

HISTORY 91: SENIOR RESEARCH SEMINAR  
FALL 2020

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**Course Goals and Objectives:** This senior research seminar is designed to assist you in conceptualizing, researching, and writing an original historical essay (25 pages) 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

**WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS AND DUE DATES:**

Brief Description of Topic and Outline of Article	September 10/11
Summary of Discussion with History Department Faculty and Revised Description of Topic	September 16
Research Proposal (Prospectus) and Bibliography	September 23
Annotated Bibliography	September 30
Document Analysis	October 14
Historiographical Essay	October 28
First Installment of Paper	November 20
Draft of Paper	December 7
Peer Review Comments	December 9
Final Version of Paper and Abstract	December 15

**RESOURCES:** 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).

In addition, you can find a link to an ebook on Moodle (or directly through Tripod): Wayne C. Booth, et al., *The Craft of Research*, 4th ed. (Chicago, 2016). Pages 33-48 and 60-64 offer valuable guidance for selecting, shaping, and refining a research question.

Samples of some History 91 papers (and Honors Theses) can be found at:  
<http://thesis.haverford.edu/dspace/handle/10066/27>

**POLICIES:** Students must complete **all written and oral assignments** to pass this course.

**ATTENDANCE AND COMMUNICATION (HISTORY DEPARTMENT POLICY):** Students are required to attend all classes. Unexcused absences will result in a lower grade for the course. If you are having a medical or personal emergency, please contact the Dean's Office as well as the instructor. It is your responsibility to inform your instructor as soon as possible. It is essential that you check your email on a regular basis since History professors will contact you via email. We also expect you to use email to contact History professors.

**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.

**ACADEMIC HONESTY:** Students must read the History Department's statement on Academic Honesty posted on the seminar's Moodle site, and will be held accountable for any breach of "the College's standards of academic integrity whether these violations are intentional or unintentional" (see: <http://www.swarthmore.edu/student-handbook/academic-policies>).

**DEADLINES, EXTENSIONS, AND INCOMPLETES:** 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.

**INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES:** These meetings are required, just like attendance at the seminar. Failure to attend a meeting with Professor Azfar or Professor Weinberg will impact your final grade.

**EVALUATION OF WRITTEN WORK:** 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.

**DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS:** If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability or a chronic medical condition, please contact the Student Disability Services (Parrish 113W, 123W) via email at [studentdisabilityservices@swarthmore.edu](mailto:studentdisabilityservices@swarthmore.edu) to arrange an appointment to discuss your needs. As appropriate, the office will issue students with documented disabilities or medical conditions a formal Accommodations Letter. Since accommodations require early planning

and are not retroactive, please contact the Student Disability Services as soon as possible. For details about the accommodations process, visit the Student Disability Service website at <https://www.swarthmore.edu/academic-advising-support/welcome-to-student-disability-service>. You are also welcome to contact the instructors privately to discuss your academic needs. However, all disability-related accommodations must be arranged through Student Disability Services.

## SEMINAR SCHEDULE

**WE WILL MEET AS A GROUP THE FOLLOWING WEEKS: 1, 3, 4, 12**

### **WEEK 1 (SEPTEMBER 10/11): INTRODUCTION—FROM TOPIC TO RESEARCH PROJECT**

**Read:**

- Wayne C. Booth, et al, *The Craft of Research*, 4th ed. (2016), 33-48, 60-64.
- Tyler Stovall, “White Freedom and the Lady of Liberty,” *American Historical Review* 123, no. 1 (February 2018): 1-27.

Come to class with a written outline of the Stovall essay 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; engagement with 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.

**Written Assignment: Preliminary Statement of Topic**

- Due on Moodle before class on Thursday, September 10 or Friday, September 11.
- A one- or two-sentence brief description of proposed topic for your research paper.

**Choosing a Research Topic:** 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. 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. 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. Your research question 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.)

**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. Feel free to consult previous course syllabi and your written assignments to help you define your interests. 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.

**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 this a step toward your final research question not the question itself.
- 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.
- Requires linguistic skills and travel that are logistically impossible and impractical.

**Shaping and Refining 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, then: Pare it down if it's too big. Or shift the topic to some other geographical area or more limited time period.

Is the topic too specific, convoluted, or trivial? Then consider broadening it out some. Or clarify the topic: what are you really interested in?

## **WEEK 2 (SEPTEMBER 17/18): INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS**

**Meet with Professor Azfar or Professor Weinberg.**

**Written Assignment: Submit a Summary of Meeting with History Department Faculty Member and a Revised Description of Topic**

- Due on Moodle by 5 PM on Wednesday, September 16

During this week you will begin to assemble your bibliography of secondary works and identify primary materials. Begin reading and taking careful notes on the materials you are collecting. 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 3 (SEPTEMBER 24/25): RESEARCH PROPOSAL (PROSPECTUS)**

**Written Assignment: Research Proposal and Bibliography**

- Due on Moodle by 5 PM on Wednesday, September 23.
- The proposal should be two-three pages in length.
- The bibliography should be divided into two sections: primary sources and secondary sources.

**We will meet in small groups, and you will give a brief (five-minute) presentation about your project.**

**Read a sample research proposal posted on Moodle. (You are also encouraged to read the proposals that your fellow students have posted before class.)**

**Research Proposal (Prospectus):** Your *Prospectus* should describe the question 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)? Explain how you will address the topic from an angle that has not been previously examined, or how you expect to draw conclusions different from those of other scholars.

#### **WEEK 4 (OCTOBER 1/2): ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY AND CLASS PRESENTATION ON SCHOLARLY ARTICLE**

##### **Read:**

**Sample Annotated Bibliography on Moodle**

##### **Written Assignment: Annotated Bibliography**

Due on Moodle by 5pm on Wednesday, September 30.

##### **Five-Minute Presentation on Scholarly Article**

**Annotated Bibliography:** 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, based on K. Turabian, *Manual*.)

**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.

See James L. Harner, *On Compiling an Annotated Bibliography* (McCabe Reference Call Number: Z 1001 H33 2000).

**Five-Minute Presentation 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. 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 its historical significance. Hence, for a good presentation, you will need to have begun seriously to work on your bibliography and have read several articles.

An effective oral presentation requires you to be concise and focused. Five minutes pass 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.

**Your presentation should cover the following points:**

- Why did you choose this article?
- What are its main themes, arguments, questions, and methodologies?
- What types of primary sources did the author use?
- How does the article contribute to historiographical, theoretical, or methodological debates on your topic?
- How did the research question get reframed or refined as the scholar engages with the sources?
- What questions or controversies does it leave unanswered?
- How do you expect your research to contribute to the issues raised by this article?

**WEEK 5 (OCTOBER 8/9): INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH AND MEETINGS**

**Meet with Professor Azfar or Professor Weinberg.**

**Note: Special Majors will meet with both department advisors this week.**

**WEEK 6 (OCTOBER 15/16): DOCUMENT ANALYSIS**

**Read:**

- **Martin Duberman, “‘Writhing Bedfellow’ in Antebellum South Carolina: Historical Interpretation and the Politics of Evidence,” in *About Time: Exploring the Gay Past*, ed. Martin Duberman (1986).**

**Written Assignment: Document Analysis:**

Due on Moodle by 5 PM on Wednesday, October 14.

**Meet with Professor Azfar or Professor Weinberg.**

**Document Analysis:** 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? 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. 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? (The “Analyzing Primary Sources” handout will assist you in thinking deeply about your document and asking the appropriate questions.) A document analysis essay is usually about three to four pages. In your class presentation you will summarize the document and your interpretation; you are limited to seven minutes.

## **WEEK 7 (OCTOBER 22/23): INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS**

**Meet with Professor Azfar or Professor Weinberg.**

## **WEEK 8 (OCTOBER 29/30: HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY**

**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**
- **Kim Gallon, “Silences Kept: The Absence of Gender and Sexuality in Black Press Historiography”**

### **Written Assignment: Historiographical Essay**

Due on Moodle by 5 PM on Wednesday, October 28.

**Meet with Professor Azfar or Professor Weinberg.**

**Historiographical Essay:** 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 works 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 existing scholarship. How do the debates among historians relate to your paper? Does the historiography help refine the central question propelling your research project? 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? 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. Enter into the discussion that other historians have started.

**WEEK 9 (NOVEMBER 5/6): INDEPENDENT RESEARCH AND WRITING**

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

**WEEK 10 (NOVEMBER 12/13): INDEPENDENT WRITING AND CONFERENCES**

Meet with Professor Azfar or Professor Weinberg.

**WEEK 11 (NOVEMBER 19/20): INDEPENDENT WRITING****Written Assignment: First Installment of the Research Paper**

- Due on Moodle by 5 PM on Friday, November 20.
- Aim for 8 or 10 pages.

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 12 (NOVEMBER 19/20): FIRST INSTALLMENT OF PAPER**

- Due on Moodle by 5 PM on Friday, November 20.

**DECEMBER 7: SUBMIT COMPLETE DRAFT OF PAPER****Written Assignment: Complete Draft of the Research Paper**

- Due on Moodle by 5 PM on Wednesday, December 7.
- A draft of all sections of the paper: introduction, body, conclusion (roughly 20 pages).

**DECEMBER 10/11: PEER REVIEW****Read:**

- Your peers' papers

**Written Assignment: Peer Review Comments Due on December 9**

- Due on Moodle before you meet in peer groups.

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. Post written critique to Moodle before class. Class meeting this week will be devoted to conversations with your peer about the written comments.

**DECEMBER 15: FINAL PAPER DUE AND ABSTRACT****Finish Paper (25 pages) and Submit by Noon on December 15.**

- Please post on Moodle.
- Be sure that you provide footnotes and bibliography in correct form.
- 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.