



The Importance of Looking at Rocks: The Value of a CCHA/NEH Summer Institute in Teaching and Learning

by Antonio E. Acevedo

There appears to be an educational dichotomy that leaves the community college professor in a bind. On the one hand, it is increasingly expected (and rightly so) that in addition to content knowledge, educators teach students the critical-thinking skills inherent to each discipline. It has even been recently stated by Dan Berrett in a *Chronicle of Higher Education* cover story that “skills have become the new canon.”¹ And research has shown that educators who seek to teach these critical-thinking skills benefit from intensive professional development. On the other hand, faculty workload, financial cost, and lack of compensation have all been cited

as barriers to effective professional development opportunities for community college educators.² So where will the educators themselves find ample time, funding, and opportunity to practice their skills in “doing the discipline,” the very skills that are now deemed *canonical* in teaching? This article will draw heavily upon my participation in the CCHA’s and NEH’s “The Legacy of Ancient Italy: Etruscans and Early Rome” Summer Institute (2015) to show that such professional development opportunities – steeped as they are in collegial collaboration, evidence-based inquiry, and rigorous analytical study – are invaluable resources toward these ends.

¹ Dan Berrett, “The New Canon,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 62, no. 30 (April 8, 2016): A24.

² Althea Smith, “Professional Development Issues for Community Colleges” *Peer Review* 9, no. 4 (2007): 25.

³ Dan Berrett, “The New Canon,” A24.

⁴ *Ibid.*, A25.

⁵ See Lendol Calder, “Uncoverage: Toward a Signature Pedagogy for the History Survey,” *Journal of American History* 92, no. 4 (March 2006): 1358-1370; Joel M. Sipress and David J. Voelker, “The End of the History Survey Course: The Rise and Fall of the Coverage Model,” *The Journal of American History* 97, no. 4 (March 2011): 1050-1066; David J. Voelker, “Assessing Student Understanding in Introductory Courses: A

In his article, Berrett states that “just about everyone – administrators, students, parents, employers, policy makers, and most professors – has accepted the notion that broad, transferrable skills are the desired product of college.”³ These skills include analytical and critical-thinking that put “evidence at the forefront, exploring how a discipline defines, uses, and evaluates it.”⁴ This trend is true enough, as history education, for example, over the past fifteen years has seen a large body of scholarship devoted to helping students “think like historians,” where they analyze original sources, learn how to marshal and interpret evidence, examine rival claims, and synthesize disparate accounts of information by producing historical arguments.⁵ Will they become *experts* in this craft, especially in introductory courses? By no means, as historical thinking is really an “unnatural act” that professionals learn over time.⁶ But the hope is that students will at least understand historical inquiry as a process, and that as informed citizens they will gain skills that will help them value the role of evidence in supporting claims.

NEH Summer Seminars and Institutes are important resources for helping educators develop and implement such learning. They allow a wide range of educators from diverse backgrounds – pre-college, post-secondary, and full-time and part-time faculty alike – the opportunity and funding to participate in intensive learning environments that will build their skills while inspiring and improving their teaching.

This is a critical moment to discuss the value of the NEH Summer programs, as their merits have been questioned recently and their funding put in jeopardy. They focus on a humanities topic and last between one-to-four weeks (previously two-to-five) over the summer, usually held at universities, and organized and administered by distinguished faculty. NEH Seminars accept 15 school, college, and university faculty with the emphasis on intellectual enrichment, while Institutes accept 25-30 school, college, and university faculty with the emphasis on discussion and projects. In addition, there are five-day Landmarks of American History and Culture Workshops for School Teachers. Among the programs’ goals are to “provide models of excellent teaching; provide models of excellent scholarship; broaden and deepen understanding

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of the humanities,” and “build communities of inquiry.”⁷ Yet in 2013 and 2014, U.S. Senator Jeff Sessions (R-AL) sent a series of letters to the acting Chairwoman of the NEH, Dr. Carol Watson, questioning the appropriateness and financial viability of various programs, specifically calling the Summer Seminars “free vacations” of “randomly selected” participants that do not have “any comprehensive, systemic impact.”⁸

Sample Strategy,” *History Teacher* vol. 41, no. 4 (2008): 505-518; Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

⁶ See Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*.

⁷ National Endowment for the Humanities, “NEH Summer Seminars and Institutes,” <http://www.neh.gov/grants/education/summer-seminars-and-institutes>

⁸ Jeff Sessions, April 10, 2014, “Sessions Questions National Endowment For The Humanities Over Dubious Expenditures,” <http://www.sessions.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/news-releases?ID=DAED67C0-6CED-4464-8D33-50CA49C1471E>

Regrettably, as of 2015, it appears the NEH is no longer offering overseas institutes.⁹

Far from a “free vacation,” the “Legacy of Ancient Italy” Summer Institute (or as one friend jokingly called it: “one month of looking at rocks”) was an intensive program of study that has enriched my teaching in many ways, including promoting evidence-based learning in my classes. The Institute allowed 23 faculty members and 2 graduate students from across the U.S. to spend over three weeks at various sites throughout Switzerland and Italy engaged in in-depth study of Etruscan and early Roman history, paying special attention to themes such as gender, urbanization, identity, religion, the environment, and the complexities of historical evidence. Because the Etruscans have left behind very little literary evidence themselves, a major element of the Institute was archaeological evidence and the interpretation of material culture. The Institute’s schedule included individual readings of current scholarship in the evenings, intensive seminars throughout the mornings (and sometimes follow-up seminars in the afternoons), and site visits – usually excavations or museums – in the afternoons. If there was free time between site visits and dinner, scholars could embark on sightseeing, but the rigorous (and valuable) reading schedule allowed for only so much time to explore. Much like one participant in an NEH Summer Seminar on African Literature remarked, “these sessions were exhausting and at the same time exhilarating.”¹⁰ The Institute was led by accomplished Etruscologists P. Gregory Warden and Gretchen Meyers, with several visiting scholars interspersed to give lectures at various historic sites and museums.

The Value of the “Legacy of Ancient Italy” Institute for the Educator

First, the Institute lent itself wonderfully to evidence-based thinking, the type so valued in Berrett’s article. In the job interview for my current position, I did a teaching demonstration on cultural and gender diversity in the ancient Greek *poleis*. I thought the interview was going quite well and that I was ready for all follow-up questions until one of my colleagues, a Fulbright Scholar and sociology professor, calmly asked, “How do we know that any of this is true?” Not expecting that question, I rattled off all I could about primary evidence, historical critical analysis, archaeological remains, and scholarly debates before recommending Lynne Hunt, Joyce Appleby, and Margaret Jacob’s book, *Telling the Truth About History*.¹¹ Not bad. But the only problem was that before “The Legacy of Ancient Italy” Institute, I had never actually seen a lot of the material evidence to which I alluded.

The “Legacy of Ancient Italy” changed this from the start, as our initial seminar began with the following question: “do objects speak?” Having studied ancient history in graduate school, I was naturally familiar with analyzing classical primary sources and sourcing them to understand their provenance, intended audience, original meaning, social context, and inherent biases. But I was relatively unfamiliar with applying these same methods to material culture. For example, I had seen bronze masterworks such as the Chimaera of Arezzo in books but had never engaged in a debate about their provenance, and then analyzed them in person, as I was able to do in the Summer Institute. Rather than merely “appreciate” such masterworks as tourists on

⁹ For more on the discontinuation of the overseas seminars, see David Perry, “Save the Overseas Seminars,” *Chronicle Vitae* (blog), October 16, 2014. <https://chroniclevitae.com/news/761-save-the-overseas-seminars>

¹⁰ Richard A. Broan, Kate Pezanowski, and Jill VanHimbergen, “The High Point of My Professional Development: An NEH Seminar on Africa,” *English Journal* (September 2008): 69.

vacation, the Institute scholars were first assigned to read current scholarly articles where specialists debated the provenance of such works. Then after reading these articles, we visited the Florence National Archaeological Museum, where its Deputy Director and Archaeological Inspector gave us an in-depth tour of the museum and

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where we got to see the Chimaera for ourselves. Examining the statue in person – especially by getting an up-close look at its Etruscan inscription and taking photos from multiple angles – illuminated the scholarship in ways that would not otherwise have been possible. This in-depth and experiential learning brought to the surface wide-ranging questions in my mind. What is revealed by the fact that the Chimaera as a creature was made famous in Greek mythology, but that this bronze piece was discovered in Etruria and bears a dedicatory Etruscan inscription? What happens, as one article asked, when we compare the piece with smaller Etruscan bronzes?¹² And what do these questions say about the interactions between ancient Greek colonists around the Mediterranean and the cultures they encountered? The ability to ask and attempt to answer these types of questions are central to developing critical-thinking skills in the classroom.

This experiential learning that combined up-to-date scholarship, intensive seminars, and site visits did not begin or end with the Chimaera; it was the daily pattern for most of the nearly four weeks of the Institute, and with each article and exhibit, I learned more about material evidence and its wider implications. Before the Institute,

I had not yet fully understood, say, the importance of grave goods such as fibulas (kinds of safety pins) or engraved mirrors in determining questions of identity and literacy among ancient women. I did not yet understand the complexities of economic exchanges in ancient Italy as fully as I did when I realized that the Etruscans rarely used their own

coins – something I only considered upon going to several Etruscan museums and asking, “where are all the Etruscan coins?” I might have mentioned something in my interview about stratigraphy, but I had not yet examined up close intricate stratigraphic complexes such as those of ancient Etruscan and Roman ruins at Sant’Andrea in Orvieto or Sant’Omobono in Rome (both led by visiting scholars). Until I examined the reciprocal influences of various Mediterranean societies in Etruscan archaeological sites, I did not understand the trouble with terms such as “Romanization” or “Hellenization,” terms that often imply a sense of one-sidedness. And I never thought to ask the most essential of questions until it sprang up in one of our seminar discussions: if a Greek potter made an Athenian-styled vase in Etruria, but it was commissioned by an Etruscan noble – what type of vase was it? Oh, if only I had been asked that interview question after having attended the Institute!

¹¹ Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2011).

¹² See P. Gregory Warden, “The Chimaera of Arezzo: Made in Etruria?,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 115 (2011): 1-5.

The value of working hands-on with evidence in an atmosphere that helps recreate one's subject of study is not limited to archaeologically centered NEH Seminars and Institutes such as "The Legacy of Ancient Italy." Participants at other NEH programs have reported the same sentiments. After an NEH Landmarks of American History and Culture five-day workshop on "Shaping the Constitution: A View from Mt. Vernon, 1783-1789," participants visited George Washington's burial site at Mr. Vernon. Upon seeing the Civil War-era markings carved by decorated Union officer Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain on the bricks near Washington's tomb, one participant said, "Interacting with such small details firsthand, like graffiti scribbled 150 years ago by the hand of a significant historical figure, brings this story to life in a way that textbooks never can."¹³ Similarly, a 2012 NEH Seminar on Roman comedy sought to re-create the ancient stage environment, combining scholarship and workshops while emphasizing performance and incorporating ancient-styled masks and costumes. One participant remarked, "After learning so much from visiting experts and each other, the co-directors and participants in the NEH Institute are even more convinced that Roman comedy makes little sense without the dimension of performance."¹⁴

Beyond the benefit of helping educators engage in the type of evidence-based learning that many aim to teach, the collaborative nature of NEH Institutes has also proven quite valuable. The "Legacy of Ancient Italy" Institute was no exception, as colleagues from various disciplines were able to lend their expertise in filling in some

gaps in my historical knowledge. All history, but especially ancient history, is fragmentary. The historian, of course, does not know everything that ever happened and must rely on evidence, evidence which is often limited for the ancient world and which must be filtered through the lenses of memory. Then in the humanities and social sciences we often tuck ourselves so deeply into our disciplinary niches so as to lose out on the benefits of interdisciplinary exchange that might fill in such gaps. As Fernand Braudel elegantly stated, "With varying degrees of clear-sightedness, all the sciences are preoccupied with their own position in the whole monstrous agglomeration of the past and present researches, researches whose necessary convergence can now clearly be seen."¹⁵

The "Legacy of Ancient Italy" Institute brought this *convergence* to life. Its 25 summer scholars held interests and specializations that ran widely across the academic spectrum. There were only two who worked in history, strictly speaking. The rest came from classics, philosophy,

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archaeology, visual arts, language, art history, literature, and even film departments. This proved incredibly useful when, at the National Archaeological Museum, an art historian colleague gave me a personalized lecture about red-figure pottery; when, at Marzabotto (an Etruscan archaeological complex outside of Bologna), an archaeologist colleague explained the intricacies of field surveys and shovel testing; when, at the Florence National Archaeological Museum,

¹³ Travis Pantin, "Summer Programs Offer Great Ideas for Teachers," *Phi Delta Kappan* 88, no. 5 (January 1, 2007): 375.

¹⁴ Sharon L. James, Timothy J. Moore, and Meredith Safran, "The 2012 NEH Summer Institute on Roman Comedy in Performance: Genesis and Reflections," *The Classical Journal* 111, no. 1 (2015): 4.

a classicist colleague clarified an Etruscan inscription; when a sculptor colleague explained how the colossal bronze head of Constantine at the Capitoline Museum in Rome might have originally been cast; and, when at dinner, I worked up the gall to ask an extremely bright and friendly Renaissance art historian, “How much time do I *really* need to spend teaching the Renaissance in a history survey course?”

Others have likewise been quick to point out the value of collaboration with colleagues in NEH Institutes and Seminars. One educator who participated in several NEH Seminars both domestically and abroad over a 13-year span remarked, “While the settings of these seminars were exciting and culturally enriching . . . it was the conversations with colleagues in these seminars that enlightened me and provided the professional rejuvenation I sought as a classroom teacher. . . . I was able to pick the brains of my colleagues and run ideas past teachers with significantly more experience than I had at the time. I could do it in a neutral setting without the sense that I might be under evaluation. . . .”¹⁶ The diversity of disciplines represented in “The Legacy of Ancient Italy” also made these discussions less intimidating than would have been the case with a cohort of 25 scholars all in the same field. Each scholar had his or her own area of expertise, be it in teaching or content knowledge, and they all proved valuable at various points in the Institute. Yes, at times exchanges were contentious, but in collegial ways of course, as when after weeks of intensive study several scholars sat around a dinner table and fiercely debated the meaning of “civilization” and the question of whether the Etruscans had a proper literature. This revealed the passion for the subject matter that had developed among



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the summer scholars as part of this professional development opportunity (or, perhaps more realistically, may have been the result of nearly four weeks of hotel beds, shared dormitories, and egg-less breakfasts halfway across the world).

In this way, immersive professional development programs such as “The Legacy of Ancient Italy” Institute – through intensive study, analysis of evidence, and collaboration among colleagues – are perfect opportunities to foster in participants the types of skills and that are now so valued in the curricula. Teaching disciplinary-thinking skills is not easy, and educators should be supported in their efforts. In his article, “Building a Culture of Evidence Through Professional Development,” Stephen Mucher notes as much with regard to history education in k-12 classrooms, stating:

Research on teaching and learning history suggests that the implementation and practice of historical thinking in the classroom has been rare. Using and teaching historical thinking places significant demands on teachers and requires ongoing support for students. It demands that teachers engage in practices that go against the grain of

¹⁵ Fernand Braudel, *On History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 25.

¹⁶ Steven T. Bickmore, “NEH Seminars: Collaborative Communities for Professional Development,” *English Journal* (2005): 40.

conventional schooling. Historical thinking demands risk and patience, and this being true, we must ask how we can support teachers who are inspired to take these risks.¹⁷

One 2011 study sheds light on this concept. Educational curriculum specialists Mimi Lee and Mimi Coughlin published a study in *The History Teacher* assessing the impact of a ten-day summer institute, similar to “The Legacy of Ancient Italy” Institute (although not overseas), on the development of twenty-six history teachers’ own critical-thinking skills. Much like the emphasis on interpreting evidence in “The Legacy of Ancient Italy,” they focused specifically on teachers’ ability to explain the context and historical significance of primary sources in American history, based thematically on Civil War-era race relations. The authors state:

The emphasis on historical thinking skills aligns well with current reform efforts in history education, supporting classroom practices in which teachers move away from memorization and recitation of facts toward the active use of critical thinking skills. To successfully implement these reform initiatives, teachers need facility with the tools of history so they can lead students in authentic and rigorous historical inquiry.¹⁸

As with NEH Institutes, the participants engaged in lectures, discussions, and collaborative

projects. They were all asked to do pre-and post-tests in which they were to explain the historical significance of an 1852 speech by Frederick Douglass. “Significance” in this case was defined by its impact on a large number of people for an extended period of time, including its impact on the present.¹⁹ Teachers were assessed on their ability to analyze multiple perspectives, draw connections to other historical phenomena, and make an “intellectually solid and rigorous argument,” all of which make up the types of skills that have been increasingly emphasized in pedagogy.²⁰

The hope is that students will develop the habit of demanding evidence for all claims.

For brevity’s sake, I will not repeat the fine details of their study, but Lee and Coughlin’s results are quite telling. The institute did not specifically teach how to determine historical significance, but the authors saw considerable development in this area among the educators:

The post-comments were also more closely related to “doing history,” displaying teachers’ willingness to accept uncertainties rather than their need to find *the* answer. The findings suggest that teachers can develop the skills associated with making claims about the historical significance of a given primary source. It is worth noting that teachers demonstrated improvement in this task following intensive professional development which was intended

¹⁷ Stephen Mucher, “Building a Culture of Evidence through Professional Development,” *History Teacher* 40, no. 2 (2007): 268-269.

¹⁸ Mimi Lee and Mimi Coughlin, “Developing Teachers’ Ability to Make Claims about Historical Significance: A Promising Practice from a Teaching American History Grant Program,” *The History Teacher* 44, no. 3 (May 2011): 448.

to increase their content knowledge and historical thinking skills in general. The summer institute did not explicitly include materials or activities that addressed making claims about historical significance. The historians and educators involved with leading the content sections of the summer institute were not aware of the specific primary sources or prompts that were used in the pre- and post-tests. . . . This study suggests that focusing on content and skills is a promising approach to strengthening teachers' ability to make well-grounded decisions related to framing particular content in terms of its historical significance. . . . The lens of historical significance may prove to be a powerful tool for making sense of myriad curricular directives that teachers receive and for effectively navigating large amounts of required content.²¹

“Doing the discipline” will be all the more vibrant in the classes of the practitioners if the practitioners themselves are provided such opportunities to engage in the disciplinary process. For this reason, the NEH Summer Institutes are especially worthwhile programs.

The Value of the “Legacy of Ancient Italy” Institute in Teaching

The Institute has also helped inform my class discussions on the nature of evidence and the basis of historical knowledge. Because students sometimes get the idea that written evidence is the only type of historical evidence, I have

traditionally attempted to widen my students' perspectives on the matter by explaining the types of discoveries scholars can make at excavation sites. Yet I had never previously been to an excavation site, which limited my understanding of the topic. But the Institute provided a wonderful opportunity to use my experiences at the aforementioned ancient Etruscan and Roman stratigraphic complexes at Sant'Andrea in Orvieto and Sant'Omobono in Rome to provide a more nuanced explanation of the discoveries and challenges of such sites. First, I use the photographs I took at each site to show students how layers have been built upon layers over time, as both sites were uncovered in the 20th Century and both lay underneath or next to medieval churches. Then, I explain to my students the objects that scholars have found at such sites, and what those objects can tell us about the original buildings. For instance, I share an excerpt from an article that states: “Remains of wood, animal bones, fruits or grain from S. Omobono in Rome suggest sacrifices as well as ritual meals.”²² Students tend to have an “oh, that makes sense” type of reaction. Finally, I briefly discuss the challenges faced by archaeologists at each site, how Sant'Andrea has had few of the excavation reports published and how Sant'Omobono, though likely the site of Rome's oldest temples, is subject to major groundwater seepage from the nearby Tiber River, making excavations of the foundation very problematic and expensive.

While students do not become junior archaeologists all at once, the point is that they at least get a sense of evidence, what it can tell us, and the challenges of interpreting it. The hope is that students will develop the habit of demanding evidence for all claims. Brief exercises such as

¹⁹ Ibid., 451.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 458.

²² Ingrid Edlund Berry, “Temples and the Etruscan Way of Religion,” in *From the Temple and the Tomb: Etruscan Treasures from Tuscany*. P. Gregory Warden, ed. (Dallas: Meadows Museum, SMU, 2009), 65.

these also help students understand that history is not fixed; it is a process of discovery. Because my most popular class, Western Civilizations I, spends so much time in the Paleolithic, ancient, and medieval eras, where we lack the written evidence so widely available in the early modern and modern eras, it has proven quite beneficial that the Institute allowed me to get “hands-on” with archaeological evidence in this way. And I do mean “hands-on” literally, for one of our visiting instructors actually passed around a fragment of bucchero pottery for the summer scholars to feel while we visited the ongoing excavation of Poggio Civitate at Murlo, Italy, where we were also allowed to visit an archaeological restoration laboratory.



Flavian corridor

Another benefit of the Institute in my teaching is that it has allowed me utilize a plethora of visual images that serve to highlight or “bring to life” context and historical change. In an article on innovative teaching practices for history courses at community colleges entitled, “Discovering History at the Community College,” Emily Sohmer Tai, a Harvard-trained professor at Queensborough Community College in New

York City, emphasizes the value of utilizing images, places, and walking tours as “strategies to enhance student perception of the fourth dimension—time—in introductory surveys.”²³ The Institute visit to the archaeological zone at Fiesole, near Florence, Italy, allowed me to do all three for my Western Civilizations I class. After assigning reading assignments related to Roman history and the Etruscan heritage, I lectured about daily life, religion, and entertainment in the Roman world before analyzing primary source excerpts with the class. Then, with the flurry of photos I had taken at the Fiesole archaeological zone, I virtually walked my students up and down the steps of an Etruscan temple, past an Etruscan altar, through a Roman bath complex, and finally to a Roman theater – all within mere steps from one another! Sounds of, “Hey, those baths are just how it was described by the primary source [Lucian],” or “How did they keep the baths warm? And who built them?” have been raised as a result of utilizing the photographs. Images from inside painted tombs at Tarquinia or others of a virtual walk around the corridors of the Flavian Amphitheater (Roman Coliseum) have likewise helped bring the ancient world to life in my classes. The students could have learned the content without these images, of course. But images, especially when combined with primary and secondary source analysis, relevant lecture, and class discussion, can give students a sense of *this actually happened somewhere and this professor was actually there to see it*. As Tai argues, “For many students, the image—accessible through media and recreational computer use—has become far more familiar and comfortable as a source of information than the word. Images can enable students to, in Peter Burke’s (2001) phrase, ‘imagine’ the past more vividly,’ proving

²³ Emily Sohmer Tai, “Discovering History at the Community College,” *New Directions for Community Colleges*, no 163 (November 2013): 53.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 53. For more on “The 5 C’s of Historical Thinking,” see Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke, “What Does It Mean to Think Historically?” *Perspectives*

particularly useful as a means to invite students to appreciate . . . the five Cs of historical thinking,” (change over time, context, causality, complexity, and contingency).²⁴

The Institute has also inspired me to provide students with opportunities outside of class to think critically about evidence. One participant in the NEH Seminar entitled “Chaucer’s Canterbury Comedies” held in Canterbury, England stated: “My immediate thought, of course, was to bring all of my students to England, but that quixotic idea was quickly discarded. Instead, I realized that it was my responsibility to bring some of England to them. . . .”²⁵ Similarly, while I could not take my students to Italy – much to their dismay – upon returning from the Institute I wanted to create an opportunity for them to utilize the world-class resources at our disposal in New York City, since my institution in Jersey City sits just 10 minutes from Lower Manhattan via the PATH Train. Several of my students have indicated that they rarely venture across the Hudson River, and many have never been to the Museum of Natural History or the Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Met). While I normally avoid extra-credit, I allowed students to earn a few extra-credit points or replace a low quiz score by visiting The Met and writing a response based on the following directions: (a) visit an exhibition at the Met directly related to one of the major topics covered in class, (b) find three pieces of “evidence” (artifacts) that you find most interesting, (c) explain the provenance of the artifacts and what they can tell you about the society that produced them. The Met’s “suggested donation” policy made this activity cost-effective. To prevent academic dishonesty, students were required to

upload their assignments to SafeAssign, an anti-plagiarism software, and bring a hard copy of their response to class with their admission ticket attached.

I was delighted by the responses of the students who took me up on the offer. One student, a male returning student in his early thirties, went with his mother and indicated he had never been to the museum, but offered the following:

The Institute has also inspired me to provide students with opportunities outside of class to think critically about evidence.

When I set out to the Metropolitan Museum in New York I did not expect to have as much fun as I did, nor did I expect to be there for over six hours. The Metropolitan has a vast collection and some of the most unique artifacts I can ever remember seeing at a museum. From the Greek and Roman art, to the sarcophaguses from Roman and Egyptian lands, it even has a reconstructed pyramid, and I didn't even get to experience more than half of the artifacts. The student showed considerable enthusiasm throughout his report. He analyzed a bronze Etruscan chariot, a Roman marble sarcophagus lid, and:

The next piece that stuck out to me was that of a bronze cista, (yes I said cista) a toiletry box. . . . It is said to be from [Praeneste] between 350 to 325 B.C. . . . I sat for about fifteen to twenty minutes trying to decipher the artistry and imagine how long it took to engrave

45 (January 2007) <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2007/0701/0701tea2.cfm>

²⁵ Richard A. Broan, Kate Pezanowski, and Jill VanHimbergen, “How I Spent My Summer Vacation,” 68.

something so beautiful thousands of years ago. The vividness of what looks to be tapestry like [sic] engraving around the cylinder and on the top looked effortless.

After explaining his interpretation of the artifact and its significance, he finished: “Although I came to the museum for extra credit I left with a vast amount of knowledge, way more than I expected. . . . Out of the many floors and corridors I could visit I literally only got to the first floor and the mezzanine. I am looking forward to going back.” Another student, a female in her early twenties, while also enthusiastic about her experience noted disappointment in the Egyptian statues of *Merti and His Wife* (c. 2350 BCE). She wondered why, if Egyptian women had a relatively elevated social status (compared to, say, women in Periclean Athens), “why isn’t her [Merti’s wife] name mentioned?” There were certainly a few misinterpretations in some of the reports, but overall the students seemed to enjoy spending time outside of class independently engaged in historical thinking – no small victory!

Conclusion: The Importance of Professional Development

Professional development opportunities such as NEH Summer Seminars and Institutes are especially valuable for community college educators, whose time committed to teaching can leave few opportunities for the type of intensive study that helps sharpen and foster the teaching of disciplinary skills. Also impacting community colleges is the fact that, according to the Center

for Community College Student Engagement, 58% of community college classes are taught by adjunct faculty, many of whom travel between multiple schools, lack benefits, receive low pay, teach heavy course loads to make ends meet, and are not ordinarily exposed to opportunities for professional development like their full-time colleagues, especially in terms of “doing the discipline.”²⁶ The NEH understands this problem, and has recently made a change for the better. As of 2015, “seminars for college and university faculty must now include three or more non-tenure-track/adjunct faculty members; institutes for college and university faculty must now include five or more non-tenure-track/adjunct faculty members.”²⁷ In a 2010 comprehensive and critical review of academic and policy research entitled, “Challenges and Opportunities for Improving Community College Student Success,” Sara Goldrick-Rab illustrates the challenges faced by community college professors who seek meaningful professional development. She states:

Although research has linked levels of instruction spending to community college outcomes, community colleges often lack the resources to support innovative practices or to fund the developmental costs for new and innovative teaching approaches . . . Compared with professors at 4-year institutions, whose salaries include pay for time spent on activities other than teaching, community college professors have little incentive to invest in their own professional development or

²⁶ Center for Community College Student Engagement (2014), *Contingent Commitments: Bringing Part-Time Faculty Into Focus*: 2. ²⁷ National Endowment for the Humanities, “NEH Summer Seminars and Institutes,” <http://www.neh.gov/grants/education/summer-seminars-and-institutes> ²⁸ Sara Goldrick-Rab, “Challenges and Opportunities for Improving Community College Student Success,” *Review of Educational Research* 80, no. 3 (September 2010): 449.

spend their scarce time learning how to effectively use new technology. . . . Unfortunately, at many community colleges the most common forms of professional development are the kinds of one-time workshops that research shows are ineffective.²⁸

If there is to be an emphasis on teaching skills and not just content mastery, professional development opportunities for intensive and analytical inquiry such as the NEH Institutes are essential to ensure that faculty across the disciplines, both part- and full-time, are able to refine their skills as scholars and educators.

Further, in the introductory survey courses mostly taught at community colleges, the vast amount of content to be covered can leave little time for building disciplinary skills if educators do not make evidence-based learning a priority in the classroom. This is especially important for history instructors because many of their students are taking their first – and perhaps only – college-level history class. Yet first-year students frequently enter these classes with little sense of history as an investigative and interpretive process that relies upon evidence. Elizabeth Belanger recently published a two-year survey of first-year students' learning experiences in history classes, where she found that many of them saw history as *fixed*, and the job of the historian as simply communicating the facts. Over half the students reported that in their previous history education they had “examined original historical sources ‘never or sometimes,’ while only 25% or them used primary sources ‘very often.’”²⁹ While Belanger's study was conducted

at a 4-year liberal arts college, I have found the same to be true in the introductory courses at my institution, a two-year college. Because, according to the U.S. Department of Education, nearly half of the postsecondary students in the U.S. complete part or all of their general history requirements at a community college, the call for more opportunities for intensive, evidence-based professional development is crucial if instructors are to teach these skills to their students.³⁰

It is my hope that the value of NEH Summer Seminars and Institutes, especially in relation to the increasing emphasis on teaching disciplinary skills, has been thoroughly demonstrated in this article. These intensive professional development opportunities can be hard work – far from a “paid vacation” – but their emphasis on evidence, collaboration, experiential learning, and critical-thinking make them invaluable tools for educators at all levels. Their importance cannot be overstated.

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²⁹ Elizabeth Belanger, “Bridging the Understanding Gap: An Approach to Teaching First-Year Students How to “Do” History,” *The History Teacher* 49, no. 1 (November 2015): 39-40. ³⁰ US Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2005, quoted in Emily Sohmer Tai, “Discovering History at the Community College,” 51.

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