This senior research seminar is designed to assist you in conceptualizing, researching, and writing an original historical essay that draws on both secondary literature and a significant body of primary sources. Assignments are designed to guide you through the process of researching and writing the paper over the course of the semester. If you read a language other than English and there is material in that language relevant to your topic, the History Department strongly encourages you to use such material in your paper.

The fundamental goals of the course for students are the completion of a substantial essay that demonstrates command over the distinctive practices of the discipline of history, that offers a clear argument or interpretation of the subject matter, that demonstrates original or independent thinking, and that makes appropriate use of evidence and historiography to sustain its analysis. Successful completion of History 91 is required for history majors at Swarthmore College.

Due Dates of Written Assignments:

Due Thursday/Friday September 6 or Friday, September 7: Brief description of topic and outline of the article Tyler Stovall, “White Freedom and the Lady of Liberty”

Due Monday, September 17: Summary of meeting with faculty expert on your topic and revised description of topic

Due Wednesday, September 19: Research proposal (prospectus) and bibliography. Please let us know if your observance of Yom Kippur presents a problem.

Due Wednesday, September 26: Annotated bibliography

Due Wednesday, October 10: Document analysis

Due Wednesday, October 24: Historiographical essay

Due Tuesday, November 6: First installment of paper

Due Tuesday, November 27: Second installment of paper

Due Tuesday, December 5: Complete draft of paper

Due Monday, December 10: Revised complete draft of paper

Due Thursday, December 13: Post peer review comments
Due by Noon on Saturday, December 22: Final version due at noon (25 pages or 7,000 words). Be sure to include abstract.

Students must complete all written and oral assignments to pass the course
All written assignments must be posted on Moodle by the deadline stated in the syllabus. The Department has a firm rule that extensions will not be granted. All assignments must be submitted on time. Any assignments received after the due date and time will be graded down severely. Please note that the Department does not grant Incompletes, which means you must submit the paper by the end of the fall semester. Failure to do so will mean that you will receive an NC in the course and you will not graduate in the spring.

Final papers will be evaluated according to the following criteria:
Articulation of a clear, strong, significant, and original thesis. Presentation of evidence that supports the thesis.
Depth of analysis (i.e., the questions posed).
Creativity and rigor of interpretation (i.e., the answers proposed).
Logical organization with clear introduction and conclusion.
Accurate citations in the correct form.
Elegant and compelling writing style.

Seminar Participation
Scholarship is not a solitary endeavor. At various times in the semester, students will be responsible for reading and discussing other students’ written assignments. This process is designed to provide students with critical readers of their writing and to encourage collective learning from each other. All assignments of this type will be considered in the final grade.

We have posted on Moodle a style sheet that serves as the ultimate arbiter of matters regarding citations. It is from Kate Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations (Eighth edition). We have also placed the following book on general reserve in McCabe (also available as an e-book on Tripod) Wayne C. Booth, et al., The Craft of Research (3rd ed., 2008). Pages 35-50 and 62-65 are particularly informative. It offers good insight into and guidance with the writing of a research paper.

Finally, a sampling of some History 91 papers (and Honors Theses) is located on Tripod at: http://thesis.haverford.edu/dspace/handle/10066/27
SEMINAR SCHEDULE

****We Will Meet as a Group the Following Weeks: 1, 2, 4, 6, and 14****

WEEK ONE: September 6/7: Introduction-From Topic to Research Project


Come to class with a written outline that breaks down the article into its constituent parts. It does not matter if this article is not in your area of study or expertise. The point of this exercise is to identify the following aspects of a history essay: statement of problem, thesis, and premises; discussion of sources; methods or strategies for research; treatment of historiography; development of narrative; comparative dimensions; suggestions for further research. Bring the outline and the article to class. We will discuss the structure of this essay and focus on the building blocks of a good historical essay.

In addition, please submit your proposed paper topic at the end of your written outline.

Selecting a research topic can be difficult and frustrating process. The first step to finding your topic is identifying your research question. A good research question will: (1) enable you to focus the scope of your project; (2) provide you with a direction of inquiry. Developing good questions will allow you to define what types of sources to collect and which methods you will use to analyze your documents. As your project evolves, your question(s) will likewise change leading you towards new sources and new interpretations.

For our first meeting, come to class with one or two preliminary research questions. Begin by thinking about topics that interest you. Consult previous written assignments or make a list of your interests. After you have settled on one topic, come up with some questions based on what you would like to know. Try to be as specific as possible. A productive research question articulates the focus of your research, its scope, and the central problem.

Approving a Topic

By the end of Week Two you must meet with a faculty member who is knowledgeable about the topic of your paper and discuss bibliographical and other matters relevant to your research. Immediately after the meeting, both you and the faculty member will send us an email summarizing what was said during the meeting. Your proposed topic will not be considered accepted until we have received both emails.

Criteria for Topic Selection

You should ideally draw inspiration from other history courses and reading you have done at Swarthmore. Think about the kinds of topics and kind of history that intrigue you and that you would like to study in greater detail. Be sure to consider whether knowledge of a language other than English is necessary for conducting research and whether you can feasibly complete the project in one semester. You will be living with your project for the entire semester, and so definitely select a topic that will sustain your interest and enthusiasm for the next several months.

The flip side of a topic is a question. The best papers start with the best questions. A good question has no obvious answer, but something about it compels you to find that answer and it keeps your reader’s attention focused. A good question is insurance against the uncertainties of the archive. It can always be refined and reframed, especially in response to what your sources reveal. (See Wayne Booth, The Craft of Research, for more on the relationship between topics and questions.)

Selecting a Topic: What Not to Do

What you don’t want to do is select a topic that possesses one or more of the following
characteristics:

Addresses issues that are settled, trivial, and banal. For example, “Did Antisemitism Play a Role in Hitler’s Thinking?” or “Lawn-Bowling in Rhodesia: Unanswered Questions.”

Focuses on matters that are too narrowly conceived or excessively specific. For example, “How many coins did the British issue in India in the 1790s?” There is nothing wrong with being specific, as long as you can identify an historically significant question.

Similarly, focuses on issues that are too broadly conceived. For example, “The history of Civil Rights in Washington, D.C. since World War II” or “The problem of crime in London in the nineteenth century.” There’s nothing wrong with thinking about big problems or questions, but you need to consider it a step toward a final topic not the end product.

Requires linguistic skills and travel that are logistically impossible and impractical. For example, “Creation of Reindeer Collective Farms in the Yakutsk Region of the Soviet Union in 1932 According to Archival Documents Found Only in Tomsk.”

Replicates or extends the argument of an inspiring work of scholarship. It’s great to be inspired, but there is a difference between being inspired by a style or method of interpretation and replicating the same kind of study in a different locale.

**Shaping Your Topic**

Once you settle upon a topic, you may find that you will need to fine-tune it for a variety of reasons.

If the topic is not feasible or practical in the form it first occurs to you, then:
- Pare it down if it’s too big.
- Deal with accessible perceptions of a distant event or social history.
- Shift the topic to some other geographical area or time period.

Is the topic too specific, convoluted, or trivial? Then consider the doing the following:
- Broaden it out some.
- Clarify the topic: what are you really interested in?

Or check that you are not:
- Substituting the conclusion or a specific argument for the topic? Letting a clever literary device or metaphor drive your idea?

**WEEK TWO: September 13/14: Library Resources and Research Tools and Strategies**

**Library Session with Sarah Elichko, Social Sciences Librarian**

Thursday, September 13: 1-4 pm - McCabe Video Classroom  
Friday, September 14: 2-5 pm - McCabe Computer Classroom

**Written Assignment Due on Moodle by 5 PM on Monday, September 17:** Summary of meeting with faculty expert on your topic and revised statement of topic

During the next two weeks you will assemble your annotated bibliography of secondary works and identify primary materials available in the library, via interlibrary loan, or in Philadelphia-area archives and libraries. Begin reading and taking careful notes on the materials you are assembling. In particular,
be sure to write complete citations of the materials. Doing so now will save you a lot of headaches later in the semester when you draw up your final bibliography and notes.

WEEK THREE: September 20/21: Research Proposal (Prospectus)

Written Assignment (Research Proposal and Bibliography) Due on Moodle by 5 PM on Wednesday, September 19. The proposal should be two-three pages in length. Please add one sentence at the end of your bibliography stating which library sources from last week’s session were most useful in preparing your bibliography.

Read a sample research proposal posted on Moodle. You are also encouraged to read the proposals that you all have posted before class.

Come speak with Professor Shokr or Weinberg on Thursday or Friday. This meeting is required; failure to meet will be reflected in the final grade.

Your research proposal should describe the topic you plan to research, explain what others have had to say about the topic, indicate how you expect your findings to fit into the existing literature, and describe your source materials. Convince us that the project is both important and fascinating and that you have moved from your original topic to a compelling research project. What is the historical significance or the complexity of your project’s central question(s)? How will your primary sources allow you to answer the question(s)? How will you address the topic from an angle that has not been previously examined, or explain how you expect to draw conclusions different from those of other scholars.

WEEK FOUR: September 27/28: Annotated Bibliography and Class Presentation on Scholarly Article

Written Assignment Due on Moodle by 5 PM on Wednesday, September 26: Annotated Bibliography.

Read the Sample Annotated Bibliography on Moodle.

You must assemble a bibliography of books, articles, and primary sources on your topic. The bibliography should include at least four books, close to ten articles, and as many primary sources as possible.

The bibliography should be structured in two sections, Primary Sources and Secondary Sources. In each section, provide complete bibliographical information in the correct form. We have posted on Moodle a style sheet for bibliographies and footnotes. In addition, Tripod can provide you with the proper citation form. STUDENTS WHO SUBMIT A BIBLIOGRAPHY IN THE INCORRECT FORM WILL BE REQUIRED TO RESUBMIT THEIR BIBLIOGRAPHY AND BE LIABLE FOR APPROPRIATE GRADE PENALTIES. For primary sources, provide a brief annotation (2-4 lines) describing the kind of source it is, where the source is located, and whose perspective(s) the source provides. For secondary sources, provide a brief annotation (2-4 lines) that summarizes the main themes, arguments, and sources used in the work cited.


Five-Minute Class Presentation on September 27/28 on Scholarly Article

Make use of the tools and resources that you learned during our library session to locate a scholarly
article that is central to your research topic. During class you will give a brief presentation on that article. For a good presentation, you will need to have begun seriously to work on your bibliography and have read several articles. The article you select is a vehicle for discussing the historical significance of your topic.

An effective oral presentation requires you to be concise and focused. Five minutes pass very, very quickly, and so it is imperative that you come to class with a well-formulated presentation that does not stray from the questions presented below. The purpose of the presentation is to force you to organize your thoughts about your topic and communicate to others what you believe to be historically significant about the topic.

**Your presentation should cover the following points:**
Why did you choose this article?
What are its main themes, arguments, and methodologies?
What is the question that propels the study? How did the question get reframed and refined as the scholar engages with his or her sources?
What types of primary sources did the author use?
What questions or controversies does it leave unanswered?
How does the article contribute to historiographical, theoretical, or methodological debates on your topic?
How do you expect your research to contribute to the issues raised by this article?

**WEEK FIVE: October 4/5: Individual Research**

Come speak with Professor Shokr or Weinberg on Thursday or Friday. This meeting is required; failure to meet will be reflected in the final grade.

Note: Special Majors Educational Studies and Black Studies will meet with both department advisors this week.

**WEEK SIX: October 11/12: Document Analysis**

Read Martin Duberman, “`Writhing Bedfellows’ in Antebellum South Carolina: Historical Interpretation and the Politics of Evidence.”

Scan and post your document on Moodle by 5 PM on Wednesday, October 10. The document should be one or two pages.

Please bring a hard copy of the document for each person in the class. In addition, each member of the class must read the posted documents for her section.

Select a document that allows you to showcase how it helps to illuminate your project. What insight(s) does the document provide? How does the document help you address the central question(s) of your project? In your presentation you will summarize the document; you are limited to seven minutes. The purpose of the assignment is to allow you to practice and showcase your skills in original historical interpretation. Think of this as the first draft of one small part of your larger research paper. It’s an opportunity to test the quality of your question against the nature of your sources. You may come away from this assignment with a new or sharpened focus for the question you wish to pose. Remember that others in the class will have read the document and will be able to help you analyze it.

There are many different ways to interpret primary sources, and a multitude of ways to be creative in the process. In some instances, you may want to tell a story; in others, you might comment on the language employed in the document; while in yet other cases your interpretation might emerge from
an attempt to assess motivation, intent, or purpose. However, simply describing what happened will never be sufficient as a historical interpretation of a document.

Interpretation involves two analytic processes because historians are always trying to discover both the meaning and the significance of any piece of historical evidence. Thus your presentation should seek to expose the meaning of the document you have chosen and uncover its significance. By meaning, we are trying to reconstruct how historical actors may have understood a document in the era in which it was composed; by significance, we attempt to relate how that evidence contributes to a particular interpretation of the past. A good document analysis will therefore focus upon both the text itself (with attention to the specifics and nuances of language used) and the context (the broader history of the period that informs the document). The meaning and significance of a text can be lost on your readers if you forget to tell them the basic information they need to know about that document. So remember to include somewhere in your document analysis essay the following important information: Who wrote the document? When? Why? For whom? How is this document relevant for your research paper?

Analyzing Primary Sources


Documents can be analyzed on many levels and asked to answer a number of questions. Not all of what follows will be useful with every document, but in general the following questions are useful and will cover virtually all of what you can get out of a document. In what follows, I am using the word “document” in the broadest possible sense. In some circumstances, a painting or a piece of music might be a document, and so might a gun or a coffee cup.

Level One Questions: These are questions for which there are normally concrete answers. The document itself might answer these questions in a straightforward way, but the answers might also require some deeper thinking.

Who created this document?
This doesn’t mean just knowing the name of the author, though that is important. It also means knowing something about the author, since who that person is will influence the content and meaning of the document. Think about what the author’s identity might reveal about the deeper meaning of the source.

Who is the intended audience?
Audience shapes what we expect from a source, and knowing the relationship between the author and the intended audience can tell us a great deal about the source because it determines a whole set of rhetorical conventions that might have an impact on the credibility of the text and/or the need to look for hidden meanings.

What is the story line?
The story line may be a narrative, but it may also be details that don’t form a story in the conventional sense. A diary entry may offer a conventional linear narrative, while a will does not – but the will still has a “story.”

Level Two Questions: Now, you will probe beneath the surface. These questions still have essentially direct answers, and ones that can be ascertained in a fairly “objective” way. They are, however, questions that take you deeper into the source and sometimes between the lines.

When and why was the document created?
Every source you will encounter was created for a purpose. What is it? Some possibilities (not an
exhaustive list!) are: to persuade, to inform, to intimidate, to make something legal.

**What type of document is this?**
Genres have conventions – i.e., certain things that always appear (like beginning a letter “Dear – “). Knowing these is necessary for a secure understanding of the source.

**What are the basic assumptions of this source?**
All documents make assumptions that are connected to their intended audience – things that the creators know the audience will know without having to be told as well as things that have to be stated because they are central to the argument.

**Level Three Questions:**
In these questions, you exercise your critical imagination – the exercise of thinking historically about your sources. These questions don’t have definite answers and may produce answers from you that others will dispute.

**Can I believe this document?**
Do the assumptions, the rhetoric, etc. of this source undermine its credibility? Are there things that are believable even if other things seem not to be? What questions do I need to answer in order to feel comfortable trusting this source? Can there be more than one interpretation of the story or details within the document?

**What can I learn about the society that created it?**
This may be the most important question for historians. Every source reveals things that its creators never intended to reveal. It’s not necessarily the case that it reveals things they did not want us to know – merely that we can see things with hindsight and a different perspective that they didn’t realize they were telling us about them. What is changing in this society? What is the conflict that this document is describing or dramatizing? How does this conflict reveal the sources of change and the causes of tension in this society?

**What does the source mean for my research topic?**
This is the great “So what?” question. Now that you have decoded this source, what difference does it make? Have you learned anything useful from it? What will you (or could you) do with what you have learned? Finally, you should think about what the document does not reveal and how you might go about trying to find out what this document fails to tell you.

**Physical Appearance of Sources:**
If you are working with a facsimile, photocopy or microfilm of the original source, think about what the physical appearance and lay-out of the source reveals about it. For example: If it is a handwritten source, is the text “letter perfect” or are there corrections, erasures, interlinear notes, etc.? If it is a printed work, is it produced in a way that can give clues about the potential audience?

**FALL BREAK: October 13-21**

**WEEK SEVEN: October 25/26: Historiographical Essay and Individual Conferences**

**Written Assignment Due on Moodle by 5 PM on Wednesday, October 24: Historiographical Essay**

Come speak with Professor Shokr or Weinberg on October 25 or 26. This meeting is required; failure to meet will be reflected in the final grade.
Read one of the following historiographical essays we have posted on Moodle as an example (of course, no one will stop you if you want to read both examples):

Jonathan Saha, “Histories of Everyday Violence in British India”
OR

Historians engage in the business of interpreting the past. Not surprisingly, historians do not always agree with the interpretations and analyses of their colleagues. This exercise is designed to have you explore the various interpretations historians have had about your research topic. The historiographical essay is a review of historians’ approaches and interpretations of your project and pays attention to how each work on the subject occupies a particular place within that body of scholarship.

Think of this as an analysis of a dialogue, conversation, or debate among scholars. Your task is to describe and analyze the contours and directions of this scholarly dialogue. What question(s) are they engaging with and debating? How has it changed over time? A successful historiographical essay will explore the strengths and weaknesses of the respective positions in terms of evidence, methodology and argumentation. You do not need to try to deal with every book/article on your subject. Instead, you should strive to integrate your analyses of the books and articles into a cohesive, integrated synthesis that examines the issues raised in common by the work under review and also compares and contrasts their respective arguments, conclusions, methodologies, etc. What are the relationships among the works under examination, and what kinds of questions are missing from the historiography? Consider how the arguments, approaches, and ideas presented in the secondary literature have influenced your own thinking on the topic. Finally, you should conclude your essay with your own assessment and judgment of the controversy. What are you trying to accomplish in the essay? How do the debates among historians link to your paper? How do your ideas coincide with those presented by other scholars? How does your thinking contribute to or move beyond the debate or dialogue you have analyzed? How does your analysis refine the central question propelling your research project? An historiographical essay is about four to five pages.

An historiographical essay is not a personal reflection. It offers you the opportunity to take a stance regarding how your subject has been studied by others and allows you to tell the reader the value (or lack of) of what others have written. In short, how does the historiography intersect with your project. Enter into the discussion that other historians have written.
WEEK EIGHT: November 1/2: Independent Writing

Feel free to schedule a meeting with us this week if you feel the need.

WEEK NINE: November 8/9: Independent Writing

Written Assignment Due on Moodle by 5 PM on Tuesday, November 6: First section of research paper. Aim for 4 or 5 pages.

Come speak with Professor Shokr or Weinberg on Thursday or Friday. The meeting is required; failure to meet will be reflected in the final grade.

WEEK TEN: November 15/16: Independent Writing

WEEK ELEVEN: November 22/23: Thanksgiving Week—Keep writing!!!!

WEEK TWELVE: November 29/30: Independent Writing and Conferences

Written assignment Due on Moodle by 5 PM on Tuesday, November 27: Second section of research paper. Aim for 4 or 5 pages.

Come speak with Professor Shokr or Weinberg on Thursday or Friday. The meeting is required; failure to meet will be reflected in the final grade.

You will submit a draft of a portion of the research paper, including notation (footnotes or endnotes) in the correct form and a (non-annotated) bibliography. All drafts should be double-spaced and paginated. You should reread the article we discussed during week one in order to see how the author constructed his essay in terms of introduction, historiography, narrative, and analysis.

WEEK THIRTEEN: December 6/7: Individual Writing and Revising.

Writing assignment due on Moodle by 5 PM on Tuesday, December 5: Full draft of research paper.

Professor Weinberg will be out of town on December 6 and 7.

WEEK FOURTEEN: December 13/14: Peer Review

Submit a revised full version of your paper by 5 PM on Monday, December 10.

Students will be assigned partners for written critiques. Critiques should discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your partner’s paper and make constructive suggestions for improvement. Bring a copy to class and post on Moodle by Noon on Thursday, December 13.

Please bring two copies of your paper with you to class on December 13 or 14. Plan to discuss your revisions in response to the comments you receive from the peer review and professors.

Finish Paper and Submit by Noon on Saturday, December 22. Please post on Moodle. Be sure that you provide footnotes and bibliography in correct form. In addition, please include an abstract, which is a summary (one to three sentences) of the subject and argument of the paper and will be used for cataloging in the Swarthmore archives. Place the abstract before the paper’s introduction.