

Factors of Change in Modern Europe: A Practical Way to Teach Contemporary History

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Abstract

For roughly one thousand years, Western European society was characteristically fractured, static, and bellicose. An obvious solution to any problem was to make war on another European. Contemporary Europe (since the end of WWII), by contrast, is relatively unified, dynamic, and peaceful. While WWI, WWII, and the inter-war period were an obvious trigger or turning point, the causes of this astonishing transformation are not clear. Factors affecting this social change appear to be multifarious and have deep roots in European history. Teaching this ongoing extraordinary transformation, for which neither a root cause nor the end result are known, presents a challenge. This paper shows how the use of traditional factor analysis to teach Contemporary European History both provides students with a deeper understanding of the dynamics of change and offers them a tool to better understand their own contemporary history. This paper proposes a methodology to make students comfortable with using factor analysis and historical arguments under conditions of uncertainty.

A Note on the Problem of ‘Contemporary History’

The Concise OED informs us that ‘history’ is “the study of past events; a continuous...record of past events or trends.” and reminds us that it originates from the Greek for ‘learned, wise man.’

The same dictionary defines ‘chaos’ as “the property of a complex system whose behavior is so unpredictable as to appear random, owing to great sensitivity to small changes in conditions.”

Looking at the behavior of a geographic region that is still in the process of change, such as Europe from 1945 to the present, it is hard to avoid the thought that the second definition fits better than the first. It is only after an historic transformation has occurred (or failed to occur) that an historian is able to sift through the complexities of the system (discarding all the ideas not adopted, the revolutionary changes which failed to secure a place, the popular leaders who lost their popularity, and 99.9% of known events) and construct a continuous record of the past – a history. For participants, or even current observers, events present a chaotic appearance.

At the same time, we cannot afford to wait until History judges events and presents its conclusions if we are participating in those events, or will be affected by the outcomes. As participants, we hold within our grasp the power to make ‘small changes in conditions’ which

could affect the end results, which could change history. But in a truly chaotic system, our actions could equally affect the end results in a way contrary to our hopes and needs.

This moves us out of the realm of historians and into the realm of current practitioners - economists, political scientists and politicians, diplomats, investors, military officers, businessmen – who strive not to fully understand the system (which they recognized as impossible) but to reduce uncertainty, to gain enough of a handle on the problem that their strategies, their best guesses, their ‘small changes in conditions’ have a ‘better than even’ chance of influencing the system in the direction of their hopes and biases. Economists hope that eliminating this tariff or adding that tax will move the economy toward growth; politicians hope that voicing this position in this way will boost their following; investors hope that they can guess which type of prospect holds a better chance of profit. As a diplomat, I personally spent some twenty-five years trying to analyze events and write advice to my home government, or argue positions to my host government, in hopes of moving events to favor my country’s interests. Businessmen and military officers hope that their actions will not be matched and countered by the actions of their competition. None of these people think that they can fully understand the system, but they try to reduce the complexity of the system by determining which elements are most important to their particular concerns. They resort to Traditional Factor Analysis. A ‘factor’, again according to the Concise OED, is “a circumstance, fact, or influence that contributes to a result.” What all of these professionals do is formulate a list of factors which they believe, either from study of past history or from theory or from personal experience, constitute those that will be most important in contributing to the specific result they want to occur. Like the historian studying the past they ignore or discard the vast majority of facts and circumstances and try to get specific information about those few selected factors, then try to

discern a trend looking for tipping points which they can affect or influence so that the end result is in accord with their interests. Theirs is the art of the possible. Recognizing that they are ignorant about the sweep of events, they try to isolate an eddy which is small enough to understand and to influence.

It is my belief that we, as teachers of history, should adopt a similar approach when we are asked to teach or study contemporary events. If we attempt to teach contemporary issues as 'history', all that we can do is teach our own biases – assuming an end result in accord with our expectations or wishes and presenting as reality a selective 'continuous record of past events or trends' which we assume will lead to the end result we expect. We must, as all historians, discard all the events and trends that do not fit into our story. The problem is that we, as participants and contemporaries, are seldom, unless blessed with uncommon luck, wise enough or learned enough to pick and discard the appropriate events and trends and to guess the actual end result. Our libraries are crammed with books that we now dismiss as naïve and biased, but which were intended to be learned histories. At the same time, our students and our institutions call on us to teach contemporary history, believing correctly that something of such overwhelming importance cannot be ignored.

This is why I suggest that, when challenged to take up this task, our best approach is to teach traditional factor analysis. We need to admit that we are unable to give confident answers and, lacking crystal balls, are unable to predict the final outcomes. However, we do have insight from our studies of history that can give the students valuable tools to increase their understanding and to improve their insight into likely futures. We can guide them into looking for the factors that, based on our experience, we believe to be most important in reducing

uncertainty about the present, and improving the probabilities of our guesses about the future. If we can accomplish this we will not only give them insight into what is called contemporary history, but will give them a valuable tool for gaining more understanding of the chaotic system which is their life.

If we do so, we must teach the limitations on factor analysis. We must continually remember and remind our students that factor analysis gives an answer that is, at base, nothing but an educated guess. It is too easy to forget that the past is not always a predictor of the future (as our stock brokers continually remind us). Students could easily assume that once having selected their factors, the result indicated by analysis of those factors is The Result - The Truth, rather than a partial truth (A likelihood based on an uncertain selection from among an infinite range of factors.) Students easily fall prey to a sort of Marxian belief that because one outcome appears inevitable according to the factors they selected, that outcome is inevitable in the real world. Factor analysis (traditional or mathematical) is a useful tool for gaining confidence about one's grasp on a chaotic system, but can too easily become the source of over-confidence. Just as Roman generals, receiving a triumph, were required to ride with a slave whose duty it was to repeat "Remember, you too are mortal", our students must be reminded that the outcomes of their analyses are at best, first approximations, needing to be continuously tested against reality. The military officer plans a strategy and tactics, but knows that "No plan survives contact with the enemy" (attributed to Field Marshall Helmuth Carl Bernard von Moltke). We need to teach factor analysis as a useful, and perhaps necessary, tool in contemplating chaotic systems, but not as the Answer. We must stress that we are teaching a tool to improve comprehension of contemporary events, not a settled history.

Introduction

Teaching history in a contemporary urban university presents multiple challenges. Students are typically under-prepared in the social sciences in general, and in history in particular. In secondary school, my American students' history curriculum typically consisted of a survey course on U.S. national history, a survey course on regional history (California history) and something like a World Civilizations course, which focused primarily on ancient Greece and Rome. Their secondary school literature courses tended toward textual and style analysis, with little or no reference to the historical context in which works were produced. (Similarly, they had studied science with the concepts abstracted from their milieu.) Students arrive at the university with an idea of history formed around a few memorized dates, a few 'great men,' and a few famous battles.

Add to that the peculiarities of the school where I teach -- Holy Names University of Oakland, Ca. is a Roman Catholic school which was until recently restricted to women, with a largely low-income student body. Students who are the first ever in their families to attend college are well represented. This means, since they got this far, that they are of superior intelligence and very strongly motivated. However, because they come from book-poor environments, they have rarely been exposed to educational experiences outside of the formal classroom, and they arrive at university with little sense of history.

In this environment I was asked to develop a history course on Contemporary Europe. As a semi-retired Professor (emeritus at European University and the University of Sierra Leone), I have become something of a fill-in resource at Holy Names. I am not formally a historian; my graduate degrees are in Economics, Public Administration, System Dynamics and International Relations, but in addition to my teaching background I have been an international consultant for 17 years and had served 25 years in the U.S. Diplomatic Corps with extensive travel and work in

Europe. The school judged that my personal experience of the developing history of post-war Europe would enrich the texts and enliven the classroom experience for my students. The history department, despite some initial skepticism, agreed to give me a free hand with my approach. As an approach, I saw this as an opportunity to introduce students to factor analysis, a methodology I have found eminently useful in my diplomatic and consultancy career.

Despite personal uncertainties about what exactly constituted the ‘History of Contemporary Europe’, I was delighted with the challenge. I saw my task as divided into at least five steps. First, I would have to win the interest of the students. Second, I would have to ensure that the students had confidence in the validity of the approach and of the fairness of the grading. Third, I would have to find authoritative texts that advanced the students’ understanding of both Europe and factor analysis. Fourth, I would have to ensure constant, active participation on the part of the students, being more a guide or seminar facilitator than a teacher. Finally, I needed to ensure that the work the students produced would be of sufficiently high quality that they would have pride in their work and that the history faculty would recognize the effectiveness of my approach. I therefore set out to develop a syllabus for this class.

The result was a new methodology for teaching contemporary history that appears to be both pedagogically effective and to have multiple benefits for the students. I taught the class as a loosely structured case study without any fixed conclusion(s), using traditional factor analysis as the principle approach. Students who have taken this course gained experience in thinking for themselves, in reasoned argument, and in effective research. They also state that they have gained a new appreciation for and interest in the study of history. I believe this methodology will prove to be broadly applicable to most studies of contemporary issues, and will provide broad benefits when applied. While my purpose was to provide the students with new learning tools,

rather than to present a traditional history course, the students, as a bonus, learned a great deal about events, trends, and personalities in European history. Since each student selected his or her own factor-focus, no two students necessarily learned the same things about that history. However, since their focus was selected according to their personal interests, they are more likely to retain those things that they learned. Also, because they shared their research in classroom presentations, all the students benefited from multiple points-of-view.

Making the Case

An open-ended case study is going to be a new technique for most students. Worries about grades, maintaining class standing, or just fears of failing at a new kind of task can interfere with a student's acceptance of the course. The professor has, therefore, an obligation to consistently present the case in a way which will be seen by the students as exciting, interesting, challenging, and do-able. An obvious beginning is in the written and oral presentation of the course, but the selection of texts and readings, the explanation of the grading requirements, and the regular involvement of students in course presentations, as well as the way the professor responds to student questions and concerns (especially their initial responses) will play an important role in gaining the necessary student involvement in the case study.

1. Setting the Challenge

I realized that if I were to be successful, I would have to challenge and excite the students. I would be asking them to do more than a normal amount of the work in the course; I would be trying to get them excited about something their secondary school courses had taught them was dull; and I would require them to learn and apply a new methodology, trusting me when I told them it would be useful to them. Since this was an elective course [the students have

free choice among offerings, given a total eight-course social-studies requirement], I had to make this attractive.

I decided that the most effective way was to face them with a challenge. I described the course as unique, as only suitable for the best students, and I set it up as a contemporary mystery rather than as “history.” The on-line course description reads:

Contemporary Europe- WWII to the Present

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As the war ended, Europe was a scarred battlefield, torn both physically and in the minds of its inhabitants. Germany, widely hated and distrusted, was a conquered nation, occupied by four allied armies. Europe was split by what came to be known as the ‘Iron Curtain’ with the democracies on one side and communist Russia and its satellites on the other. Italy and France were also divided - between those who had fought the Germans and those who had cooperated with them during the war years. The Low Countries, Scandinavia, the Iberian Peninsula, Greece and Yugoslavia were likewise scarred from conquest, resistance, and divided loyalties. England and the entire sub-continent were economically flattened and deeply in debt.

Today, only sixty-odd years later, we see the rise of the European Union. It is considered the second (or perhaps the first) most powerful economic actor on the globe, prosperous and growing, and with a strong currency. It has a strong voice in world affairs, and a growing unity, with the war-time Allies together with a re-united Germany and an expanded (and still expanding) European membership working together to contest U.S. global supremacy.

In this course, we will attempt to determine the political and economic steps that brought Europe to the current state. More importantly, we will examine the profound changes in the political culture and basic values and perceptions of Europeans, which allow people who, one generation ago, were trying to kill each other as aliens to consider themselves now a single people – Europeans.

You will answer the question – “How did this happen?”

This ‘teaser’ approach has been successful. The Registrar’s office reports that student advisors received more inquiries about this course than any other in the social sciences, and I have had to limit the class size each time I presented the course. By now the course has its own reputation,

and the Department has been pressured to add the course to the summer schedule and to schedule more sessions.

2. Selecting Texts

For this approach to be successful, students must not only accept the neutrality of the professor, but also must understand that there is no “right” answer. The professor therefore needs to select texts that are and appear authoritative, are well written, and that contradict each other – making the issue controversial. Ideally, the students will come to realize on their own that the different arguments are based on each author selecting a different set of factors, and that each conclusion is no more than the factorial outcome. If they do not, it is the duty of the professor to teach this until they understand it. The authors should have solid credentials, and appear to admit to no possibility of considering other factors. (A professor considerate of the students’ pocketbooks should also seek relatively inexpensive books – which will lead to a bias toward general non-fiction over carefully nuanced academic texts.)

For the Contemporary Europe course, I selected two authors with solid international relations and (U.S.) political credentials, whose books had been well reviewed and had significant sales (which increased the chances that the students had heard of them). The first text was *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order*, by Robert Kagan, 2003. (Knopf, NY, ISBN 1-4000-4093-0). Kagan, of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, is a well-respected “Neo-Conservative” writer. The book has been cited by at least 103 other books since publication. Kagan’s thesis is that Europe has failed to become a world power, despite notable success in economics and social policy, because it has chosen a politics that Kagan calls “post-violence”. His first sentence is deliberately controversial, “It is time to stop

pretending that Europeans and Americans share a common view of the world, or even that they occupy the same world.”

To contrast with that, I selected *The United States of Europe: The New Superpower and the End of American Supremacy*, by T.R. Reid, 2004. (Penguin Books, NY, ISBN 1-59420-033-5). The book has been cited at least 17 times. Reid’s thesis is apparent in his title: he concludes that a United Europe has won against the United States in a trans-Atlantic competition for global power.

Both books are well written, cogently argued, and persuasive – and have diametrically opposed conclusions. How is this possible? The best students quickly see that the two authors use sharply differentiated **factors** to define success. For Mr. Kagan, success as a world power is defined primarily if not exclusively by the ability to project military power, and force others to accede to your will. Europe, as a “post-violence” society, has rejected this option and therefore has rejected any claim to the status of a world power. Reid, in contrast, defines prominence primarily in economic terms – in production, consumption, and standard of living – and believes that Europe is not only on a rising tide in all these areas while the US is declining, but more importantly that the world sees a United Europe as its model to emulate and the market with which it is essential to forge closer ties – which (for Mr. Reid) defines Europe as the pre-eminent world power. Neither author would be likely to dispute the facts of the other, but they dismiss them as irrelevant for they are not the primary factors of the argument each makes.

For additional texts, I chose primarily on-line sources. I persuaded the Research Librarian at the University library to compile an initial list of library and on-line resources and to assist students with supplementary lists when asked, and I compiled an additional one of my own – concentrating of finding authoritative and contradictory sites. For example, I found that a time-

line of contemporary Europe published by the European Commission was sharply different from one published by the Churchill Society. For obvious reasons, the latter placed much greater emphasis on events in England, especially those featuring Mr. Churchill. I also required weekly (thorough) reading of *The Economist* newsmagazine, both for its articles dealing directly with the European Union and European history, and for insight into differences between the European and the American (Californian) world-view.

Finally, I required at least two live resources. I introduced myself as a source, laying out my experience and areas of knowledge – stressing that I was *a* source, with my information to be tested and verified as that from any other source. I also required each student to find at least one other primary source – focusing on WWII. They were to identify to me at least one person (e.g. a grandparent) who had stated his/her willingness to be interviewed about personal recollection of events during WWII or earlier. [One reason for this requirement is to stress in the minds of the students the fact that these ‘historical’ events occurred in the lifetimes of people that they knew personally.]

3. Introducing the Methodology

In the first class session, I reviewed with the students a variety of time-line websites that listed wars in various parts of the world. When we focused on Europe, the students noted that Europe has had an almost unbroken record of warfare from Roman times to WWII. I reminded them that most of these wars were not Europe-wide and some, like the Viking Invasions, might not be properly defined as wars, and that most of the sites had been created by Western authors who might focus more on Europe than on other parts of the world. I succeeded in fixing in their minds the idea that life in Europe from about the year one to 1945 was “nasty, brutish, and

short,” largely because of war. In contrast, the ‘war’ record in Europe for the post-WWII period (fifty years) is basically clean.

I then led them to sites showing some comparative economics – average wage, family income, years of schooling, life expectancy, GDP- for the UK, France, Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands, comparing the latest available data to whatever they could find from any period prior to WWI. The differences are astounding. I fixed in their minds an image (accurate in the broad sweep, however incomplete and distorted) of a Europe mired in war for a millennium, and suddenly recovering to peace, prosperity, and growth, like a terminal patient enjoying a total remission. Then, I asked them to explain how and why this change could occur.

From the beginning, I got them to do the research and got them involved. The ideas that came out at first were simplistic – e.g. ‘they turned away from the horror of war’; ‘democracy doesn’t allow war’; ‘they decided peace was more profitable than war’; ‘they got rid of Kings’; ‘the Industrial Revolution made war unprofitable’ - but I was able to pick up phrases and elements and show that what we would study in class was similar, giving them the understanding that we were studying their own ideas not just professor-imposed ‘truths’. By showing that their initial ideas were not wrong but incomplete, I ensured that they understood that they would need to do extensive and systematic research.

The other half of the initial session was focused on the concept of making an historical argument. I told them that they must pick a comparative base period, demonstrate that there was a difference between the base period and the present (or ‘latest data’), then show, by example, that the difference was significant to the society, and finally argue persuasively that the social impact helps answer the central question – “How and Why Did Europe Change?”

The second session was similar, but the structural focus was on factor analysis. We began with the two written texts and the question of not “Which one is right?” but “How can two prominent authors reach such different conclusions?” The best students led the class, pointing out that these authors defined words (e.g. ‘power’) differently, looked at different facts, and marshaled different arguments. I was then asked which was right, and I stated confidently that I believed both were wrong, but probably right in some elements. That began the discussion of factor analysis. I pointed out that, having defined and isolated the few factors they believed to be cogent to their specific argument, these authors would probably be the first to realize that reality was going to have a different outcome than they had concluded because they were only tracking a few factors, (and would probably each write another successful book cementing their reputation as European Affairs scholars.) Factor analysis is not designed to deliver definitive answers, but to make part of a complex subject more understandable. Instead of delivering ‘truth’, factor analysis reduces uncertainty and makes it possible for future analysis to move incrementally closer to a truth. Then I told the students that they would have the same advantage as those authors in understanding Europe, once they had defined and isolated the factors which they, each as individuals, believed best explained the changes in Europe.

By the end of the first two class sessions, I had a roomful of excited and argumentative students, determined to be the one(s) who finally figured out this conundrum (Europe) which had puzzled even their distinguished professor.

4. Student Involvement

I continued as I began: every session of the class featured student involvement and even subject leadership. I opened each session by getting a minimum of two students to present

something they had read, learned from a direct source, or questioned from a previous session. I then gently guided a general discussion of these inputs. Initially, the students focused on the two required texts, but soon branched out. Each session then focused on a single factor, with readings tied to that factor, and I required the students to come prepared to discuss *their own understanding of and experience with* that factor. For example, an author (or a student) might assert that “common sense” tells us that the Europeans had to move away from war when they realized that it was economically a losing proposition. I would guide the students to a discussion of other areas where people act against their own economic best interests (e.g. buying lottery tickets, dropping out of school, unprotected sex) until they understood that ‘economic common sense’ is neither common nor a sufficient explanation of actions. As the course continued, I left open days for which the students had to propose factors for examination. As you will see in the attached syllabus, the readings for later sessions were left unspecified. I provided handouts of readings of issues raised by students, provided lists of on-line sites students had found useful, and in general reoriented the sessions to focus on factors which had engaged student interest. Eventually, I had groups of students take over a session, arguing for a single factor (of their choice) as the ‘one most important explanatory factor’ of this apparent change in European behavior, with the rest of the class trying to pick holes in their arguments. By this time, I was meeting during office hours with individuals already working on their final exam – which I had handed out on the first day. That required a complete historical argument for their individual explanation of this change. Eventually, all of the students met with me, and I used those sessions to point out weaknesses in their argument structure and evidence and point them toward sources to strengthen their arguments.

Which Factors?

If this approach is to succeed, it cannot have a set list of factors to consider, because (a) the factors must correspond to the students' interests, and (b) any list of factors would be arguable. In my attached syllabus, I have noted the principal factor I had suggested for each session. However, these had to be suggestions only as I made it clear to the students that they were free to propose (and then argue for) different topics and their preferences would be decisive. The teacher has two roles to play in introducing and considering factors. First, it is important to guide the students to consideration of some key factors that they might not be aware of – not to force them, but to ensure that they are available for consideration. An example of this could be the realm of ideas. Students are unlikely to understand the power that ideas have when they begin to permeate a society, leading to a paradigm shift that affects how people see the world, and therefore affects everything. I spend some time in every course talking about the impact of the idea of individualism – the idea of the value of an individual as such, rather than as part of a collective or class. From early philosophical beginnings this idea became widespread, affecting considerations of religion, of politics (clashing with the concept of the Divine Right of Kings), labor, education, the status of women, and class conflict, among other things. Rather than using this as a subject of a class session, I provided them with appropriate readings and raised the question of whether or not it affected what they were studying as appropriate throughout the course.

The second role of the teacher is even more important – and that is pointing out the connections between factors. In almost every group, the students note as factors the immense loss of life in WWI and WWII, the industrial revolution, and changes in the status of women. They tend, however, to assume only a broadly negative reaction to war as the impact of the war losses, a

change in productivity as the impact of the industrial revolution, and (undefined) political change as a result of female suffrage. I took it as my role to lead the discussion to look at such elements as the class makeup of losses in WWI. The immense loss of officers from the ruling class (e.g. an entire graduating class of Oxford) led to vacancies in senior positions (in banking, industry, education, trade, government service and diplomacy) which in turn led to recruitment from levels previously considered unsuitable, which resulted in deep changes in basic attitudes toward class, position and role. The losses among the skilled trades led to vacancies in factories, which resulted in changes in education and in employment opportunities for women, which aided the drive for women's' rights.

Similarly, the Industrial Revolution led to monoculture, which caused a vast population shift from the countryside to the cities (and the hungry factories), which affected such things as the labor movement, political power, etc. Apprenticeship and training, suitable for fixed roles and unchanging jobs, was unsuitable for competitive and ever-improving factories, which caused a shift toward broader education. An educated general populace had an impact on politics, the economy, and attitudes toward war. Young students have a strong tendency to seek simple, straightforward answers, and will look for straight-line connections. To the extent the teacher is able to engage them in conversations about connections and complexities, they will gain an increasingly complex and accurate understanding of how the world works.

The Outcome

I have so far presented this course five times. The course consistently receives very high ratings in student evaluations, and any initial skepticism among the faculty of the History Department appears to have disappeared. Teachers have stated to me that students in their history courses who had previously taken this course are consistently among the most enthusiastic,

interested, and capable students in their classes. (They also, with a grumble, report that they are the most questioning, demanding and critical students, but “are probably worth the trouble”.) The Department has increased the number of course offerings, now including the summer session.

While I recognize that this is insufficient data, I propose the tentative conclusion that this methodology is an effective and efficient way of teaching contemporary history or any unresolved issues in history or similar fields, and, where teachers face similar issues and similar constraints, they may find this approach worthy of emulation. The following is my attempt to lay out the lessons learned, so that others, with different issues and different teaching styles, can adopt this method for their own purposes.

Summarized Methodology

This approach requires at least the following eight elements:

- (1) A clear assertion of ignorance.** The topic of study (the issue) must be one for which the ‘answer’ or historical consensus has not yet been reached. It is essential that the professor/facilitator make clear to the students that s/he does not have any ‘right’ answer or even any strong bias. Unless this is made clear, the students will spend the term trying to figure out what the teacher’s answer is, rather than developing their own answer. Almost of equal importance is that the issue should be one of some controversy or popular interest. Thus, this approach is suitable for such issues as ‘Will Europe become the United States of Europe?’, ‘Is the Iraq War winnable?’, ‘What will be the historical assessment of the George W. Bush Presidency/ The Blair Government?’, ‘Will China come to dominate the global economy?’, ‘What will be the effects of the admission of Turkey to the EU?’, and ‘What is the net impact of mass immigration (for the U.S./ for Europe)?’. A similar approach can be used for

ongoing controversies in other fields – e.g., the costs, causes, or prospects for amelioration of Climate Change, or the value of robot vs. human space exploration. This approach, however, is unsuitable for any issue where a broad consensus exists – e.g. the value of educating women, the value of free trade, or the importance of the printing press in economic development. There is a necessary assumption that researching students will unavoidably find sources that disagree with each other, contradict each other, and provide facts, arguments, opinions and data to support conflicting opinions.

- (2) **An interesting, challenging, provocative statement of the issue.** I believe this approach will be most valuable with students who are not already seized with an interest in history. Therefore, the issue should be presented as a mystery, a puzzle, and a challenge – in a form designed to engage their interest. (This of course, requires that the instructor/facilitator have some knowledge of contemporary culture, so that s/he can determine what kind of thing will, in fact, engage the students – often not a trivial task.)
- (3) **Texts and citations that appear authoritative but are contradictory plus separate sources of unbiased (or bias-explicit) facts.** Unfortunately, the first part of this is a relatively easy task. Few authors seem willing to concede uncertainty, and so finding two texts that authoritatively assert contradictory findings on the same facts is usually trivial. More difficult is to find sources of unbiased factual material. As the intention is to have the students do independent research there is only a requirement to provide a few examples of such sources for each factor examined. These should, primarily, be

on-line sources, since that is the form of research contemporary students are most comfortable with.

(4) Vocabulary lessons. It has been my experience that contemporary students, researching anything earlier than their own lives, tend to assume that words, in English, have always had the same meaning that they use in their daily discourse. In fact, words change meaning over time or fall out of common use altogether. In addition, in any long-term issue of dispute, it is typical to have authors use words with their own individual definitions, so as to support their arguments. If students are not to misinterpret expressions they will find in their readings, the instructor/facilitator needs to anticipate, as much as possible, which historic uses of certain words and phrases might cause difficulties, and provide the students with an understanding of them.

(5) A clear statement of the technical structure of the expected product. The professor cannot, obviously, grade students on whether or not their answers are correct when the answer is unknown. Thus, the grades must be based on such elements as clear distinctions drawn between statements and facts, indicators and evidence, theories and opinions. As the students will be making historical arguments about how changed factors have influenced social change, they must understand that such arguments are based on establishing a definite baseline and then a comparative date, demonstrating (with facts) that actual differences have occurred, showing (through examples) that these changes had social impact, and arguing (with logic) that those changes moved the society in the direction which the student has concluded to be the (approximate) answer. It cannot be assumed that students are familiar with

these technical structures. Therefore, the professor must make very clear the bases on which s/he will judge the final product, in order to avoid any suspicion that s/he awarded grades based on his/her bias in favor of one or another ‘answer.’

- (6) Significant student involvement in multiple frameworks.** The primary objective of this methodology is to leave the students knowledgeable of, and comfortable with, using factor analysis and historical arguments under conditions of uncertainty. A course resulting in a single paper would give them some experience, but they will learn better if they can try out these methods in a variety of settings. Thus I require a minimum of three products – an individual paper arguing which factor is the “most significant” in explaining the issue, a group (minimum three students) oral and A/V presentation again arguing for one factor as the “most significant”, and a major individual paper (final exam) which presents each student’s best argument for an (approximately) complete answer to the issue presented. The first paper is a test of understanding the mechanics of the techniques, and allows the professor to identify individual and class needs for further explanations of those techniques. The group project (with feedback from the rest of the class) forces students to reach consensus with at least two other students, thus exposing holes in arguments, weakness in evidence, and individual differences in emphases and priorities. The class feedback (from students who are/will be arguing different factors as most significant) again shows them the weaknesses in their arguments, while exposing the entire class to a range of options for factors to be considered. Without anyone saying, or even able to say, that the presenters are wrong, they are often firmly told that they are not persuasive. Alternatively, if they are persuasive, other students may reinterpret their

own analysis, or at minimum pick up pointers on how to make a persuasive argument. By the time of the final paper, the students have begun to master the techniques, and are able to argue, with some passion, for their individual explanations of the issue. In addition, my approach requires significant student involvement on a daily basis. Students are expected to have read on, and have opinions on, the daily topic, and they know they will be graded on their ability to do so. They report at the beginning of each class session on items they have picked up from outside reading or on interviews with living sources with personal experience of changes in the factors being discussed. They pass out copies of items they have found, and, eventually, learn to challenge me and my presentation of factors.

- (7) **Flexibility and Openness.** I build into my syllabus open days where the students are expected to set the topic(s), so that we can discuss elements they have encountered in their research, and found of interest or inexplicable. While I ensure that the factors I believe to be most important are adequately covered, I believe it is essential to adapt to and adopt the factors raised by the students, and to be willing to adjust the time to be spent on any one factor to accommodate the students' interests. Since this approach is intended to engage their attention and involvement, it must be clear to them that they have a significant hand in determining content and priority during the term. Nothing should be ruled out of bounds, either. (It is somehow not surprising how often co-educational undergraduates assume that there have been vast changes in sexual behavior and that this explains most social change.) If a student can ask a question relating to the issue, then that factor has at least some importance. Little can dampen enthusiasm more than a perception that the professor has a predetermined

agenda, and that assertions of student involvement are false. There have been times that I invited a student to my office hours to discuss a topic before I spent class time on it, but I always tried to make it clear that I was intent on improving the student's ability to ask a pertinent question rather than excluding the topic.

- (8) Higher Value for Long-Term Trends than for Precision and Detail.** I start this course with a discussion of war in Europe from approximately the year 1 A.D. to the end of WWII. We also examine other factors (e.g. technology, medicine, status of women, agriculture) for approximately the same time range. Covering this vast period of history is possible only by ignoring details, outliers and exceptions, and focusing on the broad sweep of change. If a student asserts that "Life for a peasant farmer in Europe was essentially unchanged from Roman times up to WWI," I do not stop the discussion to examine the changes from bronze to iron to steel in farm tools, or the effect of better harnesses on usable animal-power, or the differences between a tribal Gothic farmer and a feudal serf, or the impact of trade with cities for manufactured goods - because in a very broad sweep, the statement is not incorrect. I allow broad conflation of events over time, and interfere only when there is substantial error in direction of change, or if a particular point appears important to the specific argument being made. There will inevitably be errors in student presentations and comments, but unless the correction of the error is important, I let specific errors pass, covering the subject later in my own remarks and reminding them that their generalizations may well not be true for a specific area or specific date.

Traditional Factor Analysis and the Historical Argument

Factor analysis is an old methodology which today tends to be defined in a late and evolved sense – i.e., the mathematical, statistical methodology used (by means of computers) to sort masses of raw numerical data into a pattern or structure of correlated relationships. In teaching contemporary history, we also have to sort large masses of data, though often it is not in numerical form, and we also are searching for relationships and patterns. Mathematical factor analysis could certainly be applied to available historical data to assess structural trends by searching for correlations and cross-correlations, but such an application would depend on the form and availability of the data, and would normally be beyond the scope of an undergraduate class in an introductory course on current issues. Instead, when I use the term ‘factor analysis’, or ‘traditional factor analysis’, I am using it in the earlier, traditional sense, which can be defined as:

*A method for imposing meaning on a large and unsorted mass of information by isolating and studying change in individual factors and sets of factors which, a priori, **appear to have** significance.*

This traditional definition is the basis on which mathematical factor analysis was built, but is both broader and less precise. Traditional factor analysis can use any kind of data and any kind of factor. It is more dependent on *a priori* theory, with the weight of the factors and the strength of any relationship determined by theory, rather than by the data or a mathematical correlation. This is simultaneously a strength and a weakness in comparison to mathematical factor analysis: a strength because it clarifies the fact that a result is at best a

first approximation, which must be verified through logic and argumentation - something which is often concealed by the precision of the answers in mathematical factor analysis; a weakness because it cannot reveal unsuspected relationships, which are often shown by mathematical correlation. A comparison can be drawn to the use of calculators in schools. Calculators, like computer-assisted mathematical factor analysis, are invaluable tools for those who have already learned the basic relationships (e.g. the result of multiplying two positive numbers is always larger than either of the numbers.) The calculator/computer saves time, eliminates drudgery, and saves us from simple math errors. However, students who are given calculators before they learn to think mathematically can too often use them by rote, and accept any figure that comes up as accurate - "The calculator/the computer says so!" even when it is obviously wrong to a mathematically-trained observer, who would suspect an error in data-entry. Traditional factor analysis teaches students to think about relationships and patterns, and to think about the structure of social change in historical terms.

Traditional factor analysis is the beginning of an historical argument, rather than an historical conclusion. It allows the proponent to demonstrate the three elements of a successful historical argument. First, that there has been a change in the factor during the historical period under consideration (a matter of data and facts); second, that these changes have had an impact on the society (a matter of indicators and examples); and, finally, that these social impacts explain (usually only in part) the direction that society has taken in relation to the issue under study (a matter of logic and persuasive argument.) These elements are the core of an historical argument. With factor analysis, a student can make a reasonable argument, and the listener can choose to agree or disagree. If they disagree, they have a basis

for reasonable discussion: are the factors correctly chosen? Are the facts and indicators in error? Are there logical flaws in the argument? Such a discussion is inherently more useful than, “you’re wrong.”

Appendix A –Illustrative Resources

1. A selective list of useful internet resources (as rated by my students)

1. Map. Losses in the Second World War: <http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/ww2-loss.htm>
2. Factor Analysis: <http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/UFA.HTM>
3. Factor analysis (Google Search): http://www.google.com/search?sourceid=navclient-ff&ie=UTF-8&rlz=1B2GGGL_enUS204US205&q=%22factor+analysis%22
4. Suffrage, England, "right to vote" (Google Search): http://www.google.com/search?as_q=suffrage%2C+England&num=10&hl=en&btnG=Google+Search&as_epq=right+to+vote
5. Matilda Joslyn Gage Website - Women in the 19th Century: http://www.pinn.net/~sunshine/gage/features/gage_lnk.html
6. 18th Century Social Order: <http://mars.wnec.edu/~grempe/courses/wc2/lectures/peasantsaristos.html>
7. Homework Center -European history - Homework Center - Multnomah County Library : <http://www.multcolib.org/homework/eurohist.html>
8. The Age of Reason (The Enlightenment): http://www.whitworth.edu/academic/Department/Core/Classes/CO250/Intro/d_ageof.htm
9. Medieval Germany – Northern Central Europe in the Middle Ages: http://historymedren.about.com/od/germany/Medieval_Germany.htm?rd=1
10. Medieval French History - France in the Middle Ages: http://historymedren.about.com/od/france/Medieval_France.htm
11. The middle ages: http://www.teacheroz.com/Middle_Ages.htm#feudal

2. Illustrative Syllabus

HOLY NAMES UNIVERSITY

COURSE OUTLINE

FALL SEMESTER – 2006

Social Sciences

HIST 124 - Contemporary Europe

PROFESSOR DAVID C. McGAFFEY

Course Description

This course may be different than any other you have taken. For one thing, the final exam will be distributed on the first day of class. More importantly, the course will not try to teach you a defined set of facts, but rather how to effectively explore a subject and come up with a persuasive, personal answer to an issue. In the process, you will learn a great deal about European History and trends in Contemporary Europe, but the focus will be on developing your individual (and group) research and presentation skills. The issue we will be exploring is the following.

As World War II ended, Europe was a scarred battlefield, torn both physically and in the minds of its inhabitants. Germany, universally hated and distrusted, was a conquered nation, divided and occupied by four allied armies. Europe was split by what came to be known as the 'Iron Curtain' with the 'Democracies' on one side and Communist Russia and its satellites on the other. Italy and France were also divided - between those who had fought the Germans and those who had cooperated with them during the war years. The Low Countries, Scandinavia, the Iberian Peninsula, Greece and Yugoslavia were likewise scarred from conquest, resistance, and divided loyalties. England and the entire sub-continent was economically flattened, and deeply in debt. Europe, previously the undisputed center of global power, had also lost or was in the process of losing its colonies, so European Powers were being reduced from global empires to impoverished solitary states.

Today, only sixty-odd years later, we see the rise of the European Community. It is the second (or possibly the first) most powerful economic unit on the globe, prosperous and growing, with a strong currency, a strong voice in world affairs, and a growing unity. The U.K., France, Italy, a re-united Germany, and all of Europe are working together to contest U.S. supremacy, and the Community is now growing to include much of what was the Soviet Bloc and reaching into the Mediterranean Basin. This growth is not without growing pains: the EU has failed to reach agreement on a Constitution, stalling its path to political unity, and there are serious disagreements about rules for expansion. While the future of Europe is uncertain, the reality of a dramatic change and improvement to date is undeniable.

In this course, we will use factor analysis – examining changes in different elements and the effects of those changes on society – to examine, understand and develop explanations for the profound changes in the political culture and basic values and perceptions of Europeans. One generation ago, these people were trying to kill each other as aliens; they now consider themselves parts of a single people – Europeans.

At the end of this course, students will have a better understanding of Contemporary Europe – enabling them to place in context new events as they occur. Of equal importance, they will have a solid understanding of the use of Factor Analysis in understanding complex events – wherever they occur. Finally, they will understand and be able to produce a persuasive historical argument.

Required Texts

1. Reid, T.R.: *The United States of Europe*. 2004. Penguin Books, New York.
2. Kagan, Robert: *Of Paradise & Power; America and Europe in the New World Order*. 2003 (Knopf, NY)
3. Class Handouts/Blackboard postings
4. (Weekly) *The Economist* and/or other current news publications focusing on Europe
5. One person (relative or otherwise) who is able to recall events of 60 years ago.
6. At least one European History text – student choice(s) –library or other sources.

Teaching Method

Seminar Discussion
Lecture
Student Presentations (groups) and student critiques (individual)
Class handouts
Individual Research/argumentative paper

Course Requirements

Oral participation in class is a requirement

Contribution to seminar discussion/ questions to lecturer	30%
Group Presentation	30%
Individual Paper (Final Exam)	<u>40%</u>
	100%

Group Presentations

All student will form into self-selected teams (total team membership **must** equal all students registered in class) and will, in collaboration with the Professor, research and lead a class discussion entitled “How changes in [a single selected factor] between the pre-war period and post-war period have affected modern Europe’s movement toward integration.” The groups will choose a topic **subject to approval from the Professor**. They will prepare jointly, for the

Professor, a concise (1-5 page) statement of the topic/presentation, and prepare and present, for the class, a short, persuasive argument, (to include as necessary - AV display materials, handouts, and oral + blackboard presentations.) (This will fill approx. 35 minutes, including time for Q & As). The purpose of the presentation is to persuade your fellow students of the **preeminent** importance of a **single** factor in explaining and understanding our observed changes in European socio-political culture.

Examples of acceptable topics include:

Status of women

Education

Labor Unions/ labor-management relations

Relations with the World/Contemporary World Events

Politics and Political Parties

Immigration/emigration

Economics

Technology (w/ emphasis on a single element: e.g. communication, transportation, war, medicine)

or any other factor which the presenters wish to speak on, if they can persuade the Professor that the subject is valuable and presentable. Those students listening to the argument will do a short written critique of each presentation. The presentation plus critique will be 30% of the final grades, so I recommend that you form groups, select a factor to examine, and begin your research at your earliest opportunity.

Individual Papers/Final Exam

While the group presentations will argue for the importance of a single factor in understanding change in Europe, the Individual Paper/ Final Exam will be a single person's statement of her or his best overall argument for understanding the observed change in Europe – which might be a single factor, might be a few, might be many factors working together or in opposition, or might argue whether there has been any significant change at all. The question, which will be the basis for this paper, will be distributed during the first class session. **There is no correct answer for this course or this question.** The paper will be graded not for correctness of the answer (although factual errors within the argument will count against) but for logic, structure, and argument – it will test your ability to construct a Persuasive Historical Argument. Footnotes are not obligatory, but minimalist footnotes – references to material studied in the course or in the texts – which eliminate the necessity of restating factual material - will be helpful.

Grading

A	=	90 - 100
B	=	80 - 89
C	=	70 - 79
D	=	60 - 69
F	=	< 60

Note: a C or better is considered a full passing grade

Readings:

Readings listed with each class session are the **minimum** requirement. If you have a good grounding in history, especially European history, these readings will give you a satisfactory basis for understanding lectures and participating in discussions. If your grounding is minimal, use these readings as guides to information you should have, and read the entire Reid and Kagan texts plus the supplementary readings they suggest, and seek other sources until you understand the concepts being discussed. Professor McGaffey will be glad to suggest or provide texts, as will the HNU Reference librarian. It is the responsibility of each student to understand the issues under discussion and undertake such independent research as necessary for that understanding.

Sites:

Internet sites listed for each session are initial guides for independent research. Each site contains masses of information. Students are to become familiar with each site and know where and how to mine them for relevant information – no one could assimilate or memorize all the information they contain. If they refer to something without sufficient explanation, they have provided you with search terms for further exploration on your own.

PRELIMINARY COURSE OUTLINE (subject to modification)

Note that additional reading will be added later.

1. 8/28.	History of Europe/History of War Understanding a Persuasive Historical Argument Understanding Factor Analysis Distribution of Final Exam	Site 1: http://www.warscholar.com/Timeline.html A MILITARY HISTORY TIMELINE (Blackboard) – Europe Readings: Reid & Kagan (1 st half) Plus handouts Assignment #1 (Blackboard) due at beginning of class
2. 8/30	Growth of the EU Understanding a Persuasive Historical Argument Understanding Factor Analysis	Readings : Reid & Kagan (2 nd half) Site 2: EU History http://europa.eu.int/abc/history/index_en.htm
3. 9/6 (9/4-Holiday)	Characteristics of the <i>Ancien Regime</i> in Europe	Site 2: EU History http://europa.eu.int/abc/history/index_en.htm

4. 9/11	The Impact of WWI and WWII	Readings: Site: 3: http://www.worldwar-2.net/ WWII in Europe AND www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/timeline/ww2time.htm
5. 9/13	Two Wings of Liberalism; The impact of ideas	Readings : Site 2: EU History http://europa.eu.int/abc/history/index_en.htm
6. 9/18	Changes in Status of Women.	
7. 9/20	Changes in Status and structure of Labor	
8. 9/25	Changes in patterns of Education	
9. 9/27	Changes in patterns of Class structure.	
10. 10/2	Impact of Technology: Changes in Communication	
11. 10/4	Impact of Technology: Medicine.	
12. 10/11 (10/9=Holiday)	Impact of Technology: Warfare	
13. 10/16	Changes in political structures	
14. 10/18	Impact of Technology: Transportation.	
15. 10/23	Economics: Production & Trade	

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16. 10/25	Economics: Markets & Competition	
17. 10/30	International Affairs: -Loss of Colonies- status and economics	
18. 11/1	Economics and International Affairs: The Great Depression, U.S. example, Soviet example	
19. 11/6	The Historical Argument: Baseline, Change and Indicators	
20. 11/8	The Historical Argument: Factors and Synergy	
21. 11/13	Additional factors and hanging questions	
22. 11/15	Preparation for Student Presentations and Critiques - Questions	
23. 11/20	Student Presentations and Critiques	
24. 11/22	Student Presentations and Critiques	
25. 11/27	Student Presentations and Critiques	
26. 11/29	Student Presentations and Critiques	

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27. 12/4	Student Presentations and Critiques	
28. 12/6	Summary – How do we explain the changes in Europe?	
29. 12/11	Summary – How do we explain the changes in Europe? (cont.) Where goes Europe?	
12/13	Final Exam Due 4:00pm	Heafey 623

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