History 801: The Historian’s Craft
Spring 2012, Boston University
Thursdays, 12-3 pm, Department of History, 226 Bay State Rd, rm. 504

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Course Description:
This course is intended to provide new graduate students at the M.A. and Ph.D. levels with intensive training in the art of historical research and writing. The seminar will guide students through the various stages of preparing a publishable article, including conceptualizing a historical problem, doing research in primary and secondary sources, writing and revising draft text, and submitting a manuscript article to a professional historical journal. Because the seminar is composed of students working in various historical fields and using a range of approaches, students will work closely with an academic advisor (ideally their major advisor) as they formulate a problem, seek relevant sources, locate their project in a body of historiography, and scout appropriate venues for publication. Seminar members will also gain experience in presenting their work to colleagues who are not specialists in their field.

Course Requirements and Expectations:
The principal written assignment for the semester is an original research paper of approximately 30-35 pages on a subject relating to the student’s field of interest. There will also be several short written assignments to help students refine their topics and polish critical thinking skills in preparation for the research paper and, during the last two weeks of the semester, a 15-20 minute formal presentation of this research. In order to keep the focus on research and writing, common readings will be kept to a minimum and will consist of scholarly articles and book selections intended to provide models for analysis but also to provoke further thought about such problems as conceptualizing historical problems, constructing narratives, and incorporating theory.

Most weeks’ meetings will be divided into two or three parts and will include 1) general discussion of assigned journal articles, 2) individual progress reports and presentations connected to each student’s research project, and/or 3) small group work sessions of three or four students in related fields with the instructor. Students are expected to participate actively in discussion of
assigned readings but also to share research findings and engage in constructive criticism of the work of others in the class. The more we all can do to make this a mutually supportive enterprise, the more you will enjoy the course and the better your papers will be.

The final research paper should be approximately 30-35 pages in length (and must be at least 25 pages if it is to count for the department’s research requirement). **The paper is due in class on April 26** and will be graded on the basis of 1) its overall content, or contribution to historical knowledge, 2) its analysis of primary sources and their use in establishing and defending a thesis, and 3) its presentation, by which I mean primarily its readability, or style, but take also to include its technical apparatus (citations and bibliography).

I expect students to attend class regularly and to contact me if illness or other serious problems cause them to miss more than a very occasional class. I also expect them to contact me ahead of time if they will miss a paper deadline, to provide a valid excuse for that missed deadline, and to make up the missed work as soon as possible. Unexcused late papers will be marked down a half grade for every day they are late.

Finally, I expect students to adhere to the highest standards of academic honesty as outlined in the *CAS Graduate School Conduct Code*. All work handed in for credit must be your own. I will refer cases of suspected academic misconduct to the Dean’s Office and assign a grade of “F” for the course to any student whose work is judged to be plagiarized.

**Grading Breakdown:**

- Primary Source Report and Précis (10%)
- Research proposal and bibliography (10%)
- Outline, rough draft and other pre-writing activities (10%)
- Final presentation (10%)
- Seminar participation (10%)
- Final Paper (50%)

**Books:**

None are required, but I recommend purchase of the most recent edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style*, if you do not already own it.

**Course Schedule:**

**Week 1 (January 19): Introductory**
*In class:* 1) introductions 2) review of syllabus and course expectations 3) discussion of historians we admire and why

*Assignment for this class:* Be prepared to discuss a historian that you admire. What distinguishes this historian’s research and writing? What kind of impact has his or her writing had on the historical profession and/or specific subfield? Based on your assessment, can you discern what kind of contribution you hope to make in your own scholarly career?
Week 2 (January 26): Defining the Research Article and its Purposes
In Class: 1) Article genres 2) The Research Article 3) The “reciprocal” relationship between primary and secondary research

Assignment for this class: Read Sarah Knott, “Sensibility and the War for American Independence,” American Historical Review; Priya Satia, “The Defense of Inhumanity,” American Historical Review; and Samuel Moyn, “The First Historian of Human Rights,” American Historical Review (all on JSTOR); write a 1-paragraph statement of proposed research topic, with a clearly-stated research question.

Week 3 (February 2): Conceptualizing Research Projects, and the Relationship between Primary and Secondary Research
In class: 1) conceptualizing research projects 2) establishing the relationship in your research between primary and secondary research 3) discussion with Professors Johnson and Phillips about how they came to, and conceptualized their recent books 4) strategies for organizing research

Assignment for this class: read selections from James Johnson, Venice Incognito (“Saving Face,” pp. 112-128), and Sarah Phillips, This Land, This Nation (“Introduction”), posted on Blackboard. Meet with your advisor to discuss your intended research project and get suggestions for primary and secondary sources and conceptual frameworks.

Week 4 (February 9): Identifying Primary Sources
In class: 1) discussion of archival/primary sources and troubleshooting (or the problem of primary sources and the politics of knowledge) 2) sharing of select primary sources with the class 3) meeting with Donald Altschiller at Mugar to discuss advanced research strategies (with emphasis on database use and primary source access and retrieval)

Assignment for this class: Write a Primary Source Report, to be submitted in class. This 2-3 page document should outline primary sources that you intend to consult and their respective locations. Explain why these documents might be valuable and/or what insights you hope to glean from them. Make sure that your plan is realistic. In addition to the Report, please also bring to class a photocopy/image/transcript of a single document that you think *will* or *might* become important to your research and be prepared to discuss this source with the class. In preparation for this class meeting, I encourage you to reach out to Donald Altschiller, the History bibliographer at Mugar Library (donaltsc@bu.edu), as well as to archives in the greater Boston area. These archives might include: The Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University, the Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston Public Library, John Carter Brown Library, Houghton and Schlesinger Libraries at Harvard (and other Harvard libraries), the American Antiquarian Society, WGBH, and Lewis Walpole Library, amongst others.

Week 5 (February 16): Mapping Historiographies
In class: 1) research questions, revisited 2) sharing of historiographies with class 3) defining your contribution to this historiography

Assignment for this class: familiarize yourself with the historiography of your proposed subject and write précis (one-paragraph summaries of argument) for three key secondary articles and/or books; be prepared to discuss what makes these particular texts critical to your own research and how your own work might expand on/modify/support/refute them.

Week 6 (February 23): The Research Proposal
In class: 1) Discussion of “model” proposals 2) Presentation of research proposals 3) formation of working groups and strategies going forward

Assignment for this class: read “model” proposals from various fellowship competition sites (location TBA); and write a research proposal, 1000-1200 words in length, which establishes the topic of your research article, introduces a research question, conveys the significance of the project and its relationship to the existing historical literature, discusses the method(s) to be used in pursuing the research, and, if possible, indicates the framework of the article (eg organization). The proposal should also indicate where (ideally) you would like to submit this article for publication. Append a 1-2 page bibliography, listing (in correct form) the key primary and secondary sources that you will be consulting.

Week 7 (March 1): Historian’s Workshop I: “Trends” and “Voices” in your Fields
In class: 1) discussion of findings 2) “pitch” activity 3) trends versus passions

Assignment for this class: survey back issues (past 5 years) of a leading journal in your field (ideally, the one to which you would like to “submit” your own work). Can you discern trends/themes/preoccupations/developments? Are there certain books/articles that have become touchstone pieces for the scholars publishing in this journal (eg texts that make frequent appearances in citations and footnotes)? Who is the targeted audience for this journal? How general/specific is the presentation (eg what is the pitch of the articles published)? What are the guidelines for submission to this publication? Be prepared to discuss your findings, including details on submission guidelines and parameters.

Week 8 (March 8): Historian’s Workshop II: Matching Claims with Evidence
In class: 1) discussion of assigned Ferguson reading 2) refining research questions and developing answers 3) sharing of primary sources (revisited)

Assignment for this class: read selections from Niall Ferguson, Empire, posted on Blackboard; choose a key primary source to bring to class and be prepared to discuss how you will be using this source to develop and/or substantiate your central claims (if it is the same source that you brought to class in Week 4, be prepared to discuss how your understanding of this source has evolved); actively continue your research in primary and secondary materials.

Week 9 (March 15): No Class (Spring Break)

Week 10 (March 22): Writer’s Workshop I: Writing Research
In class: 1) discussion of article “diagrams” 2) approaches to writing up your own research 3) the historian’s voice 4) the art of the introduction

Assignment for this class: reread(review the articles in the journal of your choice that you read for our 7th week of class and diagram at least 3 of them (eg how are they structured? Can you identify their organization? What kind of moves do they make?); write a detailed outline for your own research paper, which includes fully-written introductory paragraph(s).

Week 11 (March 29): Writer’s Workshop II: The Problem of Audience
In class: 1) Who is the audience for your article? 2) presentation and exchange of drafts 2) small group discussions and troubleshooting

Assignment for this class: Complete the first draft of your research paper. These drafts should be as developed as possible, though footnotes can still be incomplete and sections unwritten
(provided that enough information is given to understand citations and follow the argument). Drafts of papers should be submitted to me electronically prior to the start of class. A hard copy should be delivered to your advisor.

**Week 12 (April 5): Writer’s Workshop III: Group Conferences (to be scheduled with Professor Chernock)**

**Week 13 (April 12): Individual Meetings with Professor Chernock**
*Assignment for these meetings:* Revise and polish your paper in response to the suggestions you received from your peers, Professor Chernock and your advisor. Bring the revised paper to this meeting, and be prepared to discuss substantive changes made and plans for further polishing.

**Week 14 (April 19): In-Class Presentations**
*Assignment for this class:* Continue revising and polishing your papers. Focus especially on stylistic and technical polishing, and proofreading. Prepare a 15-20-minute presentation on your research. (Half the class will present today, and half the class on the 26th.) Presentations should convey the main claim(s) of your article, its historical significance, and the primary evidence consulted to substantiate your claim. Please also include in your presentation a discussion of the journal to which you might like to contribute your piece and why it would be a good fit. I encourage you to invite your advisors to attend your presentations.

**Week 15 (April 26): In-Class Presentations**
*Assignment for this class:* RESEARCH PAPER DUE, with bibliography in Chicago Manual of Style format. Please bring a hard copy to class and give one to your advisor.