HI 402: History Honors – Senior Thesis Seminar
Friday, 11:15-2:00 / 226 Bay State Road, Room 304
Professor Sarah Phillips (sarahphi@bu.edu)
226 Bay State Road, Room 208 / 617.353.9914
Office Hours: Tues 11:30-1:30; Fri 10-11; and by appointment

Course Description

The second semester of this seminar sequence will allow students to build on the preliminary research and initial writing assignments that they completed during the fall semester. Essentially, this semester will comprise a series of workshops during which students will critique each other’s work and collectively address the problems and obstacles that arise during the course of writing a major research paper. The students will ultimately be responsible for producing a 45-60 page thesis by the end of April, which will serve as the basis for awarding history degrees with honors.

This seminar provides students with a collective structure and series of deadlines as they pursue their individual projects. Each student will also continue to work closely with an outside advisor. 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 and deadlines that will allow them to complete the thesis during this semester.

Course Structure and Evaluation

Your work this semester will be evaluated based on two components: (1) class participation and collegial engagement (20%); and (2) your final thesis (80%). Please note that poor performance on the participatory element of the class may result in your not receiving honors (although I find this unlikely, based on your prior performance). Your thesis grade will be determined by the course instructor in consultation with your outside advisor. To graduate with honors, your thesis must receive a grade of B+ or higher.

A COMPLETE FIRST DRAFT OF YOUR THESIS IS DUE MARCH 18; THE FINAL SUBMISSION DATE IS APRIL 26.

Week to week, our semester will move through cycles of submitting draft sections and workshopping them within the group. We will typically discuss four drafts per meeting, and you will be expected to submit written comments to your peers. You may submit these in either hard copy during class or electronically before class, but please be sure your comments are legible. You should write questions and comments in the margins, just as an instructor would, and write a few sentences at the end addressing conceptualization, organization, argument, use of evidence, etc. In other words, your comments do not need to be typed separately, but they must exhibit thoroughness and engagement. Our collective goal is to help each other write the best thesis possible, and to help ourselves see the forests we are trying to delineate, even when we’re lost in the trees. To do this, we need to take every draft seriously, and to be candid (if respectful) in our comments. I am confident that we built a learning community last semester that can sustain this kind of critical dialogue over the coming months, but this course’s success will depend entirely on the effort we put into each other’s drafts and our willingness to be receptive to other people’s editorial input.
Class Schedule

Jan. 25 – Discussion of Draft Section 1, pt. 1

Feb. 1 – Discussion of Draft Section 1, pt. 2

(For these two meetings, we will offer feedback to each other and discuss the draft sections that students submitted at the end of the first semester. We will also discuss the current outlines that you all have for your theses, and how your first and second sections will fit within them.)

Feb. 8 – No class. Work on Draft Section 2

Monday, Feb. 11 – **Deadline for the Submission of Draft Section 2. Hard copy and electronic copy (doc NOT pdf) due to instructor by 4pm.** This section may represent either an expansion of your previous submissions (totaling about 25-30 pages) or entirely new sections comprising 10-15 pages. I recommend, though, that either way you do this you think very carefully about how the first two sections will relate to each other, or otherwise think about how your extant pages will fit within your overall thesis outline.

Feb. 15 – Discussion of Draft Section 2, pt. 1

Feb. 22 – Discussion of Draft Section 2, pt. 2

(For these two meetings, we will focus on the second sections that all of you will submit. For these discussions, comments should focus both on the content of the new material and the overall arc/narrative/argument that the theses are starting to describe.)

Mar. 1 – No class, but each student must schedule individual discussions with instructor about strategy for completing first full draft, either during regular class time or another time.

Mar. 8 – “Open House.” Come to refine your ideas; ask for advice; troubleshoot; get word and phrasing assistance.

Mar. 15 – No class/Spring Break

Monday, Mar. 18 – **Deadline for the Submission of Complete Draft. Hard copy and electronic copy (doc NOT pdf) due to instructor and outside advisor by 4pm.**

Mar. 22 – Discussion of 3 thesis drafts

Mar. 29 – Discussion of 5 thesis drafts

(For these two meetings, we will focus on workshopping drafts. Beyond questions of content, I encourage everyone to pay special attention to the transitional points and introduction of the theses – these are the key places for making arguments explicit, so let’s focus on how effectively that is done at this point.)

Apr. 5 – No class.
Apr. 12 – Troubleshooting meeting #1

Apr. 19 – Troubleshooting meeting #2

(For these final two meetings, we will again gather in an open format to address specific problem areas within our theses. These will also be dedicated times where you can work to polish problematic sections of your papers and get immediate feedback from your peers and instructor.)

Apr. 26 – No class, but Final Thesis Due in Hard Copy to Instructor and Advisor by 2pm

May TBA - End of semester party at Prof. Phillips's house