

# HIST 300 (2009) Historical Methods



History 300-003  
Fall 2009  
Fine Arts B112  
TR 1:30-2:45  
ppetrik@gmu.edu

Office: 300 Robinson B  
Office Telephone: 993-1250  
Office Hours: TR 12:15-1:30  
and by appointment  
<http://www.archiva.net>

## Schedule

Tuesday,

September 1 — Housekeeping & Introductions

Thursday,

September 3 — Asking Questions, Finding Answers  
Reading: Booth et al., *The Craft of Research*, Section II  
**SHORT PROJECT #1: TAKE-AWAY REPORTS DUE**

Tuesday,

September 8 — Exploring a Topic 1  
Reading: Hine & Faragher, *American West*, Chaps 1–8  
Discussion: Selecting a Research Topic  
**SHORT PROJECT #2: PRELIMINARY TOPICS 1 DUE:** Using the text or your own experience, choose three topics in western history that interest you. For your short paper, briefly report on what you read about your topics and list five to six questions (5–6) about your topics that might lend themselves to a research paper. Your paper should be 1–2 pages. Finally, bring 21 copies to class.

Thursday,

September 10 — Reading: Exploring a Topic 2  
Reading: Hine & Faragher, *American West*, Chaps 9–16  
Discussion: Selecting a Research Topic  
**SHORT PROJECT #3: PRELIMINARY TOPICS 2 DUE:** Once again, choose three topics in western history that interest you. For your short paper, 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. Your paper should be 1–2 pages. Finally, bring 21 copies to class.

**Tuesday,  
September 15**

- **Electronic Databases & Topics 1 (Meet in Fenwick Instruction Rm 214-A)**  
**LAST DAY TO DROP CLASSES WITH NO TUITION PENALTY**  
**LAST DAY TO ADD CLASSES**

Thursday,  
September 17

- **Electronic Databases & Topics 2 (Meet in Fenwick Instruction Rm 214-A)**

Tuesday,  
September 22

- **Zotero Demo or Primary Sources**  
Discussion: Short Project  
**SHORT PROJECT #4: PRIMARY SOURCES DUE:** Find three primary sources (a combination of textual and visual) focused on a potential research topic, duplicate them, and bring them to class. (Be sure that you write an annotation for your text selections and a caption for your visual choices 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.) In your project paper, discuss how the source might be used in a research project. Because some of your primary sources may be quite long, you may bring excerpts.

Thursday,  
September 24

- **Presentation: Dennis Drabelle (Meet in Johnson Center, Room 116)**  
A contributing editor at the Washington Post Book World, Drabelle reads from his recent book, *Mile-High Fever: Silver Mines, Boom Towns, and High Living on the Comstock Lode*, exploring the area that built the fortune of San Francisco, launched the career of Mark Twain, and inspired the television show Bonanza.

Tuesday,  
September 29

- **Zotero Demo or Secondary Sources**  
Discussion: Short Project  
**SHORT PROJECT #5: SECONDARY SOURCES DUE:** Second, 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. Although you do not need to make copies for everyone, bring your own hard-copy versions of the articles to class.

Thursday,  
October 1

- **Making a Claim & Evidence**  
Reading: Booth et al., *The Craft of Research*, Section III  
**SHORT PROJECT #6: TAKE-AWAY REPORTS DUE**  
**TOPIC & PRELIMINARY THESIS DUE**

- Wednesday,  
October 2 — LAST DAY TO DROP A CLASS
- Tuesday,  
October 6 — NO CLASS (Research)
- Thursday,  
October 8 — NO CLASS (Research)
- Tuesday,  
October 13 — NO CLASS–COLUMBUS DAY SWITCH
- Thursday,  
October 15 — Planning, Drafting, Revising  
Reading: Booth et al., *The Craft of Research*, Section IV  
**SHORT PROJECT #7: TAKE-AWAY REPORTS DUE**
- Tuesday,  
October 20 — Individual Conferences–Research Progress (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday)  
**SHORT PROJECT #8: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE**
- Wednesday,  
October 21 — Individual Conferences–Research Progress (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday)  
**SHORT PROJECT #8: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE**
- Thursday,  
October 22 — Individual Conferences–Research Progress (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday)  
**SHORT PROJECT #8: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE**
- Tuesday,  
October 27 — NO CLASS (Writing)
- Thursday,  
October 29 — NO CLASS (Writing)
- Tuesday,  
November 3 — Individual Conferences–Writing Progress (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday)  
**FIRST HALF OF PAPER & SECOND HALF PLAN DUE**
- Wednesday,  
November 11 — Individual Conferences–Writing Progress (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday)  
**FIRST HALF OF PAPER & SECOND HALF PLAN DUE**

- Thursday,  
November 5 — **Individual Conferences–Writing Progress (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday)**  
**FIRST HALF OF PAPER & SECOND HALF PLAN DUE**
- Tuesday,  
November 10 — **NO CLASS (Writing)**
- Thursday,  
November 12 — **1st DRAFT COMPLETE DUE (VERY IMPORTANT)**  
Discussion: Victories & Defeats
- Tuesday,  
November 17 — Discussion: Oral Presentations & Revisions Plans
- Thursday,  
November 19 — **NO CLASS (Revisions)**
- Tuesday,  
November 24 — **NO CLASS (Revisions)**
- Thursday,  
November 26 — **NO CLASS–THANKSGIVING BREAK**
- Tuesday,  
December 1 — **Oral Presentations (Group #1)**
- Thursday,  
December 3 — **Oral Presentations (Group #2)**
- Tuesday,  
December 8 — **Oral Presentations (Group #3)**
- Thursday,  
December 10 — **FINAL PAPER 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 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 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 Thursday, December 10.

## **Books**

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

Robert Hine & John Mack Faragher, *The American West: A New Interpretive History*

Booth et al., *The Craft of Research* <<http://www.press.uchicago.edu/presssite/metadata.epl?mode=synopsis&bookkey=278970>>

## **Policies**

By the time an individual elects to pursue graduate work, he or she is 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. A word to the wise, in short, should be sufficient. Similarly, the class begins at promptly at 1:30—not at some other time around 1:30. 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.

### *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.

## **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 Papers & Projects (20%); (2) Annotated Bibliography (10%); (3) First Draft (30%); (4) Final Paper (30%); (5) Oral Presentation (10%); and (6) 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

## **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) preliminary papers & projects
    - iii) annotated bibliography
    - iv) first draft
    - v) final paper
    - vi) oral presentation
  - c) class participation
    - i) discussion
    - ii) group participation
  - 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