

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
Winter 2012
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

HISTORY 9850A (001)UW
Methods and Practice in History

Wednesday 12:30 – 2:30 pm

Prof. Ben Forster

Office: Stevenson Hall 2216

Location: Lawson Hall 1227

Office Hours: Wednesdays 11:30am-12:30 pm

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Methods and Practice in History is designed to teach the skills necessary for graduate work in History. The course explores some of the interpretive methods used by professional historians and is meant as an introduction to the “tool box” of historical studies. Through engaged discussions, critical readings, and informed analysis around common themes and specific topics, students will identify, develop and reinforce the methods of historical research. A selection of theoretically informed readings will provide the common discourse for historiographical analysis. During the semester, each student will work from a particular primary source, with reference to other primary sources, relevant secondary literature, exploration of an appropriate theoretical framework and development of an analytical framework to prepare a conference-length (12-15pp) paper for presentation at the end of the semester.

Objectives:

- to identify, recognize, and develop skills in historical research
- to equip students to conduct primary research in archival settings
- to build a theoretical vocabulary relevant for historiographical discussions
- to work collaboratively with classmates to strengthen analytical capacities

Required texts:

Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987)

Annette Gordon-Reed, *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1997)

Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, *The Houses of History: A Critical Reader in Twentieth-Century History and Theory* (Manchester University Press and New York University Press, 1999)

Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

Assignments:

During the semester, each student will work from a particular primary source, with reference to other primary sources, relevant secondary literature, exploration of an appropriate theoretical framework and development of an analysis to prepare a conference-length (12-15pp) paper for presentation at the end of the semester.

In support of this project there will be brief weekly or biweekly assignments related to the student's individual research and to develop students' research skills.

Evaluation:	Participation*	30%	(includes weekly response papers)
	Primary Document Analysis	10%	(Due October 5, 2011)
	Primary Source Survey	10%	(Due October 19, 2011)
	Review of Secondary Literature	10%	(Due November 2, 2011)
	First Draft	15%	(Due November 16, 2011)
	Conference Paper	25%	(Presentation & Submission December 12, 2011)
		100%	

***Participation:**

This course is a seminar, which places a premium on informed participation in discussion. This requires that students read and reflect on the relevant material in advance, attend class meetings, and engage in the discussion regarding the readings, issues, and themes of the course. A week before the scheduled meeting, the instructor will suggest some questions that could be pursued during your reading and reflection. These questions will be intended to be only suggestive, not comprehensive, or definitive.

Each week, each student will provide a 150-250 word commentary/critical engagement/reaction to the readings. This commentary should not be a summary of our readings but rather a response to the issues they raise along with questions that you think should be addressed during our meetings. They should try to make connections across some or all of the week's readings. In addition, as the seminar unfolds week by week, it is especially productive to see what points can be made, and questions raised, that join readings and discussions one week with prior weeks' readings and discussions. These response papers will form a significant part of the mark for participation and **are due whether or not the materials for a particular week are discussed in a given class.**

Assignments:

At the first class, each student will choose a primary source on which to base his/her conference paper.

Primary Document Analysis (In class **Wednesday October 5**, written submission due in same class). Each student will present a brief report identifying the primary source s/he has selected; indicating the purpose for which it was created and if known, by whom; indicating the context out of which it arises and the historical questions which it might be used to answer. Students might usefully consider where (i.e. in which journals) articles on this topic might be published. Please note: On no account should these presentations exceed five (5) minutes in length.

Primary Source Survey: (To be submitted in class **October 19**). For this assignment, students will have developed a clear statement of the question that their research is meant to answer. Students will use library and online archive finding aids to identify and describe the additional primary sources that will form the basis of their papers.

Review of Secondary Literature: (To be submitted in class **November 2**) For this assignment, students will provide a 500-750 word summary of the major scholarship on the topic of their papers. It is not necessary to touch on everything that has been written in a given area. Decide what methods/approaches or conclusions have been important and why. Students should indicate where their own work fits in the scholarly literature on their topics.

First Draft: Each student will bring two hard copies to class on **November 16**. Please submit an electronic copy to the instructor as a Word or WordPerfect document. Each student will receive the papers from two of his/her peers and will bring a written critique of each of these to class the following week (i.e. 28 March).

Conference presentation: Monday December 12. Each student will give a fifteen minute oral presentation of his/her paper at a day long conference. Paper presentations will be organized into panels. These will be critiqued by faculty members. Students are urged to be attentive to the length of their presentations. Keep in mind that it takes two minutes at least to read one double-spaced page. The mark for the conference paper will be based on both the oral presentation and the written submission **which will be due the same day**.

More information about these assignments will be available in class.

Introduction:

To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain always a child. For what is the worth of human life, unless it is woven into the life of our ancestors by the records of history?

Cicero, *Orator*

Week 1

Wednesday, September 14 : Introduction : “Getting Ready to Do History”

What are the foundational assumptions underlying the study of History?

Reading: William Cronon, “Getting Ready to Do History,” 1-6

([www.williamcronon.net/writing/Cronon Carnegie Essay Getting Ready to Do History 2004 .pdf](http://www.williamcronon.net/writing/Cronon_Carnegie_Essay_Getting_Ready_to_Do_History_2004.pdf))

Martha Howell & Walter Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*, 1-16.

Assignment: (In Class) Select Primary Source for conference paper.

Week 2

Wednesday, September 21: Evidence I: Finding the Evidence

Prof. M. Shatzmiller “Working in Archives outside of North America”

R. Keirstead/T. Belton “Working in the ARCC”

Readings: Terry Cook, “What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future of Paradigm Shift” *Archivaria* 43 (1997): 17-63.

Howell & Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*, pp.17-42.

Week 3

Wednesday, September 28: Argument I: Generating a Bibliography – What’s Been Said?

* This session will be held in the Electronic Instruction Room in the D.B. Weldon Library

E. Mantz Bibliography in History

Readings: Paul N. Edwards, “How to Read a Book”

<http://pne.people.si.umich.edu/PDF/howtoread.pdf><http://pne.people.si.umich.edu/PDF/howtoread.pdf>

Howell & Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*, 43-87.

Weeks 4 to 6: Thinking about the History of History:

Every important new discovery about the past changes how we think about the present

and what we expect from the future; on the other hand every change in the conditions of the present and in the expectations for the future revises our perception of the past. In this complex context history is born ostensibly as reflection on the past: a reflection which is never isolated from the present and the future. History deals with human life as it 'flows' through time.

Ernst Breisach,
Historiography: Ancient, Medieval and Modern (1995)

Week 4

Wednesday, October 5: "The Emergence of History as a Professional Discipline"
Prof. C. Simpson "Historiography in the Classical World"

Readings: Green and Troup, *The Houses of History*, 1-32.

Herodotus, TBD.

Bonnie G. Smith, "Gender and the Practices of Scientific History: The Seminar and Archival Research in the 19thC" *American Historical Review*; 100:4 (October 1995): 1150-1176.

Assignment: Primary Document Analysis

Week 5

Wednesday, October 12: "The Challenge of the Social Sciences"

Readings: Howell & Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*, 88-118.

Green and Troup, *The Houses of History*, 33-203.

Judith M. Bennett, "Theoretical Issues: Confronting Continuity," *Journal of Women's History* 9:3 (Autumn 1997): 73-94.

Week 6

Wednesday, October 19: "History and the Challenges of Pluralism, Postcolonialism and Postmodernism"

Readings: Howell & Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*, 119-150.

Green and Troup, *The Houses of History*, 204-325.

Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?" *Representations* 37 (Winter 1992): 1-26.

Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1988), 469-521.

Assignment: Primary Source Survey

Weeks 7 to 12: Questions of Evidence and Argument

History is neither watchmaking nor cabinet construction. It is an endeavor toward better understanding.

Marc Bloch

Week 7

Wednesday, October 26: Evidence II: Reading the Evidence

Prof. R. MacDougall On-Line Archives
Prof. M. Dove, Non-Documentary Sources

Readings: Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth Century France* (Stanford University Press, 1987)
Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture," in C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3-32.

Week 8

Wednesday, November 2: Argument II: Surveying the Literature: What's Left To Say?

Readings: Carlo Ginzburg, "Checking the Evidence." *Critical Inquiry* 18:1 (1991): 79-92.
Eric Hobsbawm, "Inventing Tradition," in Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 1-14.

Assignment: Review of Secondary Literature

Week 9

Wednesday, November 9: Evidence III: Weighing the Evidence

Readings: Annette Gordon-Reed: *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy* (University of Virginia Press, 1998)
Edward J. Larson, "Retelling the Tale," in *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion*, (Harvard University Press, 1997), 225-246.

Week 10

Wednesday, November 16 : Argument III: Documentation – Guidelines and Cautionary Tales

Reading: Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession*, 612– 621.
<http://www.h-net.org/about/citation>

Assignment: First Draft

Weeks 11 to 13: The Writing Process

History is always written wrong, and so always needs to be rewritten
George Santayana

Week 11

Wednesday, November 23: The First Draft

<http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/writing/index.html?grad>
<http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/writing/index.html?handouts>

Week 12

Wednesday, November 30: Organization and Argument

Week 13

Wednesday, December 7: Introductions, Conclusions and Finished Products.

Readings: <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/introductions.html>

<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/conclusions.html>

Paul N. Edwards, "How to Give an Academic Talk"

<http://pne.people.si.umich.edu/PDF/howtotalk.pdf>

Week 14: Conference Day

Monday, December 12 Conference Presentations