History 84900: First Year Seminar in American History

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Office hours: Mon: 11-1:30 or by appt.

This seminar is designed to train incoming graduate students in the craft of historical research and writing. Over the course of the term, each student will formulate a research topic, prepare a bibliography of relevant primary and secondary sources, write an historiographic essay, and present and defend a formal project proposal for the substantial research paper that is to be completed in the second semester seminar. Weekly meetings will discuss common readings, share and critique written work, and develop and refine the research proposals. We will also be devoting some time to methods and issues involved in undergraduate teaching.

Students will focus primarily on framing a topic and honing a well defined, focused and reasonable research proposal. Even before the first session students should be thinking about a research project, sampling secondary readings and investigating the availability of accessible sources.

Course learning objectives: Familiarize students with the issues historians confront in their efforts to do original work: how to shape researchable questions; how to find and cull through appropriate sources; how to weigh and interpret evidence, construct arguments, and set one’s own work within the wider debate in the discipline.

Over the course of the semester students will be expected to:

- formulate an historical research question
- assemble a relevant and effective bibliography
- shape a methodology for a research project based on primary sources
- demonstrate effective use of evidence and research
- read historical works critically and analytically
- write a well-defined research proposal for an article length historical paper
- demonstrate mastery of the research process
- critically review and analyze the work of others

Schedule of class meetings with assignments and timetables

August 28. Introductions, Orientation: Selecting a Topic

Sept. 4. No class
http://www.blogs.hss.ed.ac.uk/crag/files/2016/06/the_hedgehog_and_the_fox-berlin.pdf

Barbara Young Welke, “The Cowboy Suit Tragedy: Spreading Risk…,”

Prepare a 1-2 page paper summarizing Berlin’s main argument.

In a separate piece of 2-3 pages discuss Welke’s central question, approach and methodology; identify the main sources used as the basis of the article; conclude with an assessment of the overall quality and persuasiveness of the essay. Finally, discuss Welke’s approach within Berlin’s paradigm.

Sept. 18 Individual meetings. Discuss your topic: scope, sources and secondary readings

Sept. 25 “Between Footnotes and Plagiarism: Imagination, Creativity and Scholarship.” Read the Journal of American History, March, 2004 Round Table discussion pp. 1325-1357 and write a 3 page essay addressing one of the fundamental issues raised.

Review the offprints (NYC Housing Data) and suggest possible research topics based on these records.

Oct. 2 For the topic you have selected do the following:
   a. prepare a list of primary and secondary sources
   b. discuss how these sources are central to your research question


Prepare and circulate a one page description of the central question that you propose to investigate and its significance. Discuss in class.

Oct. 16 Prepare a 4-5 page discussion of the historiography (the present state of relevant scholarship) surrounding your topic with a bibliography of important monographs and journal articles in your topic area.

Oct. 23 In a one page submission discuss a book or article that might best serve as a model for the type of study you intend to do.

Oct. 30 Undergraduate Teaching. Read: “Textbooks and Teaching,”
Grants and applying for Grant

Department requirements, the syllabus, a bow to the local learning culture, selecting texts, preparing lessons, priming discussions, exams, grades.

Nov. 6 Discuss the methodology for your paper. Remember methodology does not mean which library you intend to visit or which sources you plan on working with, it does mean discussing your research strategy. It may help you to think in terms of how you propose to structure the various sections of the paper (perhaps in the form of sections) and how this will move the analysis forward to your conclusion.

Nov. 13 Presentation, critiquing and revising draft research proposals. The seminar will read and critique all proposals prepared by its members. Drafts will be sent by email for review and preparation of oral critiques to be discussed in class.

Nov. 20 Presentation: critiquing and revision of draft research proposals.

Nov. 27 15-minute Power Point conference-paper style revised presentations (with comments from critic/discussant) of the final research plan/proposal with potential implications of research findings on current scholarly understanding. Group I

Dec. 4 15-minute Power Point conference-paper style revised presentations (with comments from critic/discussant) of the final research plan/proposal with potential implications of research findings on current scholarly understanding. Group II

Dec. 11 Submit the final proposal