

# HIST 300 *fall* (2011) Historical Methods



History 300-001  
Fall 2011  
Arts & Design 2026  
MW 3:00–4:15  
Prof. Paula Petrik  
<http://www.archiva.net>

Office: 335 Robinson B  
Office Telephone: 993-1250  
Office Hours: MW 1:00–2:30  
and by appointment  
[ppetrik@gmu.edu](mailto:ppetrik@gmu.edu)

## Schedule

Monday,

August 29 — Housekeeping & Introductions

Wednesday,

August 31 — What Is a Good Paper Topic? (Discussion)

Monday,

September 5 — NO CLASS (LABOR DAY)

Tuesday,

September 6 — LAST DAY TO ADD CLASSES  
LAST DAY TO DROP WITH NO TUITION PENALTY

Wednesday,

September 7 — Topic Presentations–Group 1 (Discussion)  
Reading: Edwards, *New Spirits: Americans in the Gilded Age, 1865-1905*  
Discussion: Selecting a Research Topic  
**ASSIGNMENT #1: GILDED AGE THEMES (Group 1) DUE:** First, list six themes that appear in *New Spirits*. Second, using the text, choose three topics in Gilded Age history that interest you. For your short paper, briefly report on your topics and list four questions (4) about your topics that might lend themselves to a research paper. Your paper should be 1–2 pages.

- Monday,  
September 12 — **Topic Presentations–Group 2 (Discussion)**  
Reading: Edwards, *New Spirits: Americans in the Gilded Age, 1865-1905*  
Discussion: Selecting a Research Topic  
**ASSIGNMENT #1: GILDED AGE THEMES (Group 2) DUE:** First, list six themes that appear in *New Spirits*. Second, using the text, choose three topics in Gilded Age history that interest you. For your short paper, briefly report on your topics and list four questions (4) about your topics that might lend themselves to a research paper. Your paper should be 1–2 pages.
- Wednesday,  
September 14 — **Secondary Sources: Electronic Databases & Topics Part 1**  
(Meet in Johnson Center 228)
- Monday,  
September 19 — **Secondary Sources: Electronic Databases & Bibliography Part 2**  
(Meet in Johnson Center 228)  
**ASSIGNMENT #2: SECONDARY SOURCES (All Groups) DUE:** Using the America: History & Life database or one of the other online databases available from the GMU libraries, select three articles (secondary sources) pertinent to your topic, read them, and write a brief annotation for each to include in your paper. Print these out. Go to the library and select two books pertinent to your paper; bring both the books and articles to class.
- Wednesday,  
September 21 — **Primary Sources: Electronic Databases & Bibliography Part 1**  
(Meet in Johnson Center 228)
- Monday,  
September 26 — **Primary Sources: Electronic Databases & Bibliography Part 2**  
(Meet in Johnson Center 228)  
**ASSIGNMENT #3: PRIMARY SOURCES (All Groups) DUE:** GMU's databases are also valuable resources for primary documents. Using the HarpWeek database or one of the other online databases available from the GMU libraries, select four (4) primary pertinent to your topic, read them, print them, and write a brief annotation for each to include in your paper.
- Wednesday,  
September 28 — **Topic & Thesis**  
**ASSIGNMENT #4: TOPIC & THESIS (All Groups) DUE:** In a very short, one-page paper, write one sentence in which you name your topic; in a second sentence, write your provisional thesis. Remember: a thesis is a proposition or a summary statement of an argument. We will spend these class periods, going over the topics and thesis statements by group.

- Friday,  
September 30 — **LAST DAY TO DROP A CLASS**
- Monday,  
October 3 — **Field Trip to Library of Congress/National Archives**
- Wednesday,  
October 5 — **NO CLASS (Field Trip Compensation)**
- Monday,  
October 10 — **NO CLASS (COLUMBUS DAY)**
- Tuesday,  
October 11 — **Bibliography**  
**ASSIGNMENT #5: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY (All Groups) DUE:** By this point, you should have your bibliography fairly finished and in acceptable format. As a rule of thumb, it should contain at least four—preferably more—primary sources or groups of primary sources (3), five to seven articles from scholarly journals (5–7), and two to three books (2–3). Your list should include sources that you intent to quote from or paraphrase and not simply bib filler. We will spend class time going over the bibliographies as well as quotation and footnote format. Note that the bibliography is to be annotated.
- Wednesday,  
October 12 — **NO CLASS (Research)**
- Monday,  
October 17 — **NO CLASS (Research)**
- Wednesday,  
October 19 — **NO CLASS (Research)**
- Monday,  
October 24 — **NO CLASS (Research)**
- Wednesday,  
October 26 — **<<1st DRAFT DUE (VERY IMPORTANT)>>**
- Monday,  
October 31 — **Individual Conferences–Revision Strategies**  
**(Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday)**

- Wednesday,  
November 2 — **Individual Conferences–Revision Strategies**  
(Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday)
- Monday,  
November 7 — **NO CLASS (REVISIONS)**
- Wednesday,  
November 9 — **NO CLASS (REVISIONS)**
- Monday,  
November 14 — **Individual Conferences–Research Progress**  
(Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday)
- Wednesday,  
November 16 — **Individual Conferences–Research Progress**  
(Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday)
- Monday,  
November 21 — **Presentation/Final Draft Discussion**
- Wednesday,  
November 23 — **NO CLASS (THANKSGIVING)**
- Monday,  
November 28 — **Oral Presentations (Group #1)**
- Wednesday,  
November 30 — **Oral Presentations (Group #2)**
- Monday,  
December 5 — **Oral Presentations (Group #3)**
- Wednesday,  
December 7 — **Oral Presentations (Group #4)**
- Thursday,  
December 10 — **NO CLASS**  
**FINAL DRAFT & PDF VERSION DUE**  
**SELF-EVALUATION DUE**

## Course

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 Gilded Age, the period roughly spanning the years between 1877 and 1915; its twin goals are, first, to read a basic text that will introduce the history of the period 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 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, small research tasks, and drafts; 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. 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, December 12.

## Books

The following book and device are required for the course. They are available in the Campus Bookstore and from various online vendors.

Rebecca Edwards, *New Spirits: Americans in the Gilded Age, 1865-1905*

Thumb Drive

## Field Trip

Instead of meeting at our regularly scheduled time, we will meet at the Library of Congress or the National Archives, College Park during the week of October 3, for an orientation and a full day's work. Please note that the class visit to the LOC or NARA depends on the paper topics. The field trip is a course requirement. If you work or have other responsibilities, please arrange your commitments accordingly.

## Policies

By the time students should be fairly serious about their studies and responsibilities. Nonetheless, 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.

### *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. If you fail to turn in your first draft on time, it is unlikely that you will pass the course. A word to the wise, in short, should be sufficient. Similarly, the class begins at promptly at 3:00—not at some other time around 3:00. Please plan to arrive for class in a timely manner.

### *A Note on Computer Use*

Computers are a great boon to the graduate student. 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. I 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 me of an emergency situation, contact me via email.

[ppetrik@gmu.edu](mailto:ppetrik@gmu.edu)

Should you need to discuss an issue with the instructor, contact me via email or by phone to make an appointment. Do not, however, expect an immediate response. Many of your questions can be answered by consulting the web site at:

<http://www.archiva.net>

Your best chance of reaching me immediately by email is during my office hours. Even then I cannot make a guarantee because I may well be with another student.

### *Email*

Students must use their Mason email accounts—either the existing “MEMO” system or a new “MASONLIVE” account to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. See <http://masonlive.gmu.edu> for more information.

### *Students with Disabilities*

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Resources at 703.993.2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

### *Late Assignments*

In a research venture, punctuality is a virtue. Assignments that are not ready for presentation do not benefit from class members suggestions. Generally speaking, therefore, assignments are due on the date indicated on the syllabus. It is critical that you complete all your assignments on time; this is especially true of your first draft. Late assignments 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.

### *Academic Integrity*

Mason is an Honor Code university; please see the University Catalog for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else's work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt (of any kind) please ask for guidance and clarification.

### **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 (now Morgan Stanley 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 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.

If you receive a grade or criticism that seems unfair or if you desire further explanation, please feel free to discuss the matter with me.

### **Requirements**

The requirements for the course are as follows: (1) Preliminary Assignments (30%); (2) First Draft (30%); (3) Final Paper (30%); (4) Oral Presentation (10%); and (5) a self-evaluation (one-page, typed, single-spaced) assessing your performance in the course (not graded but required) and a “Letter to the Next Class” (one-page, typed, single-spaced, in sealed envelope). All of these will be discussed in considerable detail in class.

## 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

## Campus Resources

There are various campus resources that you might find helpful for various reasons:

- Writing Center: A114 Robinson Hall (703) 993-1200 <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>
- University Libraries "Ask a Librarian" <http://library.gmu.edu/mudge/IM/IMRef.html>
- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): (703) 993-2380 <http://caps.gmu.edu>
- University Policies The University Catalog, <http://catalog.gmu.edu>, is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university academic affairs. All members of the university community are responsible for knowing and following established policies. <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/>

## 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) time devoted to the materials

- i) assigned reading
  - ii) reading summaries
  - iii) seminar leadership
  - iv) blog
  - v) final paper
  - c) class participation
    - i) seminar discussion
  - 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