

**P.A.T.H.**

**Project for the Active Teaching of History**

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## **Abstract**

The Project for Active Teaching of History (PATH) is designed as a community collaborative to enhance the teaching and learning of American history. Region IV Education Service Center, the University of Houston College of Education and Department of History and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston received a “Teaching American History” Grant in 2001 entitled “Project for the Active Teaching of History” (PATH). The goal of the project is to develop high-quality in-service and pre-service professional development programs, including an annual summer institute and three colloquia a year, and to give teachers advanced instruction in American history and guidance in pedagogy, including the effective use of new classroom technologies. The project also includes programs to support school-based collaborative efforts among teachers, including monthly workshops, and creates a group of history “mentors” who will help novice classroom teachers as well as pre-service teachers and teacher education students.

## **P.A.T.H.**

### **Project for the Active Teaching of History**

#### **Introduction**

The Project for Active Teaching of History (PATH) is designed as a community collaborative to enhance the teaching and learning of American history. The presentation will provide research, critical analysis, and application ideas and issues from various participants in PATH. The research perspectives focus on achievement of project goals and objectives in the areas of powerful pedagogy, technology, content, informal education, and professional development and will focus on case studies regarding the project's success in improving American history teaching and learning. A variety of research methods have been integrated for the purposes of project evaluation and analysis.

#### **Rationale and Goals**

Region IV Education Service Center, the University of Houston College of Education and Department of History and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston received a "Teaching American History" Grant in 2001 entitled "Project for the Active Teaching of History" (PATH). The goal of the project is to develop high-quality in-service and pre-service professional development programs, including an annual summer institute and three colloquia a year, and to give teachers advanced instruction in American history and guidance in pedagogy, including the effective use of new classroom technologies. The project also includes programs to support school-based collaborative efforts among teachers, including monthly workshops, and creates a group of history "mentors" who

will help novice classroom teachers as well as pre-service teachers and teacher education students.

The project is designed to improve teachers' knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of American history by creating a comprehensive and sustainable program of professional development that can serve as a model for other school districts throughout the state and nation. This project emphasizes six key elements: (1) Improving teachers' knowledge of American history as a separate subject matter within the core curriculum; (2) Identifying effective teaching strategies, including collaborative projects and hands-on, active-learning activities, that teachers can use to improve instruction and raise student achievement, especially among students with Low English Proficiency; (3) Training teachers to make effective use of new electronic communication and computer technologies, as well as older technologies, such as tape recorders, to stimulate history learning; (4) Creating a core group of experienced, knowledgeable, well-trained teacher-mentors who can serve as coaches for other teachers in their schools and for pre-service teachers and teacher training students at the University of Houston; (5) Providing a forum where professional historians, museum professionals, and classroom teachers can interact on an on-going basis and serve each others' needs; and (6) Producing extensive online resources, model lesson plans, and project-oriented activities designed to transform the study of American history by emphasizing collaborative, hands-on projects and active student learning.

The elements of the project are designed to raise student achievement by improving teachers' knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of American history as a separate subject. The teaching of American history is crucial not only to student

achievement, but also to the future of our democratic nation. According to the National Standards for United States History: Exploring the American Experience, “history opens to students the great record of human experience, revealing the vast range of accommodations individuals and societies have made to the problems confronting them, and disclosing the consequences that have followed the various choices that have been made. By studying the choices and decisions of the past, students can confront today’s problems and choices with a deeper awareness of the alternatives before them and the likely consequences of each.”

### **Content, Pedagogy, and Technology**

Long-term improvements in student achievement and the quality of history teaching will require us to strengthen teachers’ content mastery, improve history pedagogy, and train teachers to use technology effectively. This project addresses each of these challenges.

**A. Improving Content Mastery:** This project will enhance teachers’ mastery of historical content; ensure that they have detailed knowledge about such important topics as immigration and diversity in American history. The centerpiece of this initiative is an annual intensive three-week summer seminar, taught by a team of professional historians at the University of Houston, who will focus on colonial, 19th-, and 20th-century U.S. history and the histories of immigration and the nation’s diverse ethnic communities. Supplementing the summer seminar will be the academic year follow-up and three colloquia that will examine essential topics in U.S. history and explore how recent scholarship can be brought effectively into the classroom, and school-based workshops that will be held monthly during the academic year.

**B. Improving Pedagogy:** Our goal as teachers is not only to improve our students' grasp of history but to stimulate a genuine love of history. Recent research indicates that students learn history most effectively when they are engaged in the process of discovery and interpretation of historical topics. They need to understand that history is not simply a fixed body of names and dates that they must memorize; they must also recognize that historical knowledge is a product of investigation, data collection, critical reading, and analysis. In addition to learning about such traditional historical topics as politics, war, and diplomacy, our students need to realize that every facet of our lives has a history. And further, we are convinced that history offers an ideal instrument for enhancing our students' geographical knowledge, their ability to interpret charts and graphs, their quantitative skills, and their ability to interpret written and visual texts. Through the summer seminar, colloquia, and monthly workshops, we will promote a style of pedagogy that emphasizes active, hands-on learning, which has proven particularly effective in stimulating learning among disadvantaged students with Low English Proficiency.

**C. Integrating Technology into History Education:** With proper training, teachers can use technology to promote historical learning and give students a chance to “do” history. The project emphasizes three distinct uses of technology: (1) **“Low-tech” High Technology:** Technology in the classroom needn't be expensive. Tape recorders, supplemented with digital cameras and video cameras, can provide valuable tools that allow students to record the past. As part of this grant, we want to create a Region IV oral history archive. Students will interview community residents, including their own relatives, both long-time residents and recent arrivals, in order to understand why people

migrated to Region IV geographic area and the challenges they faced in adapting to this new environment. (2) **Online Resources:** Valuable resources for teaching American history are readily available online. The University of Houston, in collaboration with the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, is creating extensive copyright-free American history resources at <http://www.gliah.org>. This project will allow us both to expand the website to incorporate other resources that teachers would find useful; it will also permit the teachers to develop lesson plans and activities that make effective use of these online materials. (3) **Enhancing Communication:** New electronic technologies offer an exciting way to break down traditional classroom walls. This project will allow teachers to pair classrooms and provide students with “electronic pen pals,” students in schools in very different parts of the Region IV geographic area. We have also the PATH website for support and sharing. These tools will allow us to publicize lectures, workshops, symposia, conferences, exhibits, and other events that teachers will find valuable for their own professional development. They will also allow us to share teaching tips and suggest activities for students.

**Professional Development Activities:** We will implement this proposal through several intensive professional development initiatives:

**I. An annual intensive three-week summer seminar and ongoing academic year follow-up,** divided into three segments: (1) A core component emphasizing content mastery led by professional historians with expertise in colonial, nineteenth-century, and twentieth century U.S. history and the histories of immigration, and African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Asian Americans; (2) A grade-specific component focusing on history pedagogy led by specialists from the University of Houston College of Education

and Region IV ESC, Social Studies curriculum developers, museum professionals, and master teachers that will emphasize the critical reading and application of primary sources; and (3) A component emphasizing ways to effectively integrate new technologies into the history classroom. This component will show teachers how to use tape records, digital cameras, and video cameras to create a local history archive; photographs and film clips as an entryway into American history; and online history resources the University of Houston is creating for the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, including original historical documents, images, and maps, available at <http://www.gliah.org>. Participants in the summer seminar will create an instructional module during the seminar and serve as mentor for other teachers in Region IV geographic area during the academic year.

**II. Three colloquia during the school year featuring professional historians, Region IV ESC consultants, museum professionals, and specialists in historical pedagogy.**

One colloquium, hosted by the University of Houston History Department, will focus on content and the challenges of integrating essential topics in American history into the history curriculum; a second, at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, will concentrate on ways of promoting students' visual literacy and illustrate how material culture can bring American history to life; a third, at the University of Houston College of Education, will demonstrate the "best practices" of master history teachers. Region IV ESC consultants will participate in the planning and implementation of each colloquium.

**III. The Houston-Area History Network** which offers a website and listserv which will publicize our colloquia as well as other events of interest to history, social studies

teachers, and pre-service teachers, including lectures, exhibits, activities at [www.path.coe.uh.edu](http://www.path.coe.uh.edu).

**IV. Online resources, lesson plans, and hands-on, active-learning projects** to assist teachers to improve history pedagogy. These modules will emphasize: (1) using online resources effectively; (2) historical decision-making, such as President John Kennedy's decisions during the Cuban Missile Crisis; (3) connecting local and national history by focusing on such themes as movement and migration; (4) reading primary sources; and (5) Creating "wall-less" classrooms, which allow students to "do" history by conducting oral history interviews, visiting historical sites in the Region IV geographic area, and participating in service learning projects.

**The opportunity for pre-service and teacher education students to work with experienced classroom teachers** in planning and implementing American history projects and activities. Collaborating with an experienced teacher to plan and teach are not experiences that can be reproduced in a university classroom. By assigning pre-service teachers to work with experienced teachers, they will not only have a chance to plan and teach, but to reflect on what happens in a classroom. One of our goals is to create a community of master teachers who will nurture and mentor future teachers and give them confidence that they will succeed.

### **Evaluation**

**Specification and Measurement of Goals and Outcomes:** This project has multiple goals: (1) to implement high quality in-service and pre-service professional development programs that will better prepare Region IV students to achieve higher standards in American history; (2) to implement sustained, ongoing collaboration between Region IV

ESC, the University of Houston, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, through intensive summer seminars, colloquia, and school-based workshops; (3) to implement a mentoring and field-based training program for novice in-service teachers and pre-service teachers and teacher education students to better prepare them for the classroom; (4) to provide guidance to teachers in the use of technology and primary source documents; (5) to develop online instructional resources, lesson plans, and active-learning history activities; and (6) to document the project's outcomes.

We are assessing the project's benefits through a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures of teachers' professional development, their mastery of historical content, and student achievement. These include checklists, questionnaires, interviews, portfolios, and student performance assessments. A rigorous assessment of the project's impact on teacher preparedness and student learning is an essential aspect of this proposal. The Department of Education's American History Project offers an exciting opportunity for researchers to carefully evaluate the relative effectiveness of various kinds of interventions on teachers' professional development, their mastery of historical content, and student achievement.

**Primary Assessment:** Our evaluation plan is designed to assure accountability. An external evaluator will carefully monitor the implementation of the grant to ensure that participants follow the proposal's timetable, spend the money according to the proposed budget, and institute the programs that the grant describes.

**Secondary Assessment:** To evaluate the impact of the grant on teacher effectiveness and student learning, we will obtain data using standardized and non-standardized tests, checklists, questionnaires, interviews, portfolios, and performance assessments. Student

performance data will be statistically analyzed to determine the impact of our interventions on learning. Content analysis of questionnaires, on-site visits, and interviews will complement statistical analysis providing formative feedback for ongoing program improvement. Summary evaluation reports will include content analysis.

Both formative and summary evaluations will occur. Formative evaluations will provide ongoing information to help project participants make adjustments to better achieve our objectives. Summary evaluations will assess how the objectives are achieved at specific project intervals and over the life of the project.

To assess student performance, we will use TAAS, the state-mandated test measuring content mastery; and TEKS, the recently adopted student performance standard for the state curriculum. To evaluate professional development efforts, we will examine both short-term and long-term impact. All professional development activities will be evaluated by participants on a project-developed evaluation form designed to measure the effectiveness of each training session. Follow-up evaluations will be carried out by project staff through observations, checklists, and surveys to determine the impact of our professional development activities on teacher effectiveness and the transfer of information into the classroom.

**Sustainability:** One of our project goals is to create a critical mass of representatives within Region IV and a partnership with the University of Houston and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston that will maintain the momentum of the project and add to its sustainability after the grant period. We plan to do this in the following five ways: (1)

**Professional Development:** At the end of the grant period, sixty Region IV teachers will have participated in the Summer Institutes and monthly workshops; they will continue to

serve as a trained mentors within our school district. (2) **Creating Teaching Modules and Online Instructional Resources:** Each of the sixty teachers who participate in our Summer Institutes and workshops will have created teaching modules, led in-service workshops within their individual schools, and will be trained in the effective use of the online instructional resources we will create. They will serve as catalysts for innovation within their schools. (3) **Creating a Support System for History Teachers :** This project will create support mechanisms for teachers throughout the Region IV of which the most important will be a critical mass of trained mentors distributed across grade levels and schools. (4) **Creating Institutional Partnerships :** The partnerships forged during the grant period—between Region IV, the University of Houston, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston—are intended to persist after the grant ends. These partnerships will allow us to jointly apply for future grants and host professional development programs. (5) **Fostering the Next Generation of History Teachers :** The pre-service teachers and teacher education students who participate in this program and intern with a master teacher will be better prepared to enter actual classrooms after their training has concluded. They will be familiar with instructional technology, active, project-oriented learning, and ways to link local and national history.

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