when they leave any one of my seminars or work with me on an individual level.

I strive to create an inclusive environment that values and leverages the diverse perspectives and experiences of all students. Diversity in the classroom, whether in terms of background, thought, or learning style enriches our study and the field of history, fostering a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the past. By integrating a wide array of voices and materials, including those from traditionally marginalized groups, I aim to challenge dominant narratives and encourage students to critically engage with the complexities of historical interpretation. I emphasize the importance of creating a learning space where every student feels seen and heard, facilitating discussions that respect and explore differing viewpoints. This commitment to diversity is not only a pedagogical strategy but a vital element of preparing students to navigate and contribute to an increasingly interconnected and pluralistic world. Through these efforts, I hope to cultivate in my students a sense of belonging and an appreciation for the ways diverse histories intersect and shape our present.

I prioritize frequent, timely and constructive feedback, provide models or examples for every level assessment and am a strong proponent of peer review and collaborative feedback sessions in person and online to help students and growing professionals learn from one another to build a supportive learning community across multiple methods of communication. I aim to provide them with the tools and skills needed to become a thoughtful, informed professional, one well equipped to engage with their own questions about the past in meaningful ways.

Education should empower students to not only comprehend historical events but to be active participants in the construction and interpretation of history and truly understand the ways it impacts their lived experience.