

The University of Western Ontario

History 4796F (undergraduate)  
History 9870A (graduate)

Seminar on the Comparative History of North America

Fall Semester 2011

Tuesday 11:30 AM - 1:30 PM in Social Science Centre 3010  
Thursday 9:30 AM - 10:30 AM in Social Science Centre 3014

Dr. Michael M. Brescia  
Visiting Fulbright professor

Office Hours: T 10:00 AM - 11:30 AM; Th 10:30 AM - 12:00 Noon; and by appointment.  
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**Course Description and Rationale:**

This seminar imparts a series of critical and evaluative skills that are part and parcel of historical research, including the historical method, the analysis and interpretation of primary sources and secondary works, the composition of a research paper, as well as the principles of exposition and style. The general theme of the course is North America, with an eye toward identifying and employing comparative methodology to generate case studies that compare and contrast the historical experiences of Canada, Mexico, and the United States. Students may choose a topic that speaks to any dimension of cross-cultural contact and exchange or transnational phenomenon within the broad sweep of continental history from Pre-Columbian times to the present. For example, students might examine the manner in which the various indigenous communities of North America shaped European colonialism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; the effects of the Enlightenment on nascent political structures; the impact of the Industrial Revolution on the Canadian Prairies, Great Plains, and Yucatán Peninsula; the federalist question in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities under constitutional law; free trade; etc. Transnational analysis and case studies are the driving forces behind this seminar; students will have to integrate the historical experiences of at least two countries in their research. In other words, it is insufficient to examine the federalist question in Canada, for example, without generating comparative case studies from the United States and/or Mexico. Finally, in addition to writing a semester-long research paper, students will examine the art and craft of the historical profession through a variety of analytical exercises, including an assessment of word origins and language, library workshops, reference matter, book reviews, and the delivery of several oral presentations.

**Differences between Comparative History and Traditional Approaches to History:**

--unit of analysis

--type of knowledge generated

--methodology

--three orders of analysis

**Required Readings (both undergraduate and graduate students):**

[book]

Brescia, Michael M., and John C. Super. *North America: An Introduction*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009.

[articles and chapters]

Bayly, C.A., et al. "On Transnational History." *American Historical Review* 111, no. 5 (2006): 1441-1464.

Benjamin, Jules R. "Writing Book Reviews." In *A Student's Guide to History*. Ninth Edition. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004.

Bender, Thomas. "Introduction" and "Global History and America Today." In *A Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2006.

Clarkson, Stephen. "Introduction: Framing the Question" and "Conclusion: Framing the Answer." In *Does North America Exist? Governing the Continent after NAFTA and 9/11*. Toronto and Washington, D.C.: University of Toronto Press and Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008.

Johnson, Benjamin H., and Andrew R. Graybill, editors. "Introduction." In *Bridging National Borders in North America: Transnational and Comparative Histories*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

Seigel, Micol. "Beyond Compare: Comparative Method after the Transnational Turn." *Radical History Review* 91 (2005): 62-90.

**Required Readings (graduate students only):**

[book]

Johnson, Benjamin H., and Andrew R. Graybill, editors. *Bridging National Borders in North America: Transnational and Comparative Histories*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

**Course Requirements for Undergraduate Students:**

Class Participation	15%
Oral Presentations (6 presentations)	25%
Book Review (2-3 pages)	10%
Etymology Exercise (2-3 pages)	10%
Final Draft of Research paper (15-20 pages; topic proposal, annotated bibliography, peer review, and class presentation will be part of the final draft grade)	<u>40%</u>
	100%

### Course Requirements for Graduate Students:

Class Participation	15%
Oral Presentations (6 presentations)	20%
Book Review (3-5 pages)	10%
Etymology Exercise (3-5 pages)	10%
Final Draft of Research Paper (25-30 pages; topic proposal, annotated bibliography, peer review, and class presentation will be part of the final draft grade)	<u>45%</u>
	100%

### Grade Scale:

90-100	"A+"
80-89	"A"
70-79	"B"
60-69	"C"
50-59	"D"
Below 50	"E"

### Learning Outcomes:

At the end of this research seminar students will be able...

- 1) to identify and employ in a research paper the comparative method in an effort to discern patterns of change and continuity in the North American historical experience;
- 2) to integrate in a research paper interdisciplinary frameworks that reflect the influences of archaeology, ethnohistory, political science, law, economics, etc., on what we know about the North American past
- 3) to differentiate between first, second, and third orders of analysis in the comparative method and how to apply these to a major research paper;
- 4) to locate, evaluate, and use primary sources in the development of a research paper;
- 5) to identify, assess, and critique secondary works and use them in meaningful ways that demonstrate a competent understanding of the historiography related to the topic;
- 6) to identify and evaluate the transnational dimensions of the North American experience in a research paper and several shorter writing assignments; and
- 7) to sharpen critical thinking, reading, writing, and oral presentation skills appropriate to an advanced seminar, and demonstrate these skills in both a research paper and a series of shorter writing assignments.

**Book Review:** The professor will direct students to various historical journals available in the main library that contain book reviews, such as *American Historical Review*, *American Review of Canadian Studies*, *The Americas*, *Canadian Historical Review*, *Canadian Journal of History/Annales Canadiennes d'Histoire*, *Canadian Review of American Studies*, *Hispanic American Historical Review*, *Itinerario*, *Journal of World History*, *Mexican Studies/Estudios*

*Mexicanos*, etc. Most scholarly journals are available in two formats: traditional print and electronic. Book reviews are found in the back of journals. Students will peruse a variety of book reviews and choose one that they think best reflects the criteria established in class for a good book review. Afterwards students will read and evaluate a book that speaks to their intellectual interests and write a review of it for class. **\*\* Graduate students are required to read and review the Johnson and Graybill edited anthology. \*\***

**Etymology Exercise:** Students will research the etymology (origins and history) of a word, write up their findings in an essay, and report their findings to the class. Students will integrate a discussion of how the word has been used and understood over time in at least two (2) of the countries of North America. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), *Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, *Diccionario de la lengua española*, *Diccionario de mejicanismos*, *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, and *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* are important reference works that will help students fulfill this course requirement. Students will choose one word from the following list:

miscegenation	anarchism	civilization	colonialism
communism	conservatism	democracy	fascism
federalism	feudalism	hagiography	imperialism
liberalism	marxism	nationalism	patriotism
racism	totalitarianism	revolution	multiculturalism
socialism	millenarianism	terrorism	theocracy

**Topic Proposal:** This explains the topic that you have chosen to research and analyze. In your topic proposal, you will establish a plan that includes why you have chosen to research the particular topic and what steps you will take to execute the plan, particularly its comparative dimensions. You also will posit some preliminary research questions that should help you generate a strong argument and thesis statement in the weeks ahead. Finally, you will discuss briefly the nature of the primary sources and secondary works available to you.

**Annotated Bibliography of Primary Sources and Secondary Works:** A bibliography lists the primary source materials and secondary works that you have employed to develop and write your research paper. Students are required to annotate each source and work, i.e., provide a brief, analytical description of its contents and explain its significance to your research paper.

**Peer Review:** Each student will assess a classmate's rough draft. Your assessment consists of three parts: 1) grammar, style, and mechanics; 2) content and analysis, including use of primary sources and the secondary literature; and 3) effective use of the comparative methodology. On the copy of the draft that your classmate provides, you should indicate errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and style. Please do not correct the errors yourself; only note them. On a separate sheet (typed, double-spaced, and with the proper margins) you will evaluate both the content and analysis of your classmate's research paper. Is the argument clear and persuasive? Does the paper answer the questions raised in its thesis statement? Did the student use enough primary sources? Did the student rely too much on secondary literature? Are there unexplained gaps in the paper? How did the student employ the comparative method? Are there sufficient case studies?

**Final Draft:** Your seminar paper should be polished, comprehensive, logical, and neat. It must include a title page, citations, and a bibliography (following the guidelines established in class). In this course, students will employ footnotes rather than endnotes or parenthetical citations. In the final draft undergraduates must demonstrate the analytical use of at least three (3)

monographs and two (2) journal articles. Moreover, students need to show mastery of the available primary source materials by designing their papers around their own interpretations rather than those of others. Please number your pages (except the title page and first page). Your final draft should be 15-20 pages, excluding the title page and bibliography (25-30 pages for graduate students).

**Course Schedule:**

*The Mechanics of Historical Research and Comparative Methodology*

Th 9/8

A: Introduction. Course Requirements.

B: The Nature and Practice of History

T 9/13

A: Varieties of History and Historical Writing in North America

B: Class discussion of the uses and misuses of the book review.

Assigned Readings: Course syllabus; Rampolla, 24-25; Benjamin, 68-73.

Th 9/15 -- No Class

Students will use this time to identify books in the main library for their book review, as well as consult major reference works such as dictionaries, catalogues, inventories, etc.

T 9/20

A: The Broad Outlines of Historical Method

B: External and Internal Criticism of Primary Sources

C: Oral presentations on book reviews found in academic journals (1).

Assigned Readings: Rampolla, v-vi, 1-21, 39-53.

Th 9/22

A: Comparative Method, Part I: Idiographic vs. Nomothetic Knowledge

B: Class discussion of assigned readings on transnational history.

Assigned Readings: Articles by C.A. Bayly and Micol Seigel.

T 9/27

A: Comparative Method, Part II: Unit of Analysis, Orders of Analyses

B: Class discussion of assigned readings on comparative North America.

Assigned Readings: Chapters by Thomas Bender, Stephen Clarkson, and Johnson/Graybill.

Th 9/29

Workshop in the UWO Library on the nature and scope of available resources

Assigned Readings: Rampolla, 119-134.

T 10/4

Workshop in the UWO Archives on the nature and scope of the collections

*Words, Language, and the Historian's Craft*

Th 10/6

A: Reference Materials and Language Skills in Historical Research

B: Class discussion of the etymology exercise.

C: **\*\* Book review due \*\***

Assigned Readings: Rampolla, 22-34; Brescia & Super, ix-xiv.

T 10/11

A: Virtues for, and Weaknesses of, the Historian

B: Oral Presentations on the etymology exercise (2).

C: **\*\* Etymology paper due \*\***

*Periodization, Sources, and Themes in North American History*

Th 10/13

A: Historical Overview of North America

B: Convergence and Divergence in the North American Past

C: Oral presentations (3)

Assigned Readings: Brescia & Super, 1-35.

T 10/18

A: Regions and Resources

B: Politics and Power

C: Oral presentations (3)

Assigned Readings: Brescia & Super, 37-88

Th 10/20

A: Diplomacy and Continental Affairs

B: Indians, Africans, and Europeans

C: Oral presentations (3)

Assigned Readings: Brescia & Super, 89-127.

T 10/25

A: Immigration

B: Labor, Industrialization, and Social Class

C: Oral presentations (3)

Assigned Readings: Brescia & Super, 129-165.

Th 10/27

A: Trade and Commerce

B: Church and State

C: Oral presentations (3)

Assigned Readings: Brescia & Super, 167-215.

T 11/1

A: **\*\* Paper topics due \*\***

B: Oral presentations on topic proposals (4).

Th 11/3

No Class -- Individual conferences with professor to discuss topic proposals.

*Scholarly Citations and Principles of Writing*

T 11/8

A: Format for Footnotes and Bibliography

B: In-class exercise on proper format  
Assigned Readings: Rampolla, 77-118.

Th 11/10

A: Writing Style and Conventions  
B: Editing and Revising Your Research Paper  
Assigned Readings: Rampolla, 53-76.

T 11/15

A: The Value of Peer Review  
B: In-class exercise on peer review.

Th 11/17

A: Oral presentations on the secondary literature related to each student's topic (5).

T 11/22

A: Oral presentations on the primary source materials related to each student's topic (6).  
B: **\*\* Annotated bibliography due \*\***

Th 11/24

No Class -- Research and Writing Day

T 11/29

No Class -- Research and Writing Day -- Professor available for consultation at this time.

Th 12/1

A: Class presentations of research papers, Part I.

T 12/6

A: Class presentations of research papers, Part II.  
B: **\*\* Final drafts of research paper due in class \*\***