

# The Times They are A-Changin': A Snapshot of the 2015 SHAFR Teaching Survey Results

*Kimber Quinney and Lori Clune*

It's fair to say that some of our SHAFR members may have been channeling Bob Dylan in response to our 2015 SHAFR Teaching Survey.

Bob Dylan gave his very first interview with *Rolling Stone* in November 1969. That now famous interview, conducted by Jann Wenner, took over 18 months to coordinate, explained in part by Dylan's reluctance to meet and to be photographed, but also by Dylan's style. In the *Rolling Stone* piece, Wenner explains, "Bob was very cautious in everything he said, and took a long time between questions to phrase exactly what he wanted to say, nothing more and sometimes a little less." Dylan's responses to the first couple of questions provide a good indication of how the interview progressed:

When do you think you're gonna go on the road?  
*November . . . possibly December.*

What kind of dates do you think you'll play – concerts? Big stadiums or small concert halls?  
*I'll play medium-sized halls.*

And so it went, more or less (with an emphasis on the less).

In the case of our 2015 Teaching Survey, our questions were frequently longer than the answers we received. "Yes," "No," "none," and "N/A" were especially popular responses. More than one or two of the respondents conveyed a Dylanesque impatience, saying "This is a useless survey so I stopped filling it out..."

And yet, like any good *Rolling Stone* (or *Passport*) reporter, we persist in asking the questions.

In honor of Bob Dylan's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday this year, *Rolling Stone* compiled the 100 greatest Bob Dylan songs.<sup>1</sup> We thought it fitting to rely on Dylan as a framework for sharing the 2015 SHAFR Teaching results here. And it may help to know that we're not alone in relying on Dylan to speak for us—apparently the Supreme Court justices also borrow from the folksinger. According to a February 2016 *New York Times* article, Dylan "has long been the most cited songwriter in judicial opinions."<sup>2</sup> We've been similarly inspired by the rumors of Dylan's secret archive; the impending Netflix cartoon, "Time Out of Mind," that will include characters and settings drawn from the lyrics of Bob Dylan's songs; and a feature article in the *New York Times* published in May 2016, asking "Which Rock Star Will the Historians of the Future Remember?" in which Dylan featured prominently.<sup>3</sup>

In the same way that our survey results can only offer a small window into the state of our association with regard to teaching, we use a small sample of Dylan's 359 song titles to organize a sample of our survey results.

## **Changing of the Guards (1978)**

In 2005, the SHAFR Teaching Committee conducted its first teaching survey. Richard Werking and Dustin Walcher deftly managed the results which *Passport* published that December.<sup>4</sup> In 2015, the SHAFR Teaching Committee decided it was high time to return to our SHAFR members to get a fresh look at how pedagogical approaches may or may not have changed in the decade since the first survey.

## **Blowin' in the Wind (1963)**

The results are not comprehensive, nor do we claim that they represent an accurate reflection of all SHAFR teaching faculty. In the same way that Werking and Walcher struggled to determine the 2005 survey response rate, the current teaching committee faced the same challenge, given the fluidity of SHAFR membership.

## **Every Grain of Sand (1981)**

In contrast to the 2005 survey, which consisted of three parts with approximately 100 questions, we limited the 2015 survey to a total of 45 questions. Although we remain convinced that it was still too long, every bit of evidence that we managed to gather gives us further insight into SHAFR membership.

For example, the vast majority (85%) of respondents began teaching in 2000 or later. A similar number (89%) of respondents hold PhDs in History. Only 12% of respondents hold degrees in a discipline other than history—predominantly political science or economics.

Whereas the 2005 survey reported 12% respondents as "part-time," more than 30% of the respondents in the 2015 survey are lecturers or adjunct faculty. We are convinced that this trend is reflective of trends in the discipline, overall. Similarly, the survey indicates that the number of women in our field is growing. In 2005, 18% of the respondents were female compared to 30% who responded to the 2015 survey.<sup>5</sup>

## **Chimes of Freedom (1964), Masters of War (1963)**

One of the more interesting observations with regard to the courses we teach is the wide variation in both theme and content. The range of courses included Treaties and International Law; Gender and U.S. Foreign Policy; Diplomacy, Security, and Governance; Transatlantic Relations; Origins of American Foreign Policy (colonial era to 1900); Cold War; Vietnam War; Arab-Israeli Conflict; and research seminars and historical methods courses, as well.

When we asked respondents to identify the top historic topics, themes, or interpretive frameworks of interest to their students, the responses similarly revealed a wide array of chronological periods and historical themes. Responses included imperialism, as well as tensions between imperialism and democracy, U.S. exceptionalism,

globalization and its relationship to the evolution of U.S. foreign policy, military industrial complex, rise and fall of the West, international trade and globalization; modern intellectual thought, empire and imperialism, founding period, 1848 revolutions, Manifest Destiny, Theodore Roosevelt, internationalism, isolationism, and peace.

### **I Feel a Change Comin' On (2009)**

We wanted to know what new topics, themes, or interpretive frameworks that SHAFR teaching faculty are introducing into their courses. We learned that SHAFR members are innovating and adjusting their course content in many exciting ways. Respondents explained that they were focusing on domestic politics vis-a-vis foreign policy, including elections; impact on U.S. economy; and impact on immigrants. Still other responses indicated a shifting focus from elite decision making to group influences on those decisions.

"Surveillance, secrecy and civil liberties;" the war on terror; and the Middle East Cold War as a "a launching pad for terrorism" were equally intriguing responses that indicate a sign of our times. Human rights discourse, space and foreign relations, and digital diplomacy also tell us that our field is moving in new and different directions.

### **Tangled Up in Blue (1975)**

In revising the 2005 survey questions in anticipation of launching the 2015 version, we were curious to learn the extent to which SHAFR members are relying on 21<sup>st</sup> century technological and other innovations. After all, smart phones, YouTube, and social media did not exist in 2005. The results were mixed.

Approximately 15% of respondents reported that they teach online and/or hybrid (face-to-face and online) courses related to U.S. foreign relations, while 42% of respondents rely on PowerPoint in the classroom, but not a single respondent employs Facebook or Twitter as a teaching tool.

When we asked how the advent of digital resources (e.g., full-text journal articles, primary sources, other websites) has affected teaching and/or how your students learn, we discovered that some of us are reluctant to introduce digital tools at all. More than a few said "not at all" or that digital tools had "Little effect on teaching." A major concern among many respondents was that basic reading, research, and writing skills are being undermined or stunted by technology:

"Unfortunately students still believe that research is web based rather than digging in the stacks of a library. I notice that more and more of their papers are "cut and paste" descriptive work rather than analytical."

"I am aware of many of the digital advances but worry that devoting time to such resources in the classroom takes students away from learning basic academic skills, communication skills, etc."

"Students are much more incapable of reading a serious book than ever before. The overemphasis of 'Digital This' and 'Online That' has the students unable to take notes in class and unable to read a serious book all the way through."

"Students don't go to the library anymore."

"I would say that students' reading skills—which are a precursor to writing skills—have declined."

"Technology hasn't really made things easier, and it has made some things more difficult."

Other SHAFR members, however, are apparently far more enthusiastic with regard to the potential of technology to enhance our teaching and student learning:

"Much easier to get students to write research papers based solely on primary sources; far less assignments involving secondary sources."

"Much easier for students to access journal articles (through the university portal) and on-line resources... Much easier to organize multi-media class content, make changes (great flexibility), look at things spontaneously in class, etc."

"Massively easier to teach source-based now."

"Excellent for primary source assignments."

"Enhances my flexibility and variety of sources; facilitates updating of resources; saves paper and student textbook costs."

"Enables students to work with primary sources."

"Digital resources make it easier to give students secondary-source content without relying on a textbook. Online primary sources are great for short student research projects."

"Could not imagine teaching without them. Absolutely essential to my teaching."

### **Beyond Here Lies Nothin' (2009)**

When we asked if SHAFR members rely on any of the resources posted to the SHAFR website in their teaching, to our obvious disappointment, the vast majority (80%) said 'no.' Only a handful of respondents indicated that they consult the syllabi collection or lessons. Moreover, when we asked how often SHAFR members consult the SHAFR Teaching webpages, the responses were equally disappointing: 85% indicated that they never or rarely consult the site. Before launching the survey, we knew we needed to improve our SHAFR teaching resources; the survey responses confirmed an urgency to do so as soon as possible.

### **Don't Think Twice, It's All Right (1963), It's All Good (2009)**

Although some of our SHAFR members may not have found the survey useful, the SHAFR Teaching Committee found it very valuable indeed.

The survey is a clear indication that we teach disparate and varied courses, and that we rely on a broad array of resources to practice our trade. Because of our shared global expertise among SHAFR teaching faculty, we are ever more convinced that SHAFR can be a frontrunner with regard to teaching the history of American foreign relations.

But we can't share our wealth of expertise if no one visits our website to find it. Spurred by the survey results, and with the support of SHAFR's excellent webmaster, George Fujii, and encouragement from the chair of the SHAFR Website Committee, Chester Pach, and from Council, the 2016 SHAFR Teaching Committee will make an exerted effort to revamp the SHAFR Teaching website.

Thanks to the responses to our survey, we now have a wealth of materials and resources that have been uploaded

to the website. In addition to recommended books, films, and other teaching materials, as well as digital primary sources and websites, we have updated the list of syllabi that are posted on the site, new lesson plans, and videos by our very own SHAFR members. We have also uploaded new content to support SHAFR members who help train K-12 teachers.

We will be incorporating interactive blogs on the site, and we invite all SHAFR members to participate. Do you have a recorded lecture on a particular topic? Did you give a talk about your most recent book? Did you redesign a course recently? Do you have lesson plans geared toward global learning in K-12? Please share your expertise with SHAFR members and the wider community of teachers (both professors and K-12 teachers) of American foreign relations by sending it to the Teaching Committee.

### Things Have Changed (2000)

We would be remiss if we were to close without a final nod to Bob Dylan. In 2015, Dylan appeared on the cover of AARP Magazine—a far cry from *Rolling Stone*—and was featured in an exclusive, “uncut” interview, probably the longest of his career. Promoting his newest album, *Shadows in the Night*, which features covers of Frank Sinatra standards, Dylan divulged to the AARP that, if he had to do it all over again, he would have been a teacher—“probably Roman history or theology.”

We encourage readers to contribute their syllabi and teaching modules, and to help us to make the SHAFR Teaching site as useful as possible to SHAFR members and the wider community. Please contact Kim Quinney (kquinney@csusm.edu) for materials corresponding to higher education and Lori Clune (lclune@csufresno.edu) with regard to resources to support K-12.

#### Notes:

1. <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/lists/100-greatest-bob-dylan-songs-20160524/the-grooms-still-waiting-at-the-altar-1981-20160523>
2. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/23/us/politics/how-does-it-feel-chief-justice-roberts-to-hone-a-dylan-quote.html>
3. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/06/arts/music/bob-dylans-secret-archive.html>; [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/29/magazine/which-rock-star-will-historians-of-the-future-remember.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FDylan%2C%20Bob&action=click&contentCollection=timestopics&region=stream&module=stream\\_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=2&pgtype=collection](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/29/magazine/which-rock-star-will-historians-of-the-future-remember.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FDylan%2C%20Bob&action=click&contentCollection=timestopics&region=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=2&pgtype=collection)
4. <https://shafir.org/sites/default/files/Passport%20Dec%202005.pdf>
5. We suspect that our numbers mirror a similar trend in the discipline. The American Historical Association reported in March 2012 that 44.8% of History PhDs were women. “Who Are the New History PhDs?” *Perspectives on History*, March 2012.

## SHAFR NEEDS YOU!

Volunteer now to serve on one of the many SHAFR committees that are the life-blood of our organization. It's easy to nominate yourself or a colleague by using the new “Volunteer” button on the SHAFR website.

