

HI 401: History Honors – Senior Thesis Seminar
Friday, 11.15-2.00 / 226 Bay State Road, Room 304
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226 Bay State Road, Room 208 / 617.353.9914
Office Hours: Wed 11-12, Wed 2-3; Fri 10-11; and by appointment

Course Description

Students in this course will be conducting the preliminary research and undertaking the initial steps to complete a 45-55 page research paper during the spring semester. The paper will be written with the support the course instructor, an individual advisor/outside faculty member, and the other thesis writers enrolled in the class. In the first semester, students will: (1) narrow down a specific research topic; (2) identify and locate an appropriate primary source/archival base for that topic; (3) collect and begin to synthesize the relevant scholarly material/secondary sources on the topic; (4) incorporate both primary and secondary materials into a formal 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. Students will be expected to refine their topics and locate relevant sources quickly, and to work closely with an outside advisor who is an expert in the project's respective subject. 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 copies of all 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, each of which count equally towards the final grade:

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

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.

To put in bluntly: 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, you may be asked (in consultation with your advisor) not to enroll 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 three 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. Your final and fourth written submission will be a draft of one section of the thesis. These four assignments are weighted equally in the calculation of your final grade.

Assignment #1: Thesis Proposal (due October 9) – 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).

Assignment #2: Annotated Bibliography (first installment due November 2) – 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 to 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. You'll turn in an enlarged version with your Prospectus, and a complete version with your Final Submission.

Assignment #3: Thesis Prospectus (due November 20) – a 5-7 page prospectus will define the historical problem you are investigating, situate it within the relevant historiography, and identify the primary sources and research methods most appropriate to “solving” your problem.

Final Submission – your last act of the semester will be to turn in a section from your thesis (due December 18). This chunk should comprise 15-20 pages 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.

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

UROP Travel grants are awarded on a rolling basis, and information on them can be found at:

<http://www.bu.edu/urop/apply/funding/>

CAS also offers financial support to support travel for senior thesis research. These grants have deadlines (mid-Sept for fall travel, and Nov. 1 for travel over winter break), and full information about applying for these grants is available at:

<http://www.bu.edu/cas/current-students/undergraduate/special-opportunities/cas-honors-research-travel-awards/>

Class Schedule

September 7 – Getting Started

We will introduce ourselves and our topics, discuss our summers (seriously), and talk through the structure and expectations for the semester and year. Note: please present/email article choice (as pdf) for Sept. 21 class to instructor by the evening of Sat., Sept. 15.

September 14 – What Makes a Thesis Tick?

Assignment/Reading – Two senior theses (posted on Blackboard). Identify their arguments, key sources, historiographical contribution, and organizational principles. Be prepared to offer both praise and criticism, with a focus on these major features.

Proposal guides distributed.

September 21 – Introduction to Topics and Article Construction

Assignment/Reading: We will read several scholarly articles this week chosen by y'all and one by the instructor (posted on Blackboard) 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. The instructor's choice of article will serve as a good example of a model to follow.

September 28 – Introduction to Topics and Article Construction cont.

Assignment/Reading: We'll continue with what we began last week, with a discussion of more articles submitted by y'all (and posted on Blackboard).

October 5 – NO CLASS: schedule individual meetings this week with instructor to discuss progress and work on your proposals

**Tuesday Oct 9: PROPOSAL due in hard copy by 12 noon in instructor's and advisor's mailbox.
Also email digital copy to instructor.**

October 12 – Discussion of Proposals

Assignment/Reading: Please be prepared to discuss half of the class's proposals (posted on Blackboard).
Annotated Bibliography guidelines distributed.

October 19 – Discussion of Proposals cont.

Assignment/Reading: Same as last week, and start working on the bibliography! Note: please present/email article choice (as pdf) for Oct. 26 class to instructor by the evening of Sat., Oct. 20.

October 26 – What is Historiography?

Assignment/Reading: We will read one article/essay/book chapter from your bibliography that outlines the historiographical terrain of your project (posted on Blackboard). 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. We will discuss half of these today.

Prospectus guidelines distributed.

November 2 – Historiography cont.

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

FIRST INSTALLMENT OF ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE IN CLASS

November 9 – Hooks and Centers of Gravity

Assignment/Reading: During this meeting, we will read a sample of great opening pages/paragraphs to see what makes for an enticing hook or window into a project. This will only require in-class work, so focus on your prospectuses!

November 16– NO CLASS: schedule individual meetings this week with instructor to discuss progress and work on your prospectus

Tuesday Nov. 20: PROSPECTUS (plus enlarged annotated bibliography) due by 12 noon in instructor's and advisor's mailbox. Also email digital copy to instructor.

November 23 – no class (Thanksgiving)

November 30 – Prospectus Discussion

Assignment/Reading: Read and comment on half of the prospectuses. These will be posted on the Monday after Thanksgiving.

December 7 – Prospectus Discussion cont.

Assignment/Reading: Read and comment on the remaining prospectuses. These will be posted after class on Nov. 30.

Tuesday Dec. 18: THESIS SECTION (15-20 pages, plus complete annotated bibliography) due in hard copy by 12 noon in instructor's and advisor's mailbox.