

HIST 300 (2008) Historical Methods



Intro to Historical Methods
History 300
Spring 2008
Innovation 330
W 4:30-7:10

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SCHEDULE

- Wednesday,
January 23 — **Discussion: Housekeeping & Introduction**
- Friday,
January 25 — **BLOG URL DUE**
- Wednesday,
January 30 — **Reading: Exploring a Topic**
Hine & Faragher, *The American West*, Chaps 1–8
William Storey, *Writing History*, Ch. 1
Discussion: Selecting a Research Topic
BLOG POST #1: Using the text, choose two subjects that interest you. For your post, briefly report on what you read and list five to six questions (5–6) about your topics that might lend themselves to a research paper. In addition, comment on a classmate’s post.
- Tuesday,
February 5 — **LAST DAY TO DROP CLASSES WITH NO TUITION PENALTY**
LAST DAY TO ADD CLASSES
- Wednesday,
February 6 — **Reading: Exploring a Topic**
Hine & Faragher, *The American West*, Chaps 8–16
William Storey, *Writing History*, Ch. 2
Discussion: Electronic Databases & Topics (Library Presentation)
BLOG POST #2: Once again, using the text, select two subjects that interest you. For your post, briefly report on what you read and list five to six questions (5–6) about your topics that might lend themselves to a research paper. In addition, comment on a classmate’s post.

- Wednesday,
February 13 — **Reading: Primary/Secondary Sources**
William Storey, *Writing History*, Ch. 3
Discussion: Sources & Quotations
BLOG POST #3: For this post there are TWO parts. First, find two primary sources (text, image, or other) focused on a potential research topic, duplicate them, and post them to your photo album or blog. (Be sure that you provide a citation and caption for your selections and that you've provided your primary materials in the best format. You may need to scan your document, download it, or do a "screen grab," or turn a text document into a PDF and post it for download.) In your post, discuss how the source might be used in a research project. Because some of your primary sources may be quite long, you may post excerpts. Second, using the *America: History & Life* database or one of the other online databases available from the GMU libraries, select two articles pertinent to your topics, read them, and write a brief annotation for each to include in your blog. Remember to comment on another's post.
- Wednesday,
February 20 — **Reading: Libraries & Databases**
William Storey, *Writing History*, Ch. 4
Discussion: General & Individual Discussion of Topics
BLOG POST #4: Post your topic statement your blog. The topic statement should be about three paragraphs long 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 of the American West 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 then proceed to frame an answer to that question—or thesis. 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.
- TOPIC/THESIS STATEMENTS DUE**
- Friday,
February 22 — **LAST DAY TO DROP CLASSES**
- Wednesday,
February 27 — **NO CLASS (See Field Trip)**
- Saturday,
March 1 — **Field Trip—Library of Congress (All Day)**
- Wednesday,
March 5 — **Reading: The Role of a Bibliography**
William Storey, *Writing History*, Ch. 5
Discussion: Planning the Paper & Outlines
BLOG POST #5: Upload your bibliography as a file in PDF format to your blog. Include an introductory paragraph that comments on your bibliography's problem and prospects. See also, Work for additional details. Take a look at a classmate's bibliography and comment accordingly.
- BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE**

Wednesday, March 12	—	NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK
Wednesday, March 19	—	<p>Reading: On Writing William Storey, <i>Writing History</i>, Ch. 6</p> <p>Discussion: Writing Strategies BLOG POST #6: Upload your outline as a file in PDF format to your blog. As part of your post, write an introductory paragraph that describes some aspect of your outline. See also the material on the outline in Work.</p> <p>OUTLINE DUE</p>
Wednesday, March 26	—	NO CLASS (Research & Writing)
Wednesday April 2	—	<p>Reading: On Writing William Storey, <i>Writing History</i>, Ch. 7, 8 & 9</p> <p>Discussion: BLOG POST #7: Upload your paper in PDF format to your blog. Write an introduction to the draft describing your essay to accompany your upload. See Work for the specifics of the requirements for the first draft. In addition, bring a hardcopy of your essay to class. This version will be line-edited and commented on in the most detail.</p> <p>1st DRAFT DUE (VERY IMPORTANT)</p>
Wednesday, April 9	—	<p>Reading: On Revision William Storey, <i>Writing History</i>, Ch. 10</p> <p>Individual Conferences (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday & Friday) BLOG POST #8: Post a response to your writer’s paper in the comments section of the writer’s blog; in addition post a copy of your critique to your own blog. Although this critique is not intended to be as extensive as the final one, you will find the “Paper Critique Guidelines” useful.</p> <p>CRITIQUE DUE</p>
Wednesday, April 16	—	<p>NO CLASS (Revision) BLOG POST #9: For this week’s post, provide a brief progress report describing the revisions that you are planning or working on for your essay. See Work for the specifics of the requirements for the second draft.</p>
Wednesday, April 23	—	<p>Discussion: Formal Critiques & Giving Presentations BLOG POST #10: Upload your paper as a file in PDF format to your blog. Write an introduction to the draft describing your essay to accompany the file.</p> <p>2nd DRAFT DUE (In-class Paper Exchange)</p>

Wednesday,
April 30

—

Discussion: Presentations

ORAL PRESENTATIONS (GROUP #1)

Wednesday,
May 7

—

Discussion: Presentations

ORAL PRESENTATIONS (GROUP #2)

FINAL PAPER DUE

SELF-EVALUATION DUE

Staple your drafts together and attach them to your final essay. (You might wish to put them in a manila envelope to be on the safe side.) Put the essay and the drafts in the plastic container on my office door. Finally, email you self-evaluation to me.

DESCRIPTION

Be forewarned: this is a challenging academic undertaking. Introduction to Historical Methods is designed as one of the capstone courses 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 the American West; its twin goals are, first, to read a basic text that will introduce the history of the region and suggest ideas 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 dates indicated on the syllabus. The Writing Intensive regimen culminates in a 3500-word research paper. The research paper will be completed through a draft/feedback/revision process. (See [Work](#) for the specifics of the Writing Intensive regimen.) The first draft will be due on the date specified on the syllabus. I will provide commentary on the draft and return it to you for revision. The essay in its final form will be due on Wednesday, May 9.

BOOKS

The following books are required for the course. They are available in the Campus Bookstore.

Robert Hiner & John Mack Faragher, *Oxford History of the American West*
William Kelleher Storey, *Writing History*
Kate L. Turbian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*

BLOG

Rather than have a group blog or design a blog from the ground up, we'll be doing something a bit different. Because you'll need a blog that has a photo album, I'll recommend two options.

You can obtain a Plus-level subscription to Typepad, a 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. The advantages of TypePad are ease of use and the option to customize your design. Please do not ask to use one of the free services, such as Blogger; I have had no end of trouble—spam, trolls, and downtime—in previous semesters.

Alternatively, you can use Movable Type or WordPress software. Both are 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. George Mason does have a site license for Movable Type, but I'm not clear on the university's policy on students and MT or WordPress. I do not recommend either of these options 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 the MT or WordPress options

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS FIELD TRIP

Instead of meeting at our regularly scheduled time, we will meet at the Library of Congress at 11:30 on Saturday, March 1, for an orientation and a full day's work. If you work or have other responsibilities, please arrange your commitments accordingly. The field trip is a course requirement.

REQUIREMENTS

There are six assignments and a blog required for the course. The course assignments will be weighted as follows: (1) blog –20%; (2) a bibliography–10%; 3) an outline–10%; 4) first & second drafts–(20%); 5) a final paper–20%; 6) two critiques–10%; 7) an oral presentation–10%; and 8) a self-evaluation (1 page, typed, single-spaced) assessing your performance in the course (not graded but required.).

1) BLOG

You are required to make roughly one post to your blog each week as well as one comment on another's post each week. Those who make more than one comment will have their names writ in heaven, e.g. the gradebook. Guidelines for posting to your blog are available in the [Writing](#) section. Please remember to reference your comment by furnishing a text link (Comment on [Steve's Post, #2: Primary Sources](#)) in your own blog to the permalink of the post. Finally, if the blog post calls for uploading a document, include a paragraph describing the document or assignment. Simply putting "Download Bibliography" or "Here it is" are fairly boring and not likely to entice a reader.

2) BIBLIOGRAPHY

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 primary manuscript materials—letters, diaries, and journals, for example. Primary sources may also include images, maps, and government documents. 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. Turabian has more than enough information on the format for the bibliography.

3) OUTLINE

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. Think in terms of two paragraphs per page. An excerpt from a sample outline might look like this:

p. 1 para. 1–Anecdote—Jim Chee in PBS *Skinwalkers*—introducing one of the main themes in my argument about the portrayal of Indians in contemporary film. (primary source)

p. 1 para. 2–Transition to thesis by explaining relationship of scene to theme.
Thesis: Thesis goes here.

p. 2, para. 1–This paragraph continues the discussion of Native Americans in the twentieth century and continues the argument that they have not "vanished."
This will be accomplished by summarizing the arguments made in Phil Deloria's, *Indians in Unexpected Places* in which he shows that Indians—far from disappearing from the historical landscape—played important roles in films, technology, and sports and the arguments in Alan Trachtenberg's *Shades of Hiawatha* as well as Shari Huhndorf's *Going Native*. This paragraph, in other words, articulates the basic argument and some of the debate. (secondary sources)

p. 2, para. 2–This paragraph makes the transition to Native Americans in twentieth-century film and my own thesis about the continuity and discontinuity in their cinematic presence.

By the time you've finished this exercise, you will have thought through the entire paper and possess a roadmap of your essay; you will also have a pretty good sense of its strengths and weaknesses—places that need additional evidence.

4) 1ST & 2ND DRAFTS

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 at least two rounds of editing or revision. 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 also include a title, page numbers, and footnotes. I line-edit the first draft, so it is extremely important that you submit your first draft on time. The second draft cleans up all the missteps in mechanics and grammar and strengthens the argument, taking into account both the instructor's and reader's comments. The second draft also incorporates notes and bibliography in their final format.

5) CRITIQUES

Using the critiques guidelines (available for download from [Basics](#)), write a critique of your author's first and second draft. Critics will be assigned in class. The first critique should concentrate on the quality of research and argument. Although this first evaluation need not be a line edit, the critic should address the author's writing style and offer suggestions for improvement. The second critique should be more formal and more detailed and weigh both the strengths and weaknesses of the essay.

6) ORAL PRESENTATION

Presentations (7 minutes maximum, 5 minutes minimum, 2–3 minutes for questions) may be supported by note cards, manuscript, or electronic media (PowerPoint or Keynote). An oral discussion of the essay should acquaint the audience with the thesis, the main argument, and the conclusions. In the past, presenters have been very creative with handouts, demonstrations, and other presentation aids. Be aware that a PowerPoint or Keynote presentation should make use of the media and not simply be a series of bullet points.

7) FINAL ESSAY

The overarching goal for the major project is the creation of a modest, reasonably sophisticated historical argument (10–12 pages excluding bibliography and notes) based on research in both primary and secondary sources. The essay should also be situated in the historical debate. In addition, the essay should exhibit clear and error-free prose and include a bibliography and notes (footnotes or endnotes) following the Turabian or the Chicago style.

ATTENDANCE

By its nature, this is a small class and offers the participants a singular opportunity to learn new skills and new ways of thinking about history. As such, the class asks that you prepare for class and participate energetically. And you cannot participate without attending class, having read the material and, most important, worked on your paper. Let me emphasize: It will be very difficult to pass the course without attending regularly. Unlike other history classes, the assignments in this course build one on another. In fact, failure to attend class will have grave consequences. If you miss three classes, it is highly unlikely that you will be able to pass the course. A word to the wise, in short, should be sufficient. Similarly, the class begins at promptly at 4:30—not at some other time around 4:30. Please plan to arrive for class in a timely manner.

A NOTE ON COMPUTER USE

Computers are a great boon to historians. But, as with any technology, you must take steps to minimize the problems that computers inevitably cause—and, believe me, in a course like this, you will have problems. Do not expect to get through the semester without having at least one computer meltdown. Prepare for this well in advance. Back up your work and have “plan Bs” for obtaining computer use or software access, if your primary options fail you. I will not accept computer problems as excuses for missed assignments. (Oh, all right, maybe in this course there will be some latitude but not much.) You must also keep backup copies of submitted assignments either in electronic form or hard copy. You might wish to invest in a Zip drive for the purposes of archiving your material and transporting your projects.

Most, if not all, of the assignments in the course depend on your having access to a computer and an Internet account. Please obtain an internet account at the earliest available moment and become comfortable with the software and protocols. Should you work at home or off campus, learn how to do remote access so that you can be productive no matter your location. Although the university does not require the purchase of a computer, I would encourage you to consider the investment. You might also find a laptop handy if you are accustomed to a particular OS and web editor. Because of the nature of the course, you cannot depend on the university's public clusters or the availability of software.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

In a collaborative venture, punctuality is a virtue. Assignments that are not ready for presentation do not benefit from class members suggestions; late blog posts result in fewer comments and less exchange among participants. Generally speaking, therefore, assignments are due on the date indicated on the syllabus; blog posts are due at noon the day before the due date in order to give class members a chance to comment. Finally, it is critical that you complete all your assignments on time; this is especially true of your first draft. Late assignments and blog posts will be accepted up to a week after the due date; 10 points will, however, be deducted. After the grace period, late submissions will receive a zero except in cases of documented and university sanctioned reasons.

GRADES

Grades, including +s and -s, will be assigned in the following manner. REMEMBER THEY REPRESENT AN EVALUATION, NOT A REWARD. To rephrase Smith-Barney, the investment folk, we do grades the old-fashioned way—earn them.

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 assignment.

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.

The nature of the course suggests that breaches of academic integrity will be difficult to accomplish. If, however, a class member engages in plagiarism or other forms of cheating, he or she will receive a zero for that assignment and an accompanied trip to the Dean's Office to discuss further academic action.

If you receive a grade or criticism that seems unfair or if you desire further explanation, come and 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.

WRITING INTENSIVE GUIDELINES

The course fulfills a university writing intensive requirement as well a Department of History & Art History major requirement. The department requires that students earn a C+ to meet the departmental rules regarding successful completion of the major.

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

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 is one way of remedying this deficiency by illustrating and documenting your participation in the course from your perspective. This is the time to argue for yourself and put your best foot forward. In fact, it is in your interest to do the best job that you can on this assignment. The self-evaluation should be a one-page, typed single-spaced paper in which you address the following topics:

- I. Evaluation of your participation in the class
 - A. attendance
 - B. class participation
 - i. in-class contributions
 - ii. Library of Congress field trip
 - iii. class preparation
 - C. time devoted to the materials
 - i. blog (posts & comments)
 - ii. assigned reading
 - iii. research
 - iv. drafts
 - v. critiques
 - vi. final paper
 - D. the ways in which you think you improved or not
 - E. the problems you encountered in your effort to complete the class assignments to your satisfaction.
 - F. what you would have done differently
 - G. some of the skills or knowledge that you acquired
- II. A general assessment of how you will apply what you have gained (or not) from the class in the future
- III. Other activities of a historical nature that you participated in