

Fall 2014
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HIST 371
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Senior Seminar

Senior Seminar is the capstone course in history. It is the course that allows you to use all your skills, techniques, and ideas in history to explore a topic you love. This is a rigorous and demanding course. At the end of the semester you have produced a high quality, article-length paper. Most of your work will be solitary research in your study, archives, libraries, and reading rooms. But all scholarly work happens in an intellectual community. I will be your primary instructor whom you should contact with any concerns or questions. You will have another student from class writing a thorough comment on your paper draft. You will have a senior seminar advisor, a specialist in your field with whom you will meet twice during the semester. Finally, you will have the community of scholars in your peers critiquing and commenting on your ideas, presentations, and text drafts.

Objectives.

By the end of the course, you will have enhanced your abilities to:

- \$ Approach writing as a process, appropriate to the discipline of history.
- \$ Locate and use primary sources.
- \$ Locate and use secondary sources and engage in historiographical debates.
- \$ Give and receive constructive criticism.
- \$ Deliver effective oral presentations.

Research Paper.

- \$ Length: 20 to 30 pages
- \$ Secondary sources:
 - \$ 10 scholarly books (no textbooks) or more.
 - \$ 10-15 scholarly articles or self-standing chapters.
- \$ Primary sources:
 - \$ 5 lengthier (over 30 pages) texts or, depending on the topic, a large number of smaller texts.
- \$ Internet sources:
 - \$ Internet is an excellent venue for finding primary sources.
 - \$ You can use secondary sources from internet only if they are in pdf-format, in which case you deal with them as you do with any secondary sources.
- \$ Staged writing. The writing process extends over the whole class.
 - \$ Choosing a topic (3%)
 - \$ Crafting a working bibliography (7%)
 - \$ Basic Narrative
 - \$ Taking Notes (30%)
 - \$ Writing the outline and introduction (5%)
 - \$ Writing the draft (30%)
 - \$ Discussing your paper in a seminar setting
 - \$ Revising drafts (25%)
 - \$ Giving a formal presentation on your topic

- \$ Submitting the final version of your paper.
- \$ All the papers and assignments have to be submitted in person in class. No email submissions are allowed.
- \$ There will be no extension time for writing except in the case of a **documented illness**.
- \$ All major submissions should happen with your folder. The submission of the final paper should include all preceding formal submissions (indicated as “due” in the syllabus).

Choosing a Topic. I ask you to have two choices covering different continents. For instance, one in Modern Europe and another in Twentieth-Century America or one in African History and another in Latin America. The topics should be defined in time and place.

Crafting a Bibliography.

Secondary sources. Your bibliography will be long and you need thorough work to produce one. Please consult Rampolla to find good starting points. The best is to start with the most recent book in your field and see what scholarship is being discussed in that book. Find then the oldest study (a book) mentioned and read it from cover to cover as soon as possible. The sooner you master the basic facts of your topic the more efficient you are in your research. As soon as you have the most important books and articles and books figured out you should check them out or order through interlibrary loan.

Primary sources. Then you should focus on primary sources. What primary sources have the other historians used? Are there databases available, such as electronic collections of newspapers or electronic databases of books (Google Advanced), electronic collections of classic authors (Gutenberg)? Finally, do these primary sources help me prove what I want to prove?

Basic narrative and midterm exam. After three weeks I expect you to have read a book on your topic and master its basic narrative. There will be an exam to test how well you know it. A successful answer of five pages (in blue book) requires that you know the time frame of your paper, the main related events, and can tell this “basic narrative” chronologically from B(eginning) to E(nd). The weight of the midterm is 10%.

Note taking. Before note taking you should decide which primary sources are the most important and start with those. We will then take a look at some of the best practices of taking notes (primarily computerized ones) and organizing them in the way that allows you to write effectively the first draft. From time to time I will ask you to bring your notes to class and submit them for evaluation.

Writing an outline and introduction. The introduction is the foundation of your paper. It sets the framework of your research by identifying your thesis, mentioning the evidence (primary sources) that you will use, introducing the most important historical interpretations on your topic, and giving a short, synoptic structure of your paper. In the course of your research you will change almost every component of your introduction. After you have crafted an introduction you can sketch an outline.

Writing the first draft. Once you have taken your notes of all important primary sources and secondary sources and have an idea of your thesis and outline for the paper you are ready for writing. You cannot write effectively if you have to write directly from the sources (primary and secondary). Seminar presentation helps you focus.

Seminar discussion. In November, you will have the opportunity to have a thorough discussion of your paper draft in a seminar setting. I will assign you a commentator who will carefully read your paper. A seminar session goes as following.

- \$ A 10-minute synoptic presentation by the author of the paper.
- \$ A 20-minute detailed discussion of the paper draft by the commentator, author, and the audience.

- \$ The commentator should discuss:
- \$ The relevance and meaningfulness of the thesis. Is it relevant? Can it be proved?
- \$ The historiographic contribution of the author.
- \$ Evidence.
- \$ Detailed, page-by-page discussion of the paper. Are there factual errors? Are there conceptual errors?
- \$ Discussion of the conclusions.
- \$ Style and grammar (not discussed publically but notes made on the margins of the paper).
- \$ The commentator writes a two-page report in key words and submits the original text with margin comments.

Formal presentation. In the last session, you will have the opportunity to give a 15-minute conference presentation of your research topic. There will be a handout detailing the requirements for the presentation.

Evaluation

Midterm Exam	10%
Bibliography	6%
Notes	15%
Intro and outline	10%
Seminar	8%
Comment on draft	8%
Formal paper presentation	10%
Paper	33%

Attendance. One absence is allowed. After the first one each subsequent absence lowers your overall grade for the course by a third of a letter grade unless you have a documented illness or a written explanation from your athletic coach.

Workload. This is a demanding and intensive research seminar. It has been designed with the expectation that the total **minimum weekly workload** for this class is **sixteen (16) hours**. For a good paper more work is needed.

Text:

Rampolla, Mary Lynn, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2012.

Schedule

Aug 29	Introduction. Sample of secondary source notes. Topics and advisors assigned.	
Sept 5	Workshop: Bibliography and note taking. Prepare a preliminary working bibliography by following carefully Rampolla.	Due: Bibliography draft.
Sept 12	Midterm exam. Read a book about your topic. The book should provide a good narrative coverage. Learn the basic facts, events, and persons of your topic. Learn the chronology of your topic.	Due: Scheduled meeting with your advisor specialist
Sept 19	Cancelled due to conference attendance	Due: Notes of secondary sources (by email).

Sept 26	Individual Appointments. Prepare the complete bibliography by carefully following Rampolla's guidelines. We will have a detailed discussion of your progress.	Due: Complete Bibliography
Oct 3	Workshop: Finding, reading, and interpreting secondary sources. Write at least 8 pages of notes on any of your sources.	Due: Notes.
Oct 10	Workshop: Finding, reading, and interpreting primary sources. Write at least 8 pages of notes on any of your sources.	Due: Notes.
Oct 17	Workshop: Introduction and Outline	Due: Introduction and Outline
Oct 24	Individual Appointments. Prepare to discuss the progress of your research and writing.	
Oct 31	First Draft.	Due: First Draft
Nov 7	Seminar discussions of papers (4 students)	
Nov 14	Seminar discussions of papers (4 students)	Due: Scheduled Meeting with your advisor.
Nov 21	Conference (formal presentation)	
Dec 5	Final Paper	Due: Final Paper

General Guidelines for Paper

The length of your paper is 25 to 30 pages. A good paper has a structure as following:

- I. Cover Page
- II. Introduction (10%)
- III. Body (80%)
- IV. Conclusion (10%)
- V. Bibliography

The beginning of your paper is an important part of your study.

- ↔ Mention the thesis that you will prove in your paper.
- ↔ Second, discuss shortly the nature of your evidence base (primary sources).
- ↔ Third, introduce **all important interpretations** (at least three) of other historians who have studied your topic and shortly discuss your take on these interpretations. Detail discussion of these interpretations takes place in the body.
- ↔ Finally, in two or three lines, mention how you will proceed in your paper, how you break down your main thesis into smaller theses to be discussed in individual sections of the paper.

The body is the bulk of your paper. Discuss systematically, in compact paragraphs, each of the main themes that you find essential in your primary sources and that support your argument. Contrast your own interpretation with other interpretations (those you already mentioned in the introduction). Be critical in reading the other interpretations and try to **disagree** with them as much as possible. Move on to support your disagreement and your own point by providing evidence that shows how your interpretation is better than the others. It does not matter if you cannot provide exhaustive evidence for your argument. But it matters that you disagree and support your own thesis.

The conclusion is an important section of your paper. Pull the threads of your research together and tell your audience what are your findings, i.e., what was your argument and how did the data from the primary source support it. It is also important that you mention the limitations of your findings. You haven't explained everything but only a fragment of a large problem confined to its time, place, and your narrow source base. You can also now make specific suggestions for further research.

For style, footnotes, and bibliographic details see Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*.

Disability Support: Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Elaine Mara, assistant director of learning services for academic and disability support in the lower level of Monocacy Hall, or by calling [610-861-1401](tel:610-861-1401). Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic Support Center.”