

History 190
Fall 2011
M 2:45-5:30
Hum 105

Professor Liss
Hum. 214, x73541
Hours: M 1:00-2:00,
Th 1:30-2:30

History Senior Thesis Seminar

The goal of this course is to guide you through the process of writing your senior thesis in History, a capstone experience, emphasizing the analytical, research and writing skills that you have developed in your course work. It is required of History majors and open to students in European Studies and other fields. The thesis project is distinctive as an extended work of original research in which each student develops a topic and argument based on historical evidence in a variety of possible sources. The thesis seminar is distinctive because it incorporates revising as an important part of writing and because it is collaborative. The seminar provides an opportunity for students to work together as part of an intellectual community. Oral presentations help students articulate their projects concisely and effectively. Students complete the thesis by enrolling in History 191 in the spring semester and working directly with their thesis advisers. Over the course of this year, you will produce an extensive piece of scholarship of which you can justly be proud.

The thesis process includes defining the topic, finding and interpreting sources, developing an argument, and writing and revising. By the end of the fall semester, each student will have completed a draft of one chapter of the thesis. To get to that point, the class is organized around tasks designed to help you develop your topic and begin researching and writing. These tasks include a topic statement, proposal, bibliography, annotated table of contents, chapter outline, chapter drafts, and peer reviews. Peer reviews are an important part of the course. You will be able to give helpful advice to other students about their arguments, writing and use of evidence. In addition, the experience of giving constructive criticism to another will help you sharpen your analytical skills for your own work. Everything you do in this course is part of the process of producing a thesis on which you will work throughout the year. It is important to know that everything you do is part of this *process*, that it is *not* a blue-print that will be compared to the final product. Nonetheless, the more carefully and fully you can work on your thesis the more useful these assignments will be to you and the better your thesis experience will be. For this reason, I have provided detailed discussions about the assignments and expectations for each class so that you can use them as a road map for our work this semester.

The learning objectives in this course are:

- To pursue historical research in primary and secondary sources on a topic of your choosing;
- To define the contours of this year-long project in the first semester, including determining the scope and organization of the thesis;
- To develop an extended argument based on analysis of historical sources and scholarship;
- To write a draft of one chapter of the thesis through successive revisions and peer reviews

The grade in the seminar is based on your work throughout the course (assignments indicated in the syllabus schedule and class participation) and the chapter draft you turn in at the end. The grade will be determined as follows:

- 40% for course assignments (20% for participation and peer reviews, 20% for other written assignments)
- 60% for the thesis chapter (20% for first rough draft; 40% for final rough draft)

Required resource: Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations*, 7th ed. (available at Huntley Bookstore).

For more information on History Department advice and expectations, see “Senior Thesis Guidelines” handout

- [Aug. 30 Introduction to the course and to the thesis: meet in my office]**
- Sept. 5 Getting started: topics and research:** Meet at Honnold Library Services Desk
Review materials you already have (course syllabi, readings, papers) and think about how your topic connects to work you have already done and why you are interested in it. What inspired you? We will discuss this next week. After today's class you should have a clearer (but not definitive) idea of how to find sources that will be useful to you and begin your bibliography, dividing it between primary and secondary sources. Start to get books and articles, using Link+ and ILL as necessary. Use Turabian for help with documentation.
- Sept. 12 Topic statements.** One-page statements and working bibliographies due in class. If you are undecided, prepare two. Bring multiple copies to distribute. What is the topic? What is important and interesting about it to you and, as far as you know, to historical scholarship? What fields and theoretical approaches might be useful in pursuing this topic? What are your sources? Are they available to you? Who might be thesis readers (you will need two, at least one from Scripps)? Talk to them about your project, ask for advice, and ask if they are available to be your first reader.
- Sept. 19 Life with a degree in History:** Career, Planning, & Resources: first half of class
More on topics, proposals and doing research: second half of class
Continue to develop your bibliography: read and annotate at least two sources and bring the updated bibliography to class. Your annotation is a brief discussion about the book or article, for instance: what is the argument? Why is it important and interesting (or not)? What sources does it use? How is it useful to you? What questions does it raise? What other material does it direct you to that you want to pursue?
- Sept. 26 Doing research: what others have done and what you will do too**
Scripps historians on their research: first half of class
Past senior theses: look at senior theses in History and in other fields of interest to you. You can find these at Denison or ask to borrow some from me or other faculty.
Write up a brief response, discussing your observations about topics, scope, organization. What might you want to emulate? What might you do differently? Annotate at least two more sources and turn in an updated bibliography. By now you should have a first reader for your thesis: don't wait too long; ask them. Ditto second reader.
- Oct. 3 Thesis proposals, version #1.** Proposals and annotated bibliographies due [in class].
The two-page thesis proposal should include a statement of the thesis topic and discussion of the potential argument, its importance, distinctiveness, and scope and the kinds of evidence or sources you will use. This is hard to do at this point, and it is o.k. to explore possible arguments and ask questions, but it is also important to try the best you can to articulate what you are interested in. This will help your thesis take shape. Students should also include a revised bibliography of primary and secondary sources. Building on what you have already done, the annotated bibliography should include 10-15 sources, including the main scholarship (topically, theoretically) as far as you can determine it so far. Annotate at least two more sources.

- Oct. 10** **Primary sources: the basis of original research.** Select a primary source to discuss in class. You should provide me with a copy of this source by Friday, Oct. 7 at Noon to upload to Sakai. In class, you are responsible for presenting the source: Why did you select it? What can you tell us about its origins, audience, context? How does one interpret it? What are the analytical challenges of the source? You should prepare (and bring to class) a written response to these—and other—questions you may have. **Taking notes:** how to manage your research. What methods work for you? What questions or difficulties do you face?
- Oct. 17** **No class: Fall break**
- Oct. 24** **Research workshop:** meet at Honnold Library Services Desk. Come prepared with questions, goals, problems to have the librarian help you with. Update (and turn in) your annotated bibliography: identify the most significant sources and those you have read, annotating at least four more sources.
- Oct. 31** **Revised proposals and annotated tables of contents** due Friday, 10/28 by 4:00 in the Sakai drop box and to your peer editor. Bring written comments to class (and a copy for me). The proposals should reflect your current conceptualization of your thesis, the topic, the argument and approach. The annotated table of contents should clarify the structure of the thesis: the focus of each chapter and a brief, one-paragraph discussion of what you will discuss in that chapter. Indicate which chapter you will draft this semester. Written comments should provide the kind of criticism you would like to receive—thoughtful and constructive. What are the strengths and weaknesses? What needs to be clarified? How well does the structure of the thesis indicated in the table of contents help support the goals of the thesis, that is, what is the connection between structure and argument? What suggestions do you have that might be useful?
- Nov. 7** **Individual appointments: outline of the chapter you will draft this semester**
- Nov. 14** **Draft of 10 pages of your chapter due in class.** The first rough draft is probably the hardest part of the thesis you will write. After this you will be able to build more directly on work you have already done (starting with this assignment). I know this is a rough draft, even though my comments may look pretty much the same as my comments always look. Prepare to discuss what worked, what didn't, what is left to do.
- Nov. 21** **No class. Individual appointments as needed.** Chapter rough drafts due by 2:45 on Wednesday (or before you leave) in my Humanities mailbox and Sakai drop box. Provide a copy to your peer editor (make arrangements). The draft should include a 1-2 page preface to orient the reader. You can draw from your proposal, if it is still helpful.
- Nov. 28** **Individual appointments.** Bring a written self-evaluation: what worked, what didn't, what remains to be done, what kind of guidance or suggestions do you want? Peer editor comments due to me and to student by 2:45.

Dec. 5 **Chapter draft presentations.** Discuss the chapter's argument. Prepare comments on what you think has worked well and what remains to be done as you revise this chapter. The purpose of this class is not only to assess what you have accomplished over the semester, but also to set goals as you move on, outside of the seminar.

Dec. 15 (Thursday) **Chapters due** by 4:00 p.m. in my Humanities mailbox and Sakai drop box.
In this revised version, I will look for changes and improvement that demonstrate that you have addressed issues (organizational, evidentiary, analytical) that were raised by your earlier drafts. You must turn in the first draft again with this revised version. I don't want to repeat myself or, worse, contradict myself. Provide a stamped, addressed envelope so that I can mail them both back to you with comments.

Spring semester 2012: You will work independently in conjunction with your first (and second) readers. If you would like the seminar to meet periodically and informally, let me know.

April 13 **History theses are due!**

TBA: **Thesis presentations and History Department celebration**