

HI 401: History Honors – Senior Thesis Seminar

**Friday, 11:15-2pm
226 Bay State Road, Room 304**

Professor Andrew Robichaud (AndrewR1@bu.edu)

226 Bay State Road, Room 507

Office Hours: Tuesdays 11-12 and Fridays 2-3, or 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, which will be due in 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 will be required to:

1. Narrow down their specific research topic
2. Identify and locate appropriate primary source materials for their topic
3. Discover and begin to synthesize relevant scholarly material
4. Incorporate both primary and secondary materials into a thesis prospectus
5. Produce a draft of one section of their larger project.

This seminar provides students with a structure, support system, and a series of deadlines as they pursue their individual projects.

Your primary 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 (Professor Robichaud) will serve as a second pair of critical eyes, and will help guide you through the planning, development, and execution of a long-term research project. 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 social, intellectual, and organizational supports necessary to complete their projects by laying out a series of discrete tasks and assignments 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 three written assignments (described below)
- (3) Your advisor and instructor's assessments of your progress (primarily as demonstrated in the draft of your thesis section due at the end of the semester).

The first component is especially important. This seminar is unconventional in that much of the reading you do will be other students' writing. 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.

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) 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 submit three different written assignments. You will be given more extensive instructions for each assignment during the course of the semester. Please note that the three assignments are weighted equally in the calculation of your final grade.

Assignment #1: Thesis Proposal (due October 4) – 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 submitted in hard copy to your advisor and AAR's mailbox by 4pm on October 4.

Assignment #2: Annotated Bibliography (first installment **due November 1** in class) – 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.

Assignment #3: Thesis Prospectus (due November 22) – this final preliminary assignment will require you to submit a 5-7 pp. prospectus defining the historical problem you are investigating, situating your project within the relevant historiography, and identifying the primary sources and research methods most appropriate to “solving” your problem. Your prospectus should be submitted to your advisor’s and AAR’s mailbox **by 4pm on November 22.**

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 an outline that delineates the overall project and indicates where this 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 submitted to your advisor and AAR’s mailbox by **noon on Wednesday, December 18.**

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.

Additionally, CAS has begun to offer financial support to support travel for senior thesis research. These grants are also available on a rolling deadline, and full information about applying for these grants is available at: <http://www.bu.edu/cas/academics/undergraduate-education/special-opportunities/honors-in-the-major/cas-honors-research-travel-awards/>

This is a newer program (but one from which history thesis writers have received substantial support), and if you require help in preparing an application, please just ask.

Class Schedule

September 6 – Introductions and Overview

We will introduce ourselves and our topics, discuss our summers (seriously), and talk through the structure and expectations for the semester and year.

September 13 – Where are you now?

Assignment: For this class, please bring in a short summary of where you are with your project. In your write-up, please answer the following questions:

1. In one paragraph, what is the topic you are writing about? Can you narrow your topic down to a single question?
2. What are five secondary sources (scholarly books and articles) you have identified through the BU Library or more broadly?
3. List at least one archive you are planning to use, and what materials they have that will be of interest to you.
4. What is your relationship with your thesis advisor? Have you spoken with them recently? (If not, please reach out to schedule a meeting!)
5. What part of this project are you most excited about? What piece are you most interested in exploring?

In Class: Planning a long-term project.

September 20 – What Makes a Thesis Tick?

Reading – Two senior theses (posted by the instructor on Blackboard).

Identify all of the following:

- (1) What are their main arguments?
- (2) What sources did they use?
- (3) What is the historiographical contribution?
- (4) How is it organized and structured?

Be prepared to offer both praise and criticism, with a focus on these major features, rather than the technical writing.

September 27 – Anatomy of an Article/Thesis

Assignment/Reading:

For this class, bring in one scholarly article related to your topic.

Your assignment will have two parts:

1. **Outline the above four components of the article: (1) Argument(s), (2) sources, (3) historiographical contribution, and (4) organization.**
2. **Create a paragraph-by-paragraph description of the article. Create a numbered document—each paragraph of the article gets a number. As you read the article, simply write out a quick answer to this question for each paragraph: “What is the purpose of this paragraph?”**

I will post an example article and analysis to Blackboard, which you should read carefully, too.

Bring your articles to class. In class we will discuss the composition of a scholarly article and you will present your articles to one another and explain where you see it fitting into your larger historiography/project.

In Class: Writing with Purpose

October 4 – * PROPOSALS DUE *****

October 11 – Discussion of Proposals 1-8

Assignment: Please be prepared to discuss the first 8 proposals. I will post the ones we will discuss.

In Class: Annotated Bibliography Guidelines

October 18 – Discussion of Proposals 9-16

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

October 25 - What is Historiography?

Reading:

Essays on Blackboard.

In Class: Outlining your historiography.

November 1 - * FIRST INSTALLMENT OF ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE IN CLASS *****

November 8 – No Class – Work on your prospectuses

November 15 – Class Check In

Readings on Blackboard:

- How to read for a senior thesis.
- How to give constructive feedback.

Build on your bibliography and work on your prospectuses!

November 22 – * PROSPECTUSES DUE *****

November 29 – NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING BREAK

December 1 – Prospectus Discussion I

Assignment: Read and comment on first half of class's prospectuses.

December 8 – Prospectus Discussion II

Assignment: Read and comment on second half of class's prospectuses.

In Class: Planning Your Next Steps

*****THE DRAFTS OF YOUR THESIS SECTION AND OUTLINE ARE DUE TO YOUR
ADVISOR AND AAR ON WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18TH AT NOON.*****