

My commitment to cultivating an atmosphere embedded in the study of *all* people's voices and agencies—especially of non-hegemonic groups—stems from my oral, public, and World history work and teaching. Active listening and attentiveness to our power and biases, which I learned while conducting oral histories, lie at the heart of my teaching. The University of Florida's Samuel Proctor Oral History Program taught me how to incorporate these tools into empowering, experiential experiences for students with myriad backgrounds and interests. I ground my Ursinus courses in these dynamics in order for students to learn that studying World history requires them to go beyond examining diverse perspectives. Instead, students in my courses enmesh themselves in the analytical tools and reflective practices necessary to examine how global interconnections amongst all peoples worked in practice. Students understand the need to listen to historical sources' meanings and contexts, and reflect on their own positionality in the world. Our classroom becomes a dialogic environment ripe for analyzing the relationship between the powerful and seemingly powerless across time and space, and their own role and power in interpreting these histories. My Ursinus students therefore learn that actively seeking out marginalized voices, such as their own, is essential to becoming discerning global citizens.

One of my first Hungarian narrators demonstrated two essential lessons in 2013. In response to a naïve question, he advised me to “understand here the situation, and not according to American expectations.” His remark continues to drive my practice of two key dynamics: 1) listening to what people say, their silences, and the contextual meanings behind them, and not simply for what I expect to hear, and 2) the influence of my position on the recording and analysis of another people’s history. Listening to every possible voice and meaning ensures that I allow the actors to tell their histories. They thereby define their agency in the past *and* in their contemporary retelling in the present. Just as importantly, I learned to acknowledge my positionality by constantly reflecting on the ways that my biases as a white, female, Western researcher might influence the historical process. These lessons undergird how I teach Ursinus students to value and explore all perspectives.

Working at the esteemed Samuel Proctor Oral History Program entrenched these dynamics in my practice. The Program’s social justice orientation brings a wide variety of students together in an environment more intimate than the traditional classroom. In fall 2016 I led the internship and oral history collection titled “Sport at UF.” The diversity of the group—nearly half of the interns came from non-hegemonic backgrounds—and the current political relevance of sport made for highly-engaged discussions. After they conducted interviews with former UF student-athletes, I worked with students to help them develop their final project, a podcast based on the interview. Each student chose to analyze the relation between sport and race, gender, or class in their podcast, such as why female softball players performed gender identity and femininity through makeup. Their stimulating works reinforced the value of teaching students the power of collecting and using people’s voices to tell crucial histories about power and agency in formats accessible to everyone.

I emphasize this practice in several different ways with my Ursinus students, many of whom come from different backgrounds than myself. While playing the mediator in our discussions, I model active listening and self-reflection to show them how to contextualize and analyze other’s perspectives. I reinforce these positions by summarizing students’ contributions, connecting them to one another and larger points, and prodding students to think more critically.

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They moreover learn that the mistakes they make in the classroom are critical to their intellectual development, such as with my own naïve question to my narrator in 2013. Finally, I also strive to play the mediator in a different, but equally important class setting: after traumatic episodes of mass violence. On the Monday after the Pittsburgh synagogue attack, I devoted half of each class to giving students space to reflect and express their feelings about it. Multiple students expressed their sincere gratitude for allowing them to voice their reactions and opinions about the tragedy. Their appreciation attests to my abilities as an educator to create a welcoming yet analytical environment wherein students meaningfully and openly engage with challenging topics.

The study of oral, public, and World history require Ursinus students to do much more than consider perspectives different from their own. Rather, my students enmesh themselves in the practices and tools that enable them to listen to and empower the voices of all people. Through oral and public history exercises and my student engagement tactics, students learn to recognize silences and acknowledge how their own power and positionality might influence their view of the past. By employing active listening and self-reflection in the classroom, my teaching will continue to cultivate students' development of the tools necessary to analyze and value the multitude of voices in Ursinus's community and people across the globe.