A Moral Voyage: Proposal Part 2 - The Syllabus

Last week, I talked about the proposal serving two purposes: the second of those two purposes being a syllabus for you, your committee, and the Honors College. I call it the syllabus section because it’s a lot easier to understand why CHC is asking some of these questions, and also how to structure the proposal, when you think about it in that context. There are basically four parts: Method, Evaluation, Communication, and Timeline.

Method: For historians, the methodology is pretty simple: what’s my evidence? What’s the data? What primary sources did I consult, and why those sources specifically? For the project part of my thesis, I talked about the programs I’m using (like Omeka and Scalar) and my level of experience with them. This section is fairly department-specific – look at how your professors might have described a lab or the resources for a paper for a better sense of what to write.

Evaluation: You are getting graded on this eventually, and so in this section you define what your committee will be grading you on. I borrowed my rubric from another history department, but it basically summarizes that by the end of classes of spring semester, I will have a fully-developed thesis that evaluates, analyzes, and synthesizes my evidence in a way that clearly and effectively communicates my research question.

Communication: You know how your professors have office hours? This section is like your version of office hours – or rather, your committee’s version of office hours. You’ve
created this great team to work with – how often are they going to speak with you, and what are the meetings for? My committee and I are going to have full meetings once I have my first draft ready, but my Committee Chair and Prof. Poehler (my faculty sponsor for BDIC) will meet weekly to talk about specific issues or comments while I'm writing.

**Timeline:** This was the hardest part for me, mostly because it’s hard to conceptualize the size and scope of something that hasn't actually been written yet. I plan to spend January and February writing my first draft, and to have March be the time for my committee and I to review and strengthen the discussion. By early April, I hope to have the thesis done for any last-minute edits and to do the intimidating part – the oral defense.

One final tip: this proposal is submitted by you, but it’s supposed to reflect a conversation between you and your committee so that you both understand what is expected next semester. I drafted a proposal for my Committee Chair, and we spent one of our meetings talking through some of the question. If you’re stuck on anything, I highly recommend talking it through with one or both of your Committee members to make sure you address all the important points ahead of time and so your proposal is processed quickly and smoothly.

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