

## Mid-Course Review

Professional Assessment Statement

January 2022

Joshua Savala  
Assistant Professor  
Department of History

### I. Teaching

Over the course of five semesters at Rollins, I have taught eleven new courses and sixteen classes in total, and next semester I will add two additional new courses and one repeat. To say that I have learned new ways of teaching during these semesters would be quite the understatement.

According to the History Department Criteria, the evaluation of teaching includes, but is not limited to, a) “coherent and rigorous courses,” b) engagement with students, c) “conveying the essence of history” (such as causation, “diverse perspectives,” and primary sources), and d) pushing students toward critical thinking, writing, and speaking on history. In this section of my statement, I will discuss each one of these elements.

Before moving into the categories for evaluating teaching, my overall CIE ratings across semesters show an improvement. The numbers show that students have generally rated my classes and me as a professor higher each semester. Comparing CIEs from Fall 2019, Fall 2020, and Fall 2021 (only CLA reviews for simplicity), my scores have improved almost across the board. If I put together all class averages for each Fall semester and look at the Overall Course and Overall Professor questions, the numbers move from 3.84 and 4.0 in 2019, to 4.13 and 4.5 in 2020, and 4.44 and 4.59 in 2021. Across these same averages, the standard deviation for both questions also decreased (1.28 and 1.18 in 2019, 1.18 and .95 in 2020, and .88 and .8 in 2021), which shows a more consistent experience for students. With few exceptions, averages for all CIE questions also improved each Fall semester.

In designing classes, I aim to have students read both cutting edge work and classic scholarship. This framework, though, is not simply to bring in old and new; rather, each piece is chosen to draw out specific ways of thinking about and doing history. In my Revolutionary Latin America class (300 level), for instance, students read contributions on agency and gender from the 1980s and 1990s in the first week, and then later return to these conceptual essays through books from the 1990s, 2000s, and two books published within two years of the class. In Haitian Revolution (100 level), students read both a selection from CLR James’s classic 1938 book *The Black Jacobins*, scholarship produced and debated in the early 2000s, secondary literature from the past few years, and a podcast released just weeks prior to the beginning of the semester. As I begin to repeat classes, I bring in new material, as well. I taught History of Lima twice (Spring 2020 and Fall 2020) and in the summer I switched out a few readings in order to include a selection from a book on sex work in Lima and a narrative history of an underground revolutionary movement, both of which were published in 2020. This also included a virtual class visit by one of the authors.

Evolving with the field is not only about when things are published, but also the topics discussed in the material itself and the authors of the material—diversity of perspectives from part c of the department criteria. As I am a historian of Latin America, one of my goals in selecting class material is to make sure that students read and engage with voices *from* Latin America (and the Pacific), and a

diversity of voices at that. In my class on Chile (100 level), students read a novel by a queer Chilean writer that centers a queer relationship and gender in 1980s Santiago. In *Pacific Ocean Worlds* (rFLA 100), one student noted in their CIE that “in class, we had some very important discussions about race, gender, class, and so on while connecting it to slavery, colonialism, migration and so on” and a student in *Haitian Revolution* wrote that one thing they enjoyed was “transparent discussions about race.” Beyond primary sources from Latin America, I also think it essential that students read academics from Latin America. In all of my classes students read academics from the places we are studying, which may come in the form of a Haitian anthropologist, Brazilian, Cuban, Peruvian, or Chilean historians, or interdisciplinary scholars from the Pacific. While I could lecture on their ideas, and in some cases I do, I firmly believe that students must read and think with scholars from Latin America and the Pacific.

The discipline of history is, in part, interpretation, which means that students must come to their own conclusions based on the source material. My course design leans toward my own interpretation of the literature in some places, but I also include ample space for students to develop their own ideas. In *Pacific Ocean Worlds*, for instance, I include two primary sources from opposing perspectives on the same event. In their reading responses, I find that students wrestle with how to make sense of radically different interpretations of a blocked attempt at migrating from South Asia to Canada, and in class we discuss the perspective of each author and what we do in such situations. Similarly, in *Colonial Latin America* (300 level), students read three primary sources on the meeting of Atahualpa and Pizarro in Cajamarca, Peru, in 1532 and in class we go over the different authors, what each one brings to the discussion, and how historians analyze such divergent material. Except in rare cases, all of the required Reading Responses in my classes are centered on students interpreting the assigned reading, film, or podcast. Through these short writing assignments, students come to their own conclusions on the material. As these are turned in the night before class, I have time to read them, take notes on interpretations and troublesome parts, and use that information to guide the discussion. This involves calling on students with ideas different from others, working through a concept on the board, or asking a quiet student to talk about a point they wrote about. One student in the *Haitian Revolution* noted that the “Socratic discussion style ... resonated” with students and a part of this style is based on students proposing their own ideas and then rethinking them through conversation. Students also develop their own analysis through writing research papers in all 300-level classes. While I do guide students in on research questions with both the scope of the project and available primary source material in mind, in the end they write and research whatever they would like. In 300-level classes, students also are required to co-facilitate a class discussion. There are two pedagogical ideas behind this assignment. First, students learn how to create their own discussion questions, which requires thinking deeply about the text(s) and figuring out how to bring their peers through the material, as opposed to presenting the text(s). Second, since all of them must co-facilitate at some point in the semester, students develop a sense of responsibility and collaboration in supporting one another.

Why things happen or do not happen is a part of any class on history. What I think is important is for students to see history as multicausal, contingent, and up for discussion. Why, for instance, did several leaders of the *Haitian Revolution* side with Spanish Royalism which still oversaw slavery across the Americas? What explains the military coup of 1973 in Chile? These are some of the types of questions that my classes take on and through them we historicize the categories that many take for granted. That one is an enslaved person rebelling against French slavery does not necessarily mean they will side with republican ideals or even be on the same side as other people of color; rather, students must grapple with divisions within slave society and political imaginaries, which in

turn lead toward why people did certain things. A simple answer to the 1973 coup in Chile is the backing of the United States. A much more complex answer involves political polarization within Chile, economic problems related to US involvement but not explained entirely by it, and ideology within the branches of the military and Augusto Pinochet himself. To get at these issues, students read primary and secondary sources presenting different perspectives, which then are discussed in-class and through written work.

I am also involved in student research and teaching beyond the classroom. Erika Wesch (class of 2023) and I are applying for a Student-Faculty Collaborative Scholarship for 2022. To prepare for the project, we completed an independent study Fall 2021 on natural disasters in the Americas and if our application is approved, we will continue to research and write on the 1928 Okeechobee hurricane and its aftermath during the summer of 2022. In addition to the research with Wesch, two students—Beatriz Olivieri (International Relation) and Margaret Stewart (History and Theatre Arts)—have asked me to be on their thesis committee. To support Olivieri’s research, we met up three times in mid-2021 to discuss a field defining book on Brazilian environmental history.

Considering comments from students in their CIEs, I am revising courses every semester. My pacing in lectures has slowed, and I now add in spaces in my notes where I pause to repeat important pieces or ad lib in a more conversational style. I have also cut down on the amount of lecturing to include more discussion, and students in all three of my Fall 2021 classes noted positive experiences with in-class discussions. Repeat classes also offer a place to improve on previous iterations. Students found my initial Modern Latin America class confusing due to covering too many areas, and with that in mind I reframed all 300-level classes around a few two-week units on one specific area. The Chile in the 1970s class will require more prefatory remarks—and consistent reminders—on what it means to study the history from the perspective of Chile and not a US-USSR centered Cold War. I plan on changing Pacific Ocean Worlds to Histories of the Pacific as around half of my previous classes registered under the assumption that the class was either STEM or environmental studies focused. I also look forward to designing new classes, such as Modern Peru, Mexico in the 1520s, and Historical Marxism.

## **II. Scholarship**

The Department of History requires two “scholarly accomplishments” for promotion to associate professor. In addition, one scholarly monograph would be “judged sufficient alone.” Since arriving at Rollins I have published one peer reviewed article and my monograph will be published mid-2022 with the University of California Press. Together, these publications fulfill the requirements for promotion.

I published “Ports of Transnational Labor Organizing: Anarchism along the Peruvian-Chilean Littoral, 1916-1928” in *Hispanic American Historical Review*, seen by many as the flagship journal for Latin American history. The article is an earlier version of chapter four of my book, discussed below. The article won the José María Arguedas prize for best article on Peru in 2019 by the Peru Section of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) and has been cited by scholars in the United States, Peru, and Argentina. It has also been used as a class text at the University of California, San Diego and California State University, Los Angeles.

My book, *Beyond Patriotic Phobias: Connections, Cooperation, and Solidarity in the Peruvian-Chilean Pacific World*, is scheduled to be released June 2022. The book is made up of five chapters that chart the creation of a South American Pacific through the circulation of ships, crews, and migration;

ideologies of masculinity and sexuality along the littoral; medical cooperation and research during the cholera outbreak of 1886-1888; labor organizing; and parallel and collaborative developments in criminology in South America, all from the 1850s to the 1920s. At its heart it is a challenge to the overwhelming weight of nationalist divisions between Peru and Chile. In his blurb, Charles Walker, professor at the University of California, Davis, calls the book “stirring and innovative social and transnational history and a major contribution to the study of class, nationalism, and the Pacific world.” After its publication, I will begin the process of arranging for a translation and finding a publisher in either Peru or Chile. Publishing in both English and Spanish will mean that the book should gain attention across the United States and Latin America.

Beyond these pieces of scholarship, I have also published three book reviews spread across the journals *História, Ciências, Saúde—Maguinbos* (Brazil, 2021), *Hispanic American Historical Review* (USA, 2021), and the *Journal of Latin American Studies* (England, 2020), and will publish one more in 2022 in *A Contracorriente: una revista de estudios latinoamericanos* (USA). I have a few articles and a chapter for an edited volume on deck, as well, but will not return to writing and revising until the summer of 2022. Still, I hope to finish the chapter and send at least one article out by the end of 2022.

Over the next decade, I have two book length projects. One is a history of the port of Callao, Peru, from the mid-eighteenth century to the early twentieth century, with an emphasis on African and African descended people as a labor force in the Black Pacific. The second is a history of Chilean state expansion in the second half of the nineteenth century. These projects will require summer research and my sabbatical semester in Peru, Chile, and Spain. While I may not finish both projects in ten years, I aim to complete a substantial portion of the research and a portion of the writing by then.

### **III. Service**

The Department of History expectations for service center on four categories: advising; “projects undertaken for the Department”; collegiality; and “service on CLA or ad hoc committees” or “all-college committees.” The department expectations also contain four additional ways of evaluating service, which will “considerably strengthen the candidate’s service record.” With this in mind, I will discuss each component.

In the Fall 2021 semester I taught my first RCC course and, as a result, have a new group of advisees. I have now gone through advisor trainings, helped students through a rather difficult transition into their first year of college in the middle of COVID, and set them up for classes next semester. I plan on teaching an RCC in Fall 2023 and will acquire a new batch of first-year advisees. I have also brought in one history major who will likely switch to me as her advisor in the near future.

Over the past three years, I have participated in service for the department in a few capacities. Perhaps the most important thus far has been taking over as the faculty advisor for Phi Alpha Theta (PAT), the history honors society, beginning in Fall 2020. As the faculty advisor I have organized—alongside students and other faculty—events such as historical pictionary, movie night, a reading group, a paper workshop, induction ceremonies, and guest speakers. PAT is an essential part of the department’s social fabric for both students and faculty. Beyond PAT, I have also acted as the department secretary at department meetings. I have found the department to be a welcoming and I hope that I have reciprocated this warmth in both the work environment and off campus.

Since my last annual review, I have increased my campus-wide service. Beginning in Fall 2021, I joined the Diversity Council. As a member of the Diversity Council, I aim to be a part of some of the diversity, equity, and inclusion work on campus. This is also an outgrowth, in part, of my involvement with the Competency-Rich Education for Anti-Racist Teaching group, a grant through the American Colleges of the South. Some of the members of this group, including myself, went on to develop a Canvas course for use on campus. In addition to this, Latinx students are organizing to bring an Alpha Psi Lambda chapter to campus and have asked me to be their faculty advisor. Alpha Psi Lambda is the first national Latinx, co-ed fraternity and I am pleased that Latinx students on campus see me as someone that can help them in their efforts to create a local community and connect to national chapters. I have also interviewed Fulbright applicants in 2020 and 2021; and next year I will join Danielle Abdon (Office of External Fellowships and Scholarships) in a new committee linking her office with the various parts of the school. Although this committee has not yet met—our first meeting is January 2022—I am looking forward to developing its mission, spreading the knowledge about grants across the campus and helping reviewing applications where needed. As someone who has won a few external grants due in part to the careful reading of advisors, I am glad to do the same for students at Rollins.

I am also active outside of the campus. I served on prize committees for the Labor Studies Section of LASA (2020) and the Peru Section of LASA (2021), and will be on the prize committee for the Best Book on the nineteenth century for the Nineteenth Century Section of LASA (2022). Submissions for these prizes are interdisciplinary, which speaks to the breadth of materials read and judged. I have also reviewed article manuscripts for *Latin American Research Review*, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, and *Global Environment*. If we as scholars rely on prize committees and blind reviewers for our own work, then taking part in these processes from the other side is a fundamental aspect of the profession.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The transition from graduate student to a 4-4 teaching load, designing classes which emphasize primary source analysis, and moving from in-person to virtual and back has required learning new techniques, adaptation, and flexibility. Student comments and overall numbers on my CIEs show a steady improvement as a professor and I aim to continue this trajectory. My scholarship is on track with departmental expectations, and I am beginning to increase my campus-wide service, which should put me on track for promotion to Associate.