

**HI 401: History Honors – Senior Thesis Seminar**  
**Wednesday, 2-5pm / 226 Bay State Road, Room 504**  
**Professor Phillip Haberkern ([phaberke@bu.edu](mailto:phaberke@bu.edu))**  
**226 Bay State Road, Room 509 / 617.353.8314**  
**Office Hours: Friday 11-1pm (and by appointment)**

Course Description

Students in this course will be conducting the preliminary research and undertaking the initial steps to complete a 45-60 pp. research paper during the spring semester. The paper will be written with the support of an individual advisor, the course instructor for HI 401/402, and the other thesis writers enrolled in the class. In the first semester, students' primary task will be: 1) to choose a specific research topic; 2) identify and locate an appropriate primary source base for that topic; 3) discover and begin to synthesize relevant scholarly material that elucidates the primary sources; 4) incorporate both primary and secondary materials into a prospectus for their thesis; and 5) produce a draft of one section of their larger project.

This seminar provides students with a collective structure and series of deadlines as they pursue their individual projects. Each student will be expected to refine his or her topic and locate relevant sources quickly, and to work closely with an outside advisor who is an expert in the project's respective topic. The advisor will offer guidance and criticism throughout the year, BUT it is the student's responsibility to initiate meetings, follow up on recommended strategies, and to supply the advisor with updates and written assignments. The course instructor will serve as a second pair of critical eyes and your guide to the intertwined processes of information management and writing that a long-term research project requires. The advisor and instructor will also consult on your final grades for the semester (and for the thesis as a whole).

In sum: the goal of this seminar is to provide thesis writers with the support system necessary to complete their projects by laying out a series of discrete tasks that will serve as the foundation for the thesis itself, which will primarily be written during the spring semester.

Course Assessment

Your fall semester course grade will reflect three categories:

- (1) Class attendance and participation, including the quality of feedback offered to your classmates;
- (2) The grades on four written assignments (described below); and
- (3) Your advisor's and instructor's assessment of your progress (primarily as demonstrated in the draft of your thesis section due at the end of the semester).

Each component is weighted equally in determining your final grade.

I would ask all of you to consider the first component to be the most important. Throughout the year, your fellow students will serve as your primary support system and resource as you write. You will all engage with each other's writing intensively, and the entire seminar is built upon the premise that you will work your hardest to improve everyone else's writing, help them break through barriers in their research and arguments, and incorporate their feedback into your own project. WE LEARN THE MOST ABOUT OUR OWN WRITING FROM INVESTED PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT HISTORY BUT KNOW LITTLE ABOUT OUR SPECIFIC TOPICS! THEY ARE THE AUDIENCE WE ALL STRIVE TO REACH, AND THIS SEMINAR WILL PROVIDE YOU ALL WITH THAT AUDIENCE ON A WEEKLY BASIS. So, please take your responsibility to your fellow students very seriously, because it will have a significant impact on both your grade and the quality of everyone's work.

**Please note:** Although I do not expect this to happen and will work to prevent it at all costs, you may be asked (in consultation with your advisor) to consider not enrolling in HI 402 in the spring if you do not make acceptable progress on your thesis during the fall semester. Students who complete only HI 401 with a passing grade may still apply the seminar to the history major seminar requirements. For those completing the sequence, HI 401/402 will count as a single seminar for the course requirements for history majors. You may not apply the remaining four credits to your history major; these are considered honors program credits earned on top of the 12 courses required for the concentration.

### Course Assignments

During the semester, you will be asked to complete four different assignments that are geared towards two primary goals: 1) enabling you to formulate a pointed and specific research question that your thesis will seek to answer, and 2) giving you a set of tools (i.e. primary and secondary sources, as well as ways to manage both) with which to seek that answer. You will be given more extensive instructions for each assignment during the course of the semester, but they will be due on the following days:

**Assignment #1:** Archive Visit Write-Up (due September 24) – for this assignment, you will need to give an oral report and present your notes on, and preferably a copy of, one primary source that you discovered in a local archive and that is potentially of use for your thesis research.

**Assignment #2:** Thesis Proposal (due October 6) – for this assignment, you will need to submit a 2-page statement of your thesis topic and specific research question, plus a 1-page description of your primary source base and its location/s (physical or virtual). Proposals should be posted to Blackboard and submitted in hard copy to your advisor's and PNH's mailbox by 4pm.

**Assignment #3:** Annotated Bibliography (first installment due October 22) – rather than having you construct one annotated bibliography for the semester, you will be asked to submit an initial list of six (6) entries into an annotated bibliography, which you will continue augment with bi-weekly entries throughout the semester. By the end of the semester your bibliography should consist of eighteen (18) secondary sources, including essays, articles, and books.

**Assignment #4:** Thesis Prospectus (due November 12) – this final preliminary assignment will require you to submit a 5-7 pp. prospectus defining the historical problem you are investigating, situating it within the relevant historiography, and identifying the primary sources and research methods most appropriate to “solving” your problem. Your prospectus should be posted to Blackboard and submitted in hard copy to your advisor’s and PNH’s mailbox by 2pm on November 12.

**Final Submission** – your last act of the semester will be to turn in a section from your thesis. This chunk should comprise 15-20 pp. and include a cover outline that delineates where the chunk fits within the thesis as a whole. If you prefer, you may turn in two discrete sections that do not fit next to each other in the final project, so long as your outline makes their relationship clear. This section should be posted to Blackboard and submitted to your advisor’s and PNH’s mailbox by 2pm on December 17.

A NOTE ON UNIVERSITY RESOURCES FOR RESEARCH – I encourage all students to pursue funding, especially for travel that is related to your thesis, through BU’s undergraduate research opportunities program (UROP). While you may not pursue funding for your research during the semester (because you receive credit for this class), you can pursue one-time grants for travel. Travel grants are awarded on a rolling basis, and information on them can be found at:

<http://www.bu.edu/urop/prospective/>

Your instructor will be happy to help with the application process, but you will need a letter of support from your advisor as well.

## Class Schedule

September 3 – Getting Started: for this meeting we will introduce ourselves and our topics, discuss our summers (seriously), and talk through the structure and expectations for the semester and year. PNH will also distribute your first assignment.

September 10: What Makes a Thesis Tick?

Reading – One senior thesis (posted by the instructor on Blackboard). Identify its argument, key sources, historiographical contribution, and organizational principles. Be prepared to offer both praise and criticism, with a focus on these major features, rather than the technical writing.

September 17 – Introduction to Topics and Article Construction

Assignment/Reading: We will read four articles this week – one chosen by the instructor, and three chosen by y'all that will help introduce us to your topics. We will read and discuss them for the same kind of questions that we did last week – argument, sources, historiography, and organization. These will also help us become more familiar with each other's topics. ALL OF YOU: PLEASE SUBMIT YOUR ARTICLES/ESSAYS ASAP, SO WE CAN CHOOSE WHICH TO COVER BY SEPT. 14

September 24 – Intro and Construction, continued

Assignment/Reading: We'll continue with what we began last week, with a discussion of more articles submitted by y'all and one by PNH.

**DUE: Archives Visit Assignment**

October 1 – NO CLASS: schedule individual meetings with PNH to discuss progress and finish work on your proposals

**NOTE: PROPOSALS DUE ON OCTOBER 6**

October 8 – Discussion of Proposals

Assignment: Please be prepared to discuss half of the class's proposals. PNH will post which ones that we will discuss. PNH will also distribute annotated bibliography guidelines.

October 15 – Discussion of Proposals

Assignment: Same as last week, and start working on the bibliography!!!

October 22 – Seriously, What is Historiography?

Assignment/Reading: Submit one article/essay/book chapter from your bibliography that outlines the historiographical terrain of your project. Be prepared to simplify or clarify that terrain to your classmates, so we can understand the major argument(s) in which your work is situated. PLEASE SUBMIT THESE CHOICES ASAP, SO WE CAN BE PREPARED TO DISCUSS HALF IN CLASS!!!

**Due: First installment of annotated bibliography**

October 29 – Historiography, continued...

Assignment: Same as last week – we'll discuss the remaining articles/topics.

November 5 – Hooks and Centers of Gravity

Assignment/Reading: TBD in consultation with the class.

**November 12 – NO CLASS: PROSPECTUS DUE IN YOUR ADVISOR'S AND PNH'S BOX BY 2PM.**

November 19 – Prospectus Discussion

Assignment: Read the first half of the prospectuses carefully, and be prepared to discuss them and ask questions.

November 26 – NO CLASS FOR THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

December 3 – Prospectus Discussion, continued...

Assignment: Same as November 19

December 10 – Wrap Up, Thinking through the Break, and Planning for the Future

**\*\*\*THE DRAFTS OF YOUR THESIS SECTION ARE DUE TO YOUR ADVISOR AND PNH  
ON WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17<sup>TH</sup> AT 2PM.\*\*\***