

Classroom Contract , not so much stated as practiced

No attendance will be taken. All students are responsible for their own learning. The Professor will lose no sleep over whether you fail or succeed. Either fate rests with the student's own motivation to learn and do history.

If you exhibit non-caring—you will be told to leave. No sleeping or inattentiveness is allowed. Besides being rude, sleeping or inattentiveness is pointless. Stay home, get some rest; nobody cares or is taking note. Learning is not an obligation to be endured or faked but a right and a privilege to be exercised.

That said, the professor must care too. Although being dull is often unavoidable and a special gift of this particular professor, I promise not to go out of my way to boor you to death. I agree to try to make learning and history somewhat interesting, fun, relevant, honest, and meaningful. You have to help me.

The professor will not use the symbolic trappings of intellectual authority. He will not condescend to the students by walling himself off behind a podium. We all will be humble learners. The professor will not pretend to know everything, nor will he pretend that he is imparting "The Only Truth" of history. The old adage applies to the professor as much as to the student: "the more we know, the more we realize what more there is to learn." In fact, I encourage students to question my interpretation of history and feel absolutely free to add what they too have to teach.

Students are encouraged to interrupt the professor. Any chance for a dialogue will be welcomed. If you do not understand the professor's specific details or meaning—or simply disagree—feel free to immediately throw up your hand.

We will celebrate stupidity in ourselves! Fear of stupidity destroys classroom participation and the entire learning process. No one will be allowed to think of themselves—or be made to feel—"stupid." We will differ with one another and about history as equals with utmost intellectual and academic manners. We can all explore and test ideas—even experiment with controversial opinions—in an environment free from judgements of "right and wrong."

Multiple interpretations of the past will be allowed. There is no absolute, objective truth to history. History is interpretive. There is no such thing as retrieving whole and pure "the past that actually was." We all have reasonable perspectival views of the past. There is no "right history." All we expect is that our reading of the past will be a considered interpretation based on past primary document evidence, not mere opinion that only reflects our present bias.

We will all state our biases up front. Bias is unavoidable. We all have an elaborate and detailed understanding of how the world works and should work. We try to be impartial and objective when revisiting the past, but we are all products of our time and personal experience. When giving our interpretations of history, we will admit that our prejudices color how we understand the past, the future, the present. The more we recognize our present conceptual limitations, the more we will arrive at an honest reading of the past.

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