

Hist 300: Historical Methods

Introduction to Historical Methods
History 300-004
Fall 2004
Innovation 330
W 4:30-7:00

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SCHEDULE

Wednesday
September 1 — Introduction and Housekeeping

Wednesday
September 8 — Overview
Reading: *Conflicting Paths: Growing Up in America*
Discussion: Finding a Topic

TypePad Post #1: Of the readings in, which two interested you the most? Of your interests, which ones do you think might furnish the basis for your research paper? What would you have to do or find to carry out the research for your paper.

Wednesday
September 15 — Children in Families
Reading: *Childhood in America*, Part 2; *Children's Culture Reader*, Pt. 1
Discussion: Readings

TypePad Post #2: Of the readings, which three interested you the most? Of your interests, which one do you think might furnish the basis for your research paper? Why? What would you have to do or find to carry out the research for your paper. In addition, respond to another student's post with suggestions, observations, or criticism.

Wednesday
September 22 — Children at Play
Reading: *Childhood in America*, Part 11; *Children's Culture Reader*, Pt. 3
Discussion: Readings

TypePad Post #3: List ten potential topics in the history of childhood that you have found interesting. Which of these appear to be the most doable, given the time and resources available to you? In addition, respond to another student's post with suggestions, observations, or criticism.

Wednesday
September 29 — Children at Work
Reading: *Childhood in America*, Part 5; *Children's Culture Reader*, Choice
Discussion: Framing a Topic Statement

TypePad Post #4: List ten potential topics in the history of childhood that you have found interesting. Which of these appear to be the most doable, given the time and resources available to you? In addition, respond to another student's post with suggestions, observations, or criticism.

Wednesday
October 6

- Children at School
Reading: *Childhood in America*, Part 6; *Children's Culture Reader*, Choice
TOPIC STATEMENT DUE
LIBRARY FIELD TRIP

TypePad Post #5: Post your topic statement your TypePad. The topic statement should be a paragraph or two in length and contain a statement of what you have chosen as the topic for your essay in addition to the larger historical question about the history childhood that your essay seeks to answer. You might begin by asking yourself a question about the material that we have read in the class and proceed to frame an answer to that question. It should also contain, insofar as you are able, a discussion of the kind, quantity, and nature of your potential sources. In addition, respond to another student's post with suggestions, observations, or criticism.

Wednesday
October 13

- **NO CLASS (Reading)**
-

Wednesday
October 20

- **BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE**

TypePad Upload #6: Upload your bibliography to your TypePad. The bibliography for the purposes of this course should contain a minimum of eight books and sixteen articles that you have consulted for your essay. The course requires that you use primary sources. These may take the form of books and articles written during the time period under study or other primary manuscript materials. Secondary materials should reflect the most current books or articles as well as some of the classics in the specialty. Where appropriate, you should also use the Internet, but the bulk of your sources should be traditional, print material.

Wednesday
October 27

- **OUTLINE DUE**
Discussion: First Draft

TypePad Upload #7: Upload your outline as a file to your TypePad. An outline can take many forms. It can be written with the aid of the outlining facility on a word processor, with a dedicated outlining software program, or on cocktail napkins. The point of an outline, no matter its form, is to provide the organizational structure for an extended piece of writing. It should list the main topics, subtopics, and references to the sources. It is also a good idea to include what you intend to use as quotations in the outline so that you are assured of their applicability and appropriateness. For the purposes of this course, the outline should take the form of a paragraph-by-paragraph outline of "what" the paragraph will do and "how" the paragraph will accomplish its goal.

Wednesday
November 3

- **NO CLASS (Writing)**
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Wednesday
November 10

- **1st DRAFT DUE**
Discussion: Content & Line Editing

TypePad Upload #8: Upload your paper as a file to your TypePad account. A first draft is not the first version of the essay but the best of successive versions of the essay that you can manage working alone or with the help of another reader. This means that by the first draft, the essay should have gone through several writings and been subject to extensive revisions. It should be in the best form possible with respect to organization, argument, grammar and mechanics, inclusion of quotations, and format. The first draft should include a title, page numbers, footnotes or endnotes as well as a bibliography. One of the best ways to revise a draft is to work on a typed or word-processed copy. First drafts that patently lack revision will be penalized. Both the instructor and class members will line-edit the essays and make suggestions regarding the essays' content and structure.

Wednesday

November 17 — Discussion: Revision & Oral Presentations

TypePad Post #9: Post a response to your writer's paper in the comments section of the writer's TypePad blog. Although this critique is not intended to be as extensive as the final one, you will find the "Paper Critique Guidelines" useful.

Wednesday

November 24 — **NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)**

Wednesday

December 1 — **NO CLASS (Writing)**

Wednesday

December 8 — Discussion: Writing a Critique

FINAL PAPER DUE

ORAL PRESENTATIONS

TypePad Upload #10: Upload your final paper to your TypePad.

Wednesday

December 15 — **CRITIQUES DUE**

SELF-EVALUATION DUE

TypePad Upload #11: Upload your critique to your TypePad and email your self-evaluation to me.

COURSE

Be forewarned: this is a challenging academic undertaking. The senior seminar is designed as the capstone course for the history major. As such, it is an opportunity for class members to concentrate on the steps involved in the process of writing an original, extended research paper in which they synthesize the skills that they have honed during their undergraduate majors. This particular offering of the seminar will focus on the history of childhood, its twin goals are, first, to read several texts that will form the basis for further research and, second, to write an extended, formal essay on a topic relevant to the course topic. Along the way, the class will complete several smaller assignments that will build toward the seminar essay.

This course demands a great deal of its participants, but those who commit themselves will have a sense of accomplishment at its end. The reading assignments should be completed before the date they are due so that you will have time to digest the material thoroughly. The assignments are due on date indicated on the schedule above. Because the discussions depend on all participants' having completed the reading or done the assignments, participants are encouraged to make virtues of punctuality and readiness to facilitate lively exchange.

Since this course is an upper division, it assumes that you have attained a certain level of skill and competency; namely, you can read intelligently and write coherently. It also assumes that you can take responsibility in some measure for the course. The course will primarily depend on your contributions and arguments, although the instructor will deliver mini-lectures from time to time to assist us all in our attempts to grapple with a books and research problems.

This course fulfills all/in part the Writing-Intensive requirement in the history major. It does so through the successive stages, namely the topic statement, a bibliography, and an extended outline; these are due on October 6, October 20, and October 27 respectively; the Writing Intensive regimen culminates in a 3500-word research paper. The research paper will be completed through a draft/feedback/revision process. The first draft will be due November 10. I will provide commentary on the draft that will be returned to you on November 17; the revised draft will be due on December 8.

BOOKS

All the texts required for the course are available in the bookstore. These should be purchased at the beginning of the semester; the bookstore returns books to the publisher early on, so tardy book buyers may be unpleasantly surprised.

Barzun & Graff, *Modern Researcher*

Henry Jenkins, *The Children's Culture Reader*

Harvey J. Graff, *Conflicting Paths: Growing Up in America*

Paula S. Fass, Mary Ann Mason, eds., *Childhood in America*

TYPEPAD

You are required to obtain a Plus-level subscription to Typepad, a blog. TypePad is available at: <http://www.typepad.com>. All of your writing assignments and papers will be posted to your Typepad blog. The cost is \$8.95 per month or roughly \$27.00 for the semester (the cost of a modest textbook). The best thing to do is sign up for a free trial; this will furnish you with a month's free service. At the end of the semester, you can cancel your subscription. Or, you may discover that you like blogging so much that you retain your subscription. Alternatively, you can obtain the Movable Type software. It is free, but the installation of the software is challenging and you will need to contact your ISP to ensure that the necessary software is in place. Movable Type will install the application for you for a \$40.00 fee, but you will need to arrange to have CGI and MySQL in place. Be aware that most free web page areas do not support CGI or MySQL or charge extra. I do not recommend this option unless you have some solid computer skills and access to a sophisticated ISP, but there may some in the class who can avail themselves of this option.

POLICIES

I am explaining and stating these policies now, in the clearest possible terms, so there can be no dispute over what I expect. If you have questions about my expectations, please raise them. But whenever you ask me to modify my expectations because you failed to plan and use your time efficiently, you put me as well as the rest of the class in the ethically difficult position of applying

different standards to different people. I ask that you accept responsibility for your actions rather than put us all in an uncomfortable position.

Attendance

At this point in your intellectual development, you should have some sense of personal responsibility. Class attendance, therefore, will be up to you. It will be very difficult, however, to pass the course without attending class because the assignments and exams are the focus of many of the class discussions. In fact, failure to attend class on many occasions will have grave consequences. A word to the wise, in short, should be sufficient.

A Note on Computer Use

Computers are a great boon to the student writer. But, as with any technology, you must take steps to minimize the problems that computers inevitably cause. Do not expect to get through the semester without having at least one computer crisis. Prepare for this well in advance. Back up your work constantly and have alternative plans for obtaining computer use, if your primary options fail you. We will never accept computer problems as excuses for missed assignments. You must also keep backup copies of submitted assignments—either in electronic form or hard copy.

Similarly, computers and email permit around-the-clock communication. If you have questions or need to apprise the instructor of an emergency situation, contact me via email. Should you need to discuss an issue with the instructor, contact me via email or by phone. If you email me, please put HIST 300 in the subject line; putting something like “Hi” or “Have a question” is a common “spam” technique, and my emailer is trained to junk these messages. Do not, however, expect an immediate response. Many of your questions can be answered by consulting the web site at:

<http://www.archiva.net>

The site contains a duplicate of the syllabus, including the schedule and writing assignments. Since the course makes use of the Internet, you might find it more convenient to use the Web version of the syllabus to make use of the links.

Non-Sexist Language

George Mason University has also pledged itself to the use of non-sexist language in the classroom. We will support that effort by using both the masculine and feminine forms in our discussions and writing rather than masculine generic terms. For example, we will use instead of simply “men,” men and women; instead of “mankind,” humankind and so on. Such an effort may seem awkward initially, but the effort is well repaid by the gain in the content of class discussion and class writing.

Grades

Grades will be assigned in the following manner. To rephrase Smith-Barney, the investment people—“We do grades the old-fashioned way; we earn them.” Remember they represent an evaluation, not a reward.

A—Outstanding work, complete mastery of the material presented, combined with some originality.

B—A solid command of the material with some gaps or mistakes in a basically sound essay or discussion.

C—Some knowledge of the material; mistakes and confusion are acceptable if mixed with some understanding. Not a reward for attendance or effort.

D—An incomplete and minimal knowledge of the material, major confusions and errors.

F—A failure to present the material in a reasonably accurate and comprehensible manner.

I—There are no “incompletes” given in this course except in cases of bona fide and documented instances in accordance with the regulations of the university.

P—For a “pass” a “C” average is required.

In addition to these guidelines, the particular guidelines governing Writing Intensive courses will be used. These are

1. Papers

- Construction of an original historical thesis
- Use of primary sources in support of thesis statement
- The degree to which the work is situated appropriately in the existing literature of secondary sources, produced by historians as well as scholars in other disciplines
- The synthesis of diverse sources and the sophistication of the historical analysis
- How well the work is linked to larger political, social, and cultural issues appropriate to the topic
- How well knowledge and skills acquired in other disciplinary contexts is integrated
- The organization of the presentation and the quality of the written narrative

2. Oral Presentations

- Demonstrates ability to synthesize several aspects of general education in presentation
- Demonstrates ability to present one's work in a clear and organized manner
- Ability to handle questions from the audience
- Completed the presentation's essential elements within the allotted time
- Ability to engage and maintain the audience's attention

If you receive a grade or criticism that seems unfair or if you desire further explanation, see me. If you come to argue for a better grade, come prepared to present your case in the most coherent and organized manner possible.

REQUIREMENTS

The requirements for the course are as follows: (1) 6 TypePad post (50 pts. each=300 pts.); (2) a bibliography (75 pts.); (3) an outline; (75 pts.); (4) a first draft (100 pts) (5) a final draft (100 pts.) (6) a formal critique; (50 pts.) (7) an oral presentation (75pts) and (8) a self-evaluation (1 page, typed, single-spaced) assessing your performance in the course (not graded but required.). TOTAL=775

TypePad Posts

There are five posts required for the course. They are due in class on the date stated on the syllabus schedule. Points or partial will be awarded for the following:

1. promptness (0 or 10 pts.)
 2. introduction (1-5 pts.)
 3. thesis (1-5 pts.)
 4. content (1-15 pts.)
 5. grammar (1-10 pts.)
 6. format (1-5 pts.)
 7. bonus (0 or 5pts)
- TOTAL 50+ pts.

Although the posts result in short papers, a good deal of thinking and drafting is necessary to prepare a good post.

THE GOOD TYPEPAD POST

Students often ask about writing a good post. Essentially, a TypePad entry should be three to four paragraphs—roughly 400-500 words or the equivalent of 1-2 double-spaced pages. You might want to draft your entry in a word processing program first and copy and paste after you have finished. Use a plain text editor, such as Notepad on a Wintel platform or Tex-Edit on a Mac, to avoid pasting in all sorts of weird characters. Although we will discuss the elements of a good post and comment post extensively in class, these paragraphs are offered as a reference and a detailed summary of how your posts will be evaluated.

Format

Online writing and reading differs from print for a variety of reasons. Clarity is the name of the game. Each post should conform to the following format: Post number, post title, underlined or bolded thesis sentence, and space between paragraphs. Titles of books should be italicized, titles of articles or documents should be put in quotation marks, and so on. Any links to comments should use the author's name. Do not simply use a URL.

Title & Introductory Paragraph

A good post begins with a good title. A good title gets the reader's attention immediately and sets the tone for the rest of the entry. A title, such as "Entry #1," is not particularly effective or even informative. Since this is a class, you must number the entries so that the reader knows which assignment you are addressing. Examples might include: "#1: Topic Ideas" or "No. 8: Bibliography" You can be much more creative, but your post must have a number. And if you use a catchy title that might be confusing or ambiguous, be sure that the document title(s) is indicated in the first paragraph.

Once you've decided on an interesting title, the next step is framing an introductory paragraph. An introductory paragraph can take many forms, but in a short post, two strategies are usually successful: the brief anecdote or narrative or the quotation. The last sentence of the introductory paragraph should be the thesis. You should be aware that it is acceptable (and often necessary because of time constraints) to skip the introductory sentences in an essay examination question and begin immediately with a thesis statement. Since the posts for this class are more reportage than essay, creative titles and introductory paragraphs may be challenging.

Thesis

A thesis is a proposition or statement of an argument. It is not "stage direction" (e.g., "In this post I will tell you about the British and American attitudes toward pre-revolutionary activism, and then I'll show...."). An adequate thesis is a clear, precise, declarative statement: "The British cartoon 'Women of Edenton, North Carolina,' suggests that the British attitude toward patriot activism was _____ and _____." Obviously, your interpretation of the source will determine what you put in the blanks. Note, too, that this statement identifies the source. Since some of the assignments for this class call for lists, a thesis may be a stretch, so you can use your best judgment in this matter.

Content

For the purposes of this course, the content of the post fulfills the requirements of the assignment. If the assignment asks for a list, you should have a list. If an assignment asks you to comment on another student's post, you should provide a link to the comment.

Grammar

Grammar and mechanics are important for a variety of reasons—all of them good. All your posts should be grammatically correct in all their particulars. Correctness includes spelling, punctuation, diction, and mechanics. A list of common grammar errors and suggestions for correcting can be found online at <http://www.archiva.net/writing.html>.

Bonus

Bonus points are awarded for an especially creative, original, or stylistically sophisticated post.

PAPER CRITIQUE GUIDELINES

Paper critiques are always difficult propositions. After all, we have spent some considerable time with one another, and the process is not really anonymous. The purpose of this exercise is simply to indicate to the writer where the paper is strong and where the paper is weak. Oftentimes it is easier to be critical of an essay than it is to be praiseworthy. A brief glance at any academic journal will demonstrate that the latter attitude prevails. Nonetheless, paper critiques in this class will begin with the good and end with the not-so-good. Having been the author of several books and critic of any number of books and manuscripts, I am convinced that it is just as easy to be the author of a bad book as it is to be the author of a good book. (Excellent books belong to another category, but that is the subject of another essay.) The same time and effort must go into a not-so-good book or essay as a good book or essay. Perhaps word processors have obviated this distinction but, at this point, I am not so sure. So—in a 1-page, single-spaced paper evaluation,

concentrate on the following:

1. You must begin with the strong feature(s) of the essay.

What is good about the essay? In this regard, think about general presentation of the argument. Is there a thesis? Does the rest of the paper carry out the thesis? How does the paper fit in with what we have read, and what large question does the essay attempt to contribute to? Could you easily recap the essay in a sentence or two? Does the essay attempt to integrate the author's findings into the current historical debates? Does the essay have a conclusion? (This is a different proposition from merely restating the thesis.)

If the argument is defective, concentrate on where the essay is strong in style, breadth of research, the imaginative use of the research materials, and in general presentation.

Finally, think about whether the essay tells a good story or not. Does the author inter-weave specific anecdotes to illustrate a point or present evidence in a convincing manner? Do these illustrations pertain to the point at hand? Is the essay interesting to read?

2. End with the weak points in the essay but guide your criticisms by thinking about what improvements the author might make in his or her essay or research in line with the statements and questions outlined above.

The point of this part of the critique is not to devastate the writer but to indicate where the research might be questioned, strengthened, or extended. Do not pull any punches here, but do not be unkind or vicious—to use a nineteenth-century phrase. A university is the place where we might try our mistakes and not suffer inordinately for our thinking or for our risks. But, at the same time, the purpose of writing history, as I see it, is to publish somewhere, sometime. Otherwise, we are garret writers and nothing else; hence, the writing deserves our best critical eye. Think about how a general audience, an academic audience, or a “buff” audience might react. Above all else, is the essay interesting? What would you suggest to make it interesting or captivating? Is the essay stylistically accomplished, or would the writing be improved by re-acquaintance with a style handbook? Do mechanical errors get in the way of easy reading?

Remember: our time is limited; do not criticize an author for an “imaginary essay”—the essay the author might have written “given world enough and time” (“To His Coy Mistress”). In other words, do not criticize a writer for argument and sources beyond the author's effort or the documents' availability. We should be all aware at this point of what is possible and what is not. After all, in doing this kind of research, we have, to borrow from Tom Wolfe's *The Right Stuff*, “pushed the outside of the envelope.”

3. Last but not least, assign a letter grade to the paper.

SELF-EVALUATION GUIDELINES

Oftentimes, a letter grade does not reflect the effort that students put into a course, the amount a student has learned, or the skills that a student has acquired.

A self-evaluation should illustrate and document your participation in the course. It should be a one-page, typed single-spaced paper in which you address such topics as:

1. class attendance
2. study time devoted to the materials
3. timely completion of the reading and assigned papers
4. class participation (some evaluation of the quality of your contributions would be helpful here)
5. the ways in which you think you improved or not
6. some of the skills or knowledge that you acquired (for our purposes, this is probably the most important)
7. what you might have done differently or what you might have added or what you have determined to do differently next time
8. events, lectures, and other activities pertaining to history that you attended or participated in

Since this is a writing assignment, it should be well-written with a thesis sentence and paragraphs that develop your assessment of your participation in class. As I said in seminar, these papers will not be graded but will be used to help me in giving students the benefit of the doubt. The self-evaluation can only help you; it will not be used to detract from your mark. It must, however, be submitted.

To keep the process as fair as possible, the self-evaluation should not be an assessment of the class or the instructor. Class evaluation will be done during the last class meeting. Class and instructor evaluations are kept confidential, and the instructor does not see them until after the final grades are in the registrar's hands. Take this opportunity to reflect on your own commitment to the course and to ascertain what benefits you have derived from our time together.