Austin Hepp
Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)
“Foundations of a History Course”
Abstract

For incoming high school students, history education is commonly associated with limiting misconceptions that skew the potential of such courses. Students routinely perceive a history course as a collection of dull, dry facts and countless dates. If an instructor does not take the time to address these misconceptions, students enter their history courses without a fair appreciation for the value of a history course. This 24-minute film introduces students to the incredible potential of history education. By addressing topics such as historical perspectives, the connections between the past and the present, global interactions, history’s relevancy to all career paths, and entertaining approaches to history, students obtain a well-rounded understanding for what a history course offers. Nine different history instructors, ranging from junior high to high school to collegiate professors, reinforce the advantages of taking a history course. This film is grounded in the realization that history is first and foremost a story about people. Upon establishing this foundation, students become more aware of their personal connection with history. Designed to serve as an orientation video for students new to a high school history setting, *Foundations of a History Course* showcases how the principles of history education have a direct impact on students’ everyday lives. Addressing the foundations of a history course sparks students’ interest and excitement for their upcoming class. This film has been uploaded to the Internet for easy access and mass distribution throughout the education realm. *Foundations of a History Course* can be viewed at “foundationsofhistory.org”
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Chris Flook, instructor of Ball State Telecommunications, for advising me throughout this extensive process. His guidance, assistance, and insight made my thesis project what it is today. I am grateful for his enthusiasm and commitment to this project.

I would like to thank Brian Nash for his commitment to this thesis project. As my project partner, Brian showcased diligence and dedication for excellence in all aspects of production. His efficiency and reliability made this thesis a product that we are both extremely proud of.

I would like to thank Dr. Joe Misiewicz and the Ball State Telecommunications department for their support and generosity throughout this process. The department eagerly offered state of the art equipment and facilities to allow me to produce a high quality video production.

I would like to thank Dean James Ruebel and the Ball State Honors College for the opportunity to undergo this video production. Their openness to a creative project that reflects our academic studies is greatly appreciated.

I would like to thank Dr. Fritz Dolak for his insight and guidance in regards to copyright regulations when producing a documentary for educational purposes.
"Foundations of a History Course" Author’s Statement

For my culminating project at Ball State University, I undertook an honors thesis that showcased the skills and lessons I obtained throughout my time on campus. As a telecommunications student, I was anxious to produce a film that revealed the skills and techniques I had acquired over my past three years at Ball State. The Honors College provided me with an opportunity to fulfill this aspiration through Honors 499. When considering a project I wished to undertake, I evaluated the traits I had acquired in my studies. One major component of a video production student is the concept of collaboration. Both Ball State Telecommunications and the Honors College endorse the concept of expanding academic horizons by collaborating with individuals outside one’s field of studies. As a student who wishes to develop a career in video production, collaborating with others is a necessity when creating documentaries that require interviews on topics that may be foreign to me. As a result, I teamed up with fellow Honors College member Brian Nash for my honors thesis project. Upon extensive discussion with Brian, we developed a project that effectively fused our two majors. As a history education major, Brian had an extensive background on historical perspectives, as well as educational methods to teach such perspectives. At great lengths, we discussed potential project topics that could blend his education background and my telecommunications studies. Ultimately, we agreed upon producing a 24-minute film that instructed teenage students, primarily at the high school level, on the foundations of a history course.
The film itself exposed students to the value of a history course. Brian and I reflected upon our past studies and realized that teachers rarely took the time to address the overall value and benefits of taking a history course. Rather, teachers focused on distributing a syllabus and discussing the material that would be presented throughout the course. For students who were not readily engaged in history studies, their approach to class was often narrow minded and bleak. As referenced in the film by high school history instructor Gaye Garrett, many students possess the misconception that history is simply a dull, dry, and boring class full of books and people who died a long time ago. Without elaboration on the potential of a history course, many students are left with this interpretation. For that reason, Brian and I produced a film that could serve as an orientation-like video that could be shown on the first day of a history course. Such film would provide a through, comprehensive analysis of what a history course entailed. The film would entice, engage, and develop interest in a history course. At roughly 24 minutes in length, the film fits perfectly into any history course. Viewers are exposed to the foundations of history through video recorded interviews with nine different history instructors. This group of individuals included instructors ranging from the junior high level all the way through college history professors. The vast array of instructors provided viewers with diverse individuals at multiple levels of academia, yet all grounded in similar principles. These testimonials provided validation for claims that an instructor may make in their course. When nine different instructors at all levels of education endorse the same principles about a history course, students are more inclined to embrace such a lecture. Despite the primary target audience being students early in their high school careers, the diversity of the video made the content both relevant and effective for junior high and college level courses as well.
Upon proposing and confirming our thesis project, Brian and I set out to organize the content of the film. Extensive time was devoted to ensuring that the video guided teenagers through the necessary foundations of a history course. The biggest challenge encountered with such an approach was ensuring that the film related with young individuals. The film could not be bogged down with technical terminology or historical references that would not be readily accessible to youthful minds lacking a firm historical background. Therefore, we grounded our approach in our target audience and material they would actively respond to.

To begin the film, we chose to acknowledge some common misconceptions about a history course. One instructor, Gay Garrett, provided a candid imitation of a typical history student who was reluctant to take a history course. She parodied a teenager claiming that a history class was "boring." We chose this approach to ensure that from the first moment of the film, our young audience would relate and connect with the documentary. Had we taken on a more dry and rigid approach, students would not showcase the same response. In my telecommunications studies, my instructors consistently reinforced the reality that viewers today have very short attention spans. Therefore, filmmakers must connect and excite their viewers within the first minute, or arguably, the first frame of the video. I kept this principle in mind when editing together the introduction of the film. Other instructors then proceeded to address the myth that history classes were full of dates and facts with right or wrong answers. Such misconceptions have crippled the potential of history education. To combat this, the instructors quickly absolved any doubts about a history course by introducing the idea that history is a story about people, just like you and me. Infusing a sense of humanity allows the student to develop a connection with historical figures. The interview subjects honed in on the idea that history's
most iconic figures were flawed individuals who possessed traits similar to students. This revelation opened up the flood gates to a more optimistic approach to a history course.

Diving into the first main foundation of our film, we determined that "historical perspectives" would be an appropriate topic. This portion of the film denounced the common misconception that a history course consisted solely of dates, figures, and memorization. To combat this belief that a history course was black and white, the instructors addressed the realization that history is founded upon interpretations. Despite what television and the media may say about one issue being right or wrong, the reality is that somewhere in between lays a biased opinion. Interview subjects proceeded to encourage students to develop their own opinions. To do so, students must embrace the idea of questioning material presented to them. Once students recognize that history is founded upon opinions and interpretations, they are introduced to their potential in a classroom. With support from historical evidence, students have the potential to develop their own conclusions. Gaye Garrett provided an excellent example of perspectives in the film by creating a scenario about a fight breaking out in a cafeteria at school. She proceeded to address the reality that if a group of individuals were questioned about the event, different people would provide different accounts. Despite some overlapping similarities, variations would always emerge. This example provided teenage viewers with a tangible connection that they could relate to. Instead of using a historical event that occurred decades or centuries before their birth, Garrett founded her story in a relatable scenario that would spark the interest and attention of a young audience member. Brian and I agreed that this portion of the film should conclude with an explanation of primary sources. We felt that upon offering students the potential to develop their own conclusions, they would need to have the ammunition necessary to defend such conclusions. Therefore, the concept of
primary sources, which are artifacts produced in the time being studied, was an essential addition to the film. This conclusion provided viewers with the concept of taking original materials from a certain era and utilizing them to justify their reasoning in a course. Timothy Latimer, another interview subject and junior high history instructor, solidified this concept by admitting that teachers don’t have all the answers. Teachers have opinions and, therefore, students should have the right to form their own opinions. This revelation opens student’s eyes to their potential a classroom.

For the second portion of the film, we decided that we must address the relevancy between the past and the present. Feeding off of the previous foundation’s reveal of the potential of a history student, this portion also acknowledged the connection a student has with history education. The interview subjects recognized the opportunity to take past events and use them as reference when making decisions in the present day. If a student took the time to study an historical event such as Pearl Harbor or the Gettysburg Address, they could absorb the causes and effects of such event and modernize the principles in which such events were founded upon. We felt that this concept would create a sense of responsibility that history students would bear. In certain respects, this portion of the film was a “call to action” to enlist young minds who had the potential to make a positive impact on the world. Upon analysis of past conflicts, such as those in the Middle East, a student could develop a connection with historical events and the modern day conflicts that exist today. As children who grew up in times of war, such a statement would ring true to teenagers who were raised around the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Acknowledging the past provides history students with a well developed understanding of why global conflicts exist still today. Garrett provided another relatable example that addressed the evolution of technology over the past century. Students are hit with the reality that had it not
been for the strong emphasis on technological advancements over the past 100 years, students today would not have the iPods, cell phones, or computers that they worship today. This connection can fuel students’ drive towards further research and development in modern day advancements and technological progress. To bring this portion of the film full circle, Latimer acknowledged the necessity to recognize what historical figures, such as politicians, leaders, immigrants, and social classes had accomplished in the past to create the world that we live in today. Without an appreciation for the past, there is minimal potential for progress and productive expansion.

Another crucial foundation of a history course that we knew needed to be incorporated into the film was the concept of diversity. Junior high school instructor Adam Zoeller recognized the necessity for young minds to be opened up to the concept of a global picture. In the film, he acknowledged the “little spheres” that adolescents lived inside without an appreciation or understanding for people and places outside of their community. The interview subjects proceeded to elaborate on the necessity of this concept by applying diversity to global interaction. With networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, people from all over the globe become connected. To effectively communicate and interact with individuals from all over the world, people must develop an appreciation for different cultures. The instructors in the film embraced the idea of diversity and openness to other cultural lifestyles and practices. Without such willingness, society would not coexist in the manner that we do today. High school history instructor Chad Janney reinforced its necessity by addressing some of the darker times of American history where diversity was not embraced. For instance, he cited the Japanese internment camps form World War II where American citizens with Japanese heritage were forced to live in government supervised camps. Such activity was grounded in a
fear of foreign culture. Janney addressed the reality that if Americans had been grounded in a willingness to address diversity in a more logical sense, such internment could have been avoided. Although the internment camps existed decades before the intended audience was born, such a topic offers students the opportunity to take the oppression that Americans endorsed and re-evaluate current policies that exist in foreign affairs. Junior high history instructor Michael Fassold solidified the necessity to address diverse cultures by debunking the common American misconception that the world revolves around us. Once he exposed his class to the reality that other civilizations, such as the Chinese Dynasty, existed efficiently centuries before the emergence of this country, students became humbled in their perspective of our planet and its diverse inhabitants.

At this point in the filmmaking process, Brian and I realized a potential gap in the documentary. Reminiscing on my high school days of watching films in various classes, I often “tuned out” certain informative films when I recognized that the topics addressed did not apply directly to me. For instance, I watched films in science classes that were intended to excite interest in those pursuing a career in scientific studies. As a young individual who always knew I wanted to pursue a career in film, I often neglected the material presented in such films because I assumed that the material did not apply to my endeavors. Although such a mentality was shallow and self-absorbed, it is a shameful trait that many adolescent students possess. Therefore, Brian and I decided to devote one portion of the film to the benefits of a history course for every student, regardless of their future career choice. In doing this, students who may have “tuned out” the film due to their pursuit of a career in a different field would suddenly recognize that the film was addressing the very reason they were attempting to neglect it. To support the claim that history education is relevant to all future studies, doctor of history studies
Kevin Smith opened this portion of the film by simply stating “regardless of their career choice, that job has a history.” This revelation will hit students with an immediate reality check due to such a well articulated statement. In addition, multiple instructors mentioned the fact that to have an intelligent conversion about any political or social event, one must have a foundation in history. Janney even claimed that history was “the only adult topic you study in high school.” This claim was grounded in the idea that “water cooler” talk always revolves around current events, which is a by-product of history. Garrett connected the idea of diversity in history to the workforce by addressing the necessity to understand a foreign culture’s values when participating in global business affairs. In a modern society that revolves around global connectivity, diversity in every aspect of the business world is inevitable. Instructors also addressed the critical thinking skills that a history course instills in a student. As mentioned earlier in the film, all students must possess the ability to question statements and claims being tossed around in modern society. History courses provide students with the necessary tools to not only question an argument, but develop a personal stance that is grounded in evidence. This life skill is applicable to all professions and careers.

In one final attempt to connect with the young audience, Brian and I knew that we must debunk the myth that a history courses is limited to taking notes and filling in multiple choice bubbles for every exam. The instructors in the film abolish these narrow misconceptions by providing tangible examples of entertaining approaches to studying history. This section was intended to draw attention to the fact that history could be taught in a very engaging and hands-on approach. In a culture that embraces art and creativity, many instructors endorsed the acceptance of various forms of art as a means to show the absorption of a historical concept. Interview subjects also honed in on the openness to incorporating technology in the classroom.
Just as this video itself catered to the visual learning demands of modern education, history instructors often embraced the implementation of technology in showcasing the comprehension of a concept. Janney reinforced diverse teaching methods by providing the example of having his students break up into 13 “colonies” and try to agree upon a new addition to the cafeteria lunch room. When the entire class failed to make a consensus, Janney revealed the connection between their struggles and those of the Articles of Confederation. Ultimately, this segment of the film exposed students to the entertaining approaches that a history course can undergo when learning about an historical topic.

When considering the foundations addressed in the film, we decided to conclude the film with overarching themes and concepts that needed to be reinforced. Therefore, we re-introduced the necessity to question and develop personal conclusions on historical events. Also, instructors elaborated on the realization that the events occurring throughout current students’ lives, such as Hurricane Katrina, the war in Iraq, the inauguration of President Obama, and the current BP oil spill are all events that will be written into future history books. Ultimately, as Janney so eloquently put it, “they are living history right now.” The film concluded on the foundation that history is, at its core, a story about humanity. This final thought will permeate the growing minds viewing the film and spark a drive to use their potential to pave a way through history.

Beyond assessing the content of the film, I too must justify the logic of producing a film over other more traditional methods, such as an essay. As established by the history instructors in the film, students today respond well to visual images. A film provides a visual representation of a lecture that an instructor may otherwise undergo. The use of video offers the potential to sustain attention and focus for longer periods of time than stagnant oral presentation. Teenagers spend countless hours attached to electronic devices attached to their hip or nestled in their
bedrooms. In a technology-dependent society, it is only fitting to cater to the ever-evolving
demands of a culture. Therefore, I did not hesitate to conclude that a video production would be
the most effective means to attract the attention of our audience. Although older generations
may respond better to traditional lectures or literature, it would be ignorant to deny the fact that
young people connect with electronic means over any other communication tools. Such a film
embraced a changing communications standard and catered to the target audience. A literary
interpretation would not have been appropriate due to our target audience being teenagers.
Beyond the adaptation of modern social standards, the potential of film is endless. One of the
biggest advantages of producing a film is the ability to collect comments and input from
individuals from all over and bring them together in one convenient package. It would have
been impossible to coordinate the nine different instructor’s schedules to meet at one time and in
one place for a lecture. Therefore, film provided us the opportunity to visit the interview
subjects in their environment on their own schedule. Once we had collected the interviews, we
had gathered a diverse collection of professional insight that could not have occurred without
directly visiting these instructors. Although written essays offer the potential to quote and cite an
individual’s comments, a film provides a visual supplement of the subject’s input. In addition,
viewers develop a stronger connection with the subject. Viewers have the opportunity to
visually connect with the instructor and observe them in their element. We ensured that all
interview subjects were filmed in their academic environments. Such visuals validated their
existence and input on the project. Rather than provide a brief quote and “in text” citation, the
filmmaker can simply show the raw material of an instructor providing first hand commentary.
A visual representation of professionals in a thesis reinforces validity and offers a chance to
connect with the subject.
The use of video also provides an opportunity for a teacher to reinforce a point that they may address in class. A teacher may introduce their class with the same foundations of history that are incorporated in this film. For students who are reluctant or hesitant to "buy into" their claims, the teacher may then broadcast the film as a means of validation. When a student recognizes that a junior high teacher, high school teacher, doctor of history, and the teacher standing in the classroom all possess the same enthusiasm and commitment to history, they become more willing to embrace such values.

Another distinct and unique advantage of utilizing video for this thesis project is the ability to provide specific visual supplement to a lecture. For instance, this film was laced with an abundance of references to historical events and figures. With film, we were able to scour databases for historical images that supported such commentary. Therefore, when an instructor referenced the Japanese internment camps, the video proceeded to provide multiple still images from that event. Specific visual supplements offered students the ability to better connect with a concept. Brian and I ensured that the majority of the images incorporated included vivid accounts of people caught in the middle of a historical event. As a result, teenagers could imagine themselves in the shoes of those individuals. The still images provided a sense of humanity to the film, driving home the idea that history is a collection of stories about people not much different than you and me.

When acknowledging the potential of film, which can collect materials from all over the world and present them in one convenient package, one can begin to brainstorm the positive consequences of this artistic medium. One of the most striking advantages of producing a documentary that collects multiple perspectives and insight is the potential to spark discussion. As one of the foundations of the Honors College, I knew that a film that enticed discussion
would satisfy the principles of my academic studies. Upon viewing this film in a classroom, students will be enticed to ask their instructor about how such commentary relates to the class they are commencing. An instructor can use this film as a tool to ask students about their misconceptions about history and how the film may alter that perception. The film can also spark discussion over the opinions and varying perspectives that exist in history. Students may cite specific historical instances addressed in the film in hopes of expanding upon such controversial topics. Ultimately, this film provided the potential to serve as an “orientation” video on the first day of class and establish an icebreaker that can spark interest and discussion in the world of history.

From the standpoint of a telecommunications student, I feel confident that this project showcased the epitome of my academic studies at Ball State University. First, this opportunity provided me with the chance to highlight my hands-on experience as a video production student. I was granted access to high-definition equipment. With high-definition being an industry standard, this thesis project provided me with the opportunity to produce broadcast-ready material with visuals that rival that of professional television productions.

Another key element of telecommunications is the necessity to collaborate. As a filmmaker, I will spend my career interacting with individuals from all walks of life and different educational backgrounds. Therefore, my collaboration with my thesis partner Brian Nash supplied me with the opportunity to showcase my ability to team up with an individual with a different educational background and develop an effective final product. Beyond just interaction with Brian, I was also forced to work with nine other individuals specialized in history. A substantial amount of studies in my major revolved around proper etiquette and interaction with interview subjects on a film set. With nine different interviews and nine different camera setups,
I was put in a position to showcase my comfort and control in an intense work environment. My past experiences on a set prepared me for this massive video undertaking. In addition to the interview subjects, I also spent a great deal of time collaborating with academic professionals at Ball State. For instance, I teamed up with telecommunications instructor Chris Flook to serve as my thesis advisor. My willingness to accept critiques and insight was crucial in putting together the product that it is today. His expertise and experience in video production served as a vital tool in compiling such a time-intensive project. My other faculty interaction dealt with Dr. Fritz Dolak at Bracken Library. As a professional in copyright laws, Dr. Dolak provided valuable insight on fair use of copyrighted material and the appropriate means to cite such material. This sense of collaboration with over a dozen individuals proved to be a cornerstone of my work.

Ultimately, this project showcased my ability to execute the entire process of a video production. From initial inception to production to distribution, I exercised the entire film pipeline. I began with the necessary writing and revision process that created the blueprint of the project. Formulating effective questions proved to be a crucial aspect of the process. Once on the set, I was required to execute professional and efficient interviews in multiple venues. Upon loading the footage into a video editing program, I was left with arguably the most important aspect of video production, which was editing. The video editing process provided the opportunity to take hours of footage and organize the material into a coherent story. This process mirrored that of a traditional written essay. Collecting the footage was only half the battle. Actually compiling the footage into a logical pattern was the "make or break" stage of the process. After countless hours in an edit bay, we emerged with a 24-minute product with which we exude great pride.
To showcase and distribute our thesis project, we concluded that the most efficient and effective format was the internet. The internet provides an easy and cost-effective way to distribute our content on a massive scale. Millions of people all over the world are connected to the internet, with the educational world constantly expanding upon its incorporation into the classroom. As multiple instructors mentioned in the film, the internet is a great tool to reveal an abundance of valuable information. As a result, we felt that publishing our video onto a website was the most effective means to distribute our project. Such format reflected upon the current progressive times that society lives in. Ignoring the influence of the internet would have been neglecting the great potential of mass distribution. With a website that could be accessed 24 hours a day, 7 days week, screenings our film could occur at any time. With many classrooms wired to internet connectivity, classes could easily incorporate this film into the curriculum. For schools that do not provide internet access in classrooms, instructors can encourage students to visit the webpage when they return home. Students may take notes on the film, which they can bring back to class the next day for discussion.

The accessibility of this project through the internet can’t be rivaled in modern times. Distribution is cost effective that does not exceed the cost of hosting a webpage. With an established webpage and URL address, educators can share the film with others simply through email attachments. Such a process comes at no cost to the producers of the website or the educators distributing the webpage information. Uploading this film to a website offers limitless access. It provides the freedom and flexibility to showcase our work at any time of year, especially once fall classes commence. Publishing the film online acknowledges modern cultural practices and a cost-efficient society. We have made the film available to view at “foundationsofhistory.org”
This honors thesis process has been a demanding and time intensive process. As a result, this project has proven to be especially rewarding. I was forced to test my academic foundations and technical expertise. The element of collaboration emerged as the dominant driving force of the project. This project granted me the opportunity to interact with interesting and encouraging individuals from varying backgrounds. As a student, I was exposed to history education and the great potential that it possessed. This project instilled a better appreciation and understanding of such an educational environment. Now, as a soon-to-be college graduate, I can use this film to showcase my production talents, as well as my devotion to creating content that promotes education and personal development.
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(reprinted from the Thesis Guide, p.14)

As a member of the Honors College, you are required to complete a Senior Honors Thesis/Creative Project. This project permits you to build on your experiences throughout your college career and develop a unique product (paper or creative work). The project qualifies for three credits of HONRS 499 and is graded. For more specific information see the Senior Honors Thesis/Creative Project Guide.

The first step in undertaking an Honors project is to identify a topic and a BSU faculty member who will serve as your project advisor. If you need help developing your proposal, finding a topic, or identifying a project advisor, you are welcome to discuss possibilities with Dean James Ruebel, Associate Dean John Emert, or Honors Fellow Barbara Stedman. Alternatively, if you have already determined a topic and found an advisor, you may wish to bring this completed form with you for your thesis conference. At least one conference with Drs. Ruebel, Emert, or Stedman is a required part of the project process. Make your appointment for this conference by phoning the Honors College at 285-1024.

Note: You and your advisor must sign the proposal coversheet before turning in the proposal to the Honors College. Honors College approval will not be given until both signatures are received.

Fill out the blue Honors project proposal sheet and turn it in to the Honors College. Project proposals will not be accepted without the blue cover sheet. Be sure to answer all of the questions below. Write clearly and concisely. Explain all abbreviations and technical terminology. Correct spelling and grammar are essential. The proposal should be error-free.

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      i. If not a standard, research thesis, indicate the scope of your author's statement.

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