

Impact of Undergraduate Research Experience Program (UREP) in Teaching History at Qatar University

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the author shares her experience in class room by presenting a model of how students could think about collection of primary sources and make sense of them by writing their own history. The application is based on a research project UREP 08-049-6-004 entitled: "Qatar as a Crossroads: Students Writing Their Own History.

The goal is that lecturers can practice this example where it can be integrated into planned exercise in history courses.

Keywords: Undergraduate students, writing own history, primary sources, compare & analyze parallel sources.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to showcase the impact of Undergraduate Research Experience Program (UREP) on teaching history at Qatar University by presenting a model for a type of learning exercise that can be used in the history classroom to teach historical subject matter, in a manner that facilitates an exercise of students' critical thinking, communication, and collaborative learning skills, by engaging students in a structured process of direct historical inquiry on the basis of primary sources. One of the projects lead by author was UREP 08-049-6-004, entitled: "Qatar as a Crossroads: Students Writing Their Own History". [1]

The project aimed to have students mastering the essential skills of essay writing--gathering basic information, analyzing it to construct concise historical research and presentations and considering themselves as cultural beings influenced by historical social, political, economic and geographical circumstances. Also, articulating the histories of their own groups or about their cultural identities and the events that shaped, questioned, or

challenged those identities. [2] We open wider circles to explore the impact of political, historical, and social movements, wars and migrations that have impacted their lives. The same model was applied in classrooms introduced at Humanities Department, College of Arts and Science, Qatar University in the history introducer courses that aimed to teach students how history is been written. [3] This model was applied in the period between 2011 up till 2016, in 18 sections involving nearly 810 students. Students are rarely asked to articulate the histories of their own groups or about their cultural identities and the events that shaped, questioned, or challenged those identities.

2. OBJECTIVE

To present a model to be considered by history instructors and teachers.

3. METHODOLOGY

The applied model in classrooms based on three methodologies:

3.1 *Theoretical Methodology:* Where students would collect data about their own history [4] as (1) documents such as: Birth certificates, school diplomas, parents' marriage certificates, family tree, diaries, letters, licenses, government documents, receipts etc. (2) photos: such as portraits, animals photos for their own pets, a personal artwork etc. (3) archaeological objects [5]: such as old cars, old houses- building, old clothes, jewelry, furniture, carpets, old money, passport stamps, old swing machine etc. Students were collaborating with their families by interviewing them and having more information about their histories based on sources.



**Fig 1: Sherine's birth certificate (left) & picture (right):
Comparing parallel primary sources**

3.2 *Applied Methodology*: As lecturer of introduction to history course, I conduct a workshop for the students on different kinds of sources; primary and secondary, how to verify strong or weak sources and how to use them in writing history. How to use parallel sources to document to their own histories. Students examine primary sources while addressing number of research questions as where? When? How? [6] Answers for such questions will lead to an abundant information about their histories. Evidence of the student's own life and accomplishments were brought forward for examination: if he claims he is a good artist, he collects his sketches and awards; if she avows her debate expertise she presents certificates. One's national identification documents can yield a rich source for inquiry:

A student born in the Gulf may carry travel documents from Kuwait, birth certificate from Qatar and a family identity of Palestinian. In the next circle of context the student examines the family using documents and oral histories that detail its origins. A Qatari student's winter trip with her/his grandfather to a family's camp in the desert can yield artifacts and stories of past ways in the fast-changing landscape of Qatar. Examinations of the cultural circle (s) describe social paths to the current life.



Fig 2: Connecting Sherine's history with the city of Alexandria, where she was born: Compare birth certificate.



Fig 3: Front face of an unpublished coin (Greco-Roman Museum) of Alexander the Great, founder of Alexandria City

3.3 *Comparative Methodology*: Students compare their experiences where this stage enable them to exchange ideas about variant used sources and to deepen their analysis including any items related to the available evidence that support that reasoning or reject it. [7]

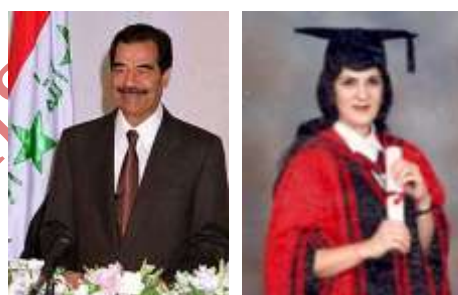


Fig 4: Saddam Hussein Abd al-Majid al-Tikriti (left) and Sherine Abd El-Aziz El-Menshawry (right)

When Sherine graduated from the Faculty of Tourism, Alexandria University in 1990, she worked as a tourist guide for only one year, and due to Kuwait war in 1991, the tourism sector was harshly affected by the Gulf War, so she studied for her Ph.D, and successfully obtained it from Liverpool University. Saddam Hussein's historical decision to attack Kuwait has changed Sherine's carrier's life & probably her whole future. [8] [Note 6]

4. DISCUSSION & RESULTS

The main results of the class model application are as follows:

4.1 This application is the outcome of a UREP project entitled "Qatar as a Crossroads: Students Writing Their Own History", which became as an effective educational tool, where students can understand history by writing their own history based on primary sources.

4.2 A main outcome of this application is the change of students' thinking about how to write history [9]. It changed student habits of mind by introducing history as a discipline and a way of thinking as it shaped students'

writing through close examination of primary documents as well as secondary sources and produced public documents that contextualize the individual in her/his own history. The students were able to confront primary sources using where, when, and how questions that examine evidence and assumptions of how things 'must have been,' analyzing these sources to yield a bounty of useful information.

4.3 Master the essential skills of essay writing as using primary sources and parallel secondary evidence. While writing about their histories they were able to analyze it to construct concise historical research and presentations.

4.4 The author observed that students have interacted with their families to be able to write their own history, which integrated the families in the education of their children and which gave them the opportunity to write their own history using social, economic and geographical dimensions.

4.5 Have students see themselves as cultural beings influenced by historical, social, political, economic and geographical circumstances. This was obvious in their written narrative histories.

4.6 Bring many more understandings of cultures by working together. What they found in common was deep respect for ancestors and their efforts to provide better lives for each of us.

4.7 This application opened wider circles to explore the impact of political, historical, and social movements, wars and migrations that have impacted the students' lives. [10]

4.8 A feedback of a student at Humanities Department, Major History, wrote: "*I thought that examining primary sources would exhaust my mind, however I discovered that it enables me to think about raising questions and trying to answer them based on evidence, it is an interesting practice that I have enjoyed for refreshing the mind*". (lecture date 22/05/2016).

5. CONCLUSION

The intention is that instructors can use this model where it can be incorporated into a structured exercise of critical thinking skills in history courses. *Students writing their own history* can be a model to enhance students' critical thinking, communication, collaborative work skills and to serve to deliver historical information by means of engaging students in actual historical inquiry from primary sources.

6. NOTE

Due to students' permission constrains the author has used her own documents as a model.

7. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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