Lisa Pennington is an Assistant Professor of Curriculum and Pedagogy at Texas A&M International University in Laredo, TX. Prior to that she taught middle and high school history, and worked as a social studies curriculum specialist. She received her PhD in Curriculum and Instruction from Virginia Tech, and her M.A. and B.A. in History from ODU. When not working she enjoys traveling, running, and eating baked goods.

What do you like the most about your instruction and research program right now?

What I most like about my instruction and research program right now is that I am teaching Elementary Social Studies Methods, and am able to combine my knowledge of history with best instructional practices. I enjoy working with pre-service teachers and helping them understand that you can make history fun, interesting, and engaging for students. In addition, since I have a background in history, I am able to help my pre-service teachers brush up on their content for their Texas state licensure exams. Most of my research currently focuses on how to help pre-service teachers become comfortable teaching social studies from a multicultural, social justice perspective. For example, I'm working with a colleague in Virginia on a cross-university virtual book club focused on children’s books appropriate for teaching elementary social studies. Through this activity we’ll introduce students not only to resources, but also literature circle strategies, and review content on several topics, such as Japanese-American internment and the Civil Rights Movement.

What skills and intellectual experiences did you acquire in the M.A. program at ODU that have served you well in your subsequent work?

Certainly, the research and writing skills I gained during the M.A. program have been helpful in my subsequent work. I drew on those skills throughout my PhD program at Virginia Tech. Researching Japanese war crimes trials after World War II gave me experience working in archives, and months of practice with primary sources. I have used those experiences as examples multiple times in classes when explaining to pre-service teachers the importance of working with primary sources. Again, since I am currently working with pre-service elementary teachers who will be responsible for teaching all subjects, they are not always proficient in historical thinking skills, analysis, or working with primary sources themselves, yet they will be responsible for helping their future students do those very things. I feel very qualified to cover those skills with my classes. Finally, researching in the archives at the MacArthur Memorial led to a great partnership with their education department. I have created resources in conjunction with the
MacArthur Memorial, and presented at multiple state and national conferences.

Which professors do you remember and why from the Department of History at Old Dominion University?

Of course I remember Dr. Hametz the most, and am still in contact with her. I took several courses with Dr. Hametz during my program, and she was my thesis advisor. She actually brought up the idea of looking into documents at the MacArthur Memorial, which led to my eventual thesis focusing on the Japanese war crimes trials. I worked with her most closely throughout my time at ODU and am appreciative of her support and guidance in classes, throughout my thesis process, and even beyond. I often asked her advice during my doctoral program and during my job search as I applied for faculty positions, and I still check in with her occasionally.

What new areas of historical and/or academic inquiry have you explored since leaving ODU?

My historical areas of inquiry have stuck closely to genocide and war crimes since I left ODU. However, my areas of academic inquiry have moved more into pedagogy since my PhD is in curriculum and instruction. So I have examined how to best teach genocide and war crimes topics to students for example, and how to best prepare teachers to cover those topics with their students through the study of professional development opportunities. While the history for me is critical in what I do, since I want students to learn accurate content, and I am still constantly expanding my own historical knowledge, my focus has been on how to get that accurate content to students in ways that are interesting and promote historical and critical thinking skills.

Did work you accomplished in the M.A. program at ODU contribute to your eventual dissertation at Virginia Tech?

While I didn’t continue the study of Japanese war crimes trials at Virginia Tech, I used the skills I learned during my time at ODU in my courses and during my dissertation process. I did use the information from my thesis for a couple of conference presentations and a short practice based article about teaching the war crimes trials to secondary students. I think moving from the M.A. in history to a PhD in curriculum and instruction, and my background in teaching middle and high school history really got me thinking about how to take history and primary sources and make them more accessible for students at the K-12 level. So I have kept that in mind in everything I’ve done since ODU, and I hope I am preparing future teachers who will teach history in an engaging way and help their own students learn the importance of working with primary sources.