History 84900 – Advanced Research Seminar

This course is an intensive writing workshop, in which students will expand and refine their skills in research and historical writing by carrying out a research project and completing an article-length historical essay. The required paper of roughly 35-40 pages must be a piece of original work with a clearly defined historiographical problem, substantially based on primary sources, suitable in form for submission to a peer-reviewed journal. Over the course of the semester, students will present for class discussion a proposal, historiography, and paper drafts. In addition to critiquing student work, in class we will discuss conceptualization, methodology, research strategies, interpretation, and the publication process. There will be some – but very little – assigned reading.

Prior to the first meeting of the course, students should select one or two possible paper topics and do some preliminary bibliographic research. The topics should be significantly different from your first-year seminar paper but may constitute a piece of research that leads toward a dissertation. Writing a publishable article over the course of a single term is a very challenging task. Intermediate products and deadlines are designed to facilitate the process. To function properly, the seminar requires that students turn in their work on time and prepare their critiques of their colleagues’ work thoroughly and promptly.

Supporting and critiquing one another’s work is an integral part of the seminar. Critical reading of historical work outside one’s own specialty and providing useful, analytic suggestions is an important intellectual and professional skill that we will be deepening over the course of the term. While the course grade will be based primarily on each student’s written work, participation in class discussion of other students’ work will also be taken into consideration.

Course learning objectives: Over the course of the semester students will be expected to demonstrate:

- An ability to formulate a historical research question
- An understanding of the research process
- An understanding of how to assemble a relevant and effective bibliography
- An ability to shape a methodology for a historical research project
- An understanding of the use of evidence and research in historical studies
- An ability to read historical monographs critically and analytically
- An ability to critically review and analyze the historical work of others
- An appreciation for the complexity of historical experience
Class Schedule:

Feb. 4: Introductions, class procedures, and presentations of proposed research topics

Feb. 11: Prepare for presentation in class a single paragraph that discusses your central research question. This should be the large enveloping issue that you will be addressing. It should frame and subordinate all other questions you intend to research.

For a discussion of what makes a good article good, read the 2013 Louis Pelzer Memorial Award Winner for the best essay in American history by a graduate student:


An additional article may be assigned.

Feb 18: Prepare a short three-page discussion of the historiography relevant to your topic. In addition, prepare to present a book or article in your field of research that engages the issues you are exploring and that serves as a model for your work.

Feb. 25: Discussion of proposals. Submit by e-mail to all seminar participants by Feb. 23 a four to six page proposal that includes:
1. A statement of the problem
2. Present state of scholarship
3. Possible significance of findings
4. Short bibliography of primary and most important secondary sources
5. The methodology or strategy you will be using to answer your central question

Mar. 3: Continuation of discussion of proposals

Mar. 10: No class; individual meetings with instructor as needed

Mar. 17: Updates on research: successes, disappointments, surprises

Mar. 24: How to get an article published; discussion of the processes and problems of getting an article published. Come to class with the names of at least two journals you that you think might be appropriate for publishing your paper and their article submission processes.

Mar. 31: No class; individual meetings with instructor as needed

Apr. 7: Discussion of sample sections. Submit to all seminar participants by Mar. 29 a eight to twelve page section of your paper for the class to workshop.

Apr. 14: Continuation of discussion of sample sections
Mar. 21: No class; individual meetings with instructor as needed

Mar. 28: No class – Spring break

May 5: Discussion of complete papers. Submit to the seminar members by e-mail what you consider a fully finished version of your paper. You must submit your paper no later than Monday, May 2.

May 12: Continuation of discussion of complete papers. Last class session.

Final revised papers are due May 19. This is a firm deadline.