

HIST 480, SEC 2 SENIOR SEMINAR IN HISTORY: MODERN AMERICA
Spring 2012

Assignment Guidelines

Class readings

The required readings in this course are online or on reserve. Buying books is thus optional. The main readings are new and exciting to me and I hope to you. Particularly, the website constructed by William Cronon and his students provides a sound foundation with a light touch and conversationally. While the examples are in environmental history, you will be able to apply the guidelines to your work. Patrick Rael's handbook is much more prosaic but useful in keeping all of us organized.

William Strunk, Jr. and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style* remains my favorite book on writing. Kate Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* focuses generally on scholarly writing, including the key area of documentation. At the start of her book Turabian reminds you, "[n]o matter how carefully you do your research, readers will judge it by how well you report it." Your footnotes/endnotes and bibliography require knowledge of "Chicago style," as presented in Turabian and in many other places.

Other readings online and on library reserve are to jump-start your thinking on topics and to deepen your attention to the craft of writing. You will be able to read all these sources quickly and return to the online ones repeatedly.

I expect all students to adhere to the SUNY Potsdam Academic Honor Code. Cases of academic dishonesty will be turned over to campus judiciary and will result in a significant penalty, including the possibility of failing the entire. I will discuss the particular problems of plagiarism in class.

Topics

You have a great deal of latitude in choosing a topic. The broad parameters are that your topic must be on some aspect of history from 1865 to 1990 related to the United States. These broad guidelines give you substantial leeway but also common ground for collaboration and discussion.

Enjoy the freedom. Keep in mind, however, that you must pick a topic with adequate primary and secondary sources and, at the same time, with enough of a focus to complete a one-semester research paper. And you do have deadlines that you must meet.

Your final paper must be on a topic focused enough for a 20-25 page paper (Times 12 pt., 1" margins, double-spaced). The paper must show an ability to analyze and evaluate primary and secondary sources and to connect your work to the larger historical and historiographic context.

Assignments (If you do not turn in all of your assignments, you will receive an unsatisfactory overall grade for the 40% of your grade comprised of assignments 1-8.)

-1) Topic listing (4%) (due 2/3)

Read one of the chapters in Alan Trachtenberg's *Incorporating America* or in *Perspectives in Modern America* (Harvard Sitkoff, editor) or one of the essays linked in the Moodle page for next week. Try to pick an essay connected to your interests. Provide a Chicago style bibliographic entry on your chapter or essay. Make as extensive a list as possible of topics for research in the reading you have chosen. This list may simply be a list; you do not need to write in full sentences. Close with any questions the essay raised in your mind.

- 2) Primary source assignment (4%) (due 2/17)
I will provide instructions later.
- 3) Secondary source assignment; statement of a working research question (4%) (due 2/24)
 - a) Choose two of your secondary sources: books and/or articles. List both sources using Chicago bibliographic style. Write a paragraph on each source, which conveys the author's credentials, his or her topic, focus, thesis, argument, and key sources. Convey how the author situates the study historically and historiographically? Write a third paragraph comparing the two sources. Write a final paragraph that evaluates the two sources in terms of their contribution to your research.
 - b) Write a sentence or two summarizing a working research question.
- 4) Working abstract, outline, and bibliography (10%) (due 3/9)
The abstract is a one- or two-page statement of your topic area, focus, refined research question or even an emerging thesis, a description of the key primary and secondary sources you will use to you address your question. Include a working outline for the entire paper that identifies areas of the research process that remain undone. Note any problem areas. Provide a working bibliography, divided into primary and secondary sources.
- 5) Draft #1 (5%) (2 copies) (due 4/6) (For formatting, see Rael, "Formatting Your Paper")
The first draft should include a working introductory section and the body of the paper. The introductory section should include topic, focus, and a working thesis. The body should include a clear historiographic section that shows how your study joins the conversation. The body should also show your knowledge of the historical context and the primary sources you are using to build your argument. You must include foot/endnotes and a bibliography. If there are sections you have not yet written, include an explanation of what is missing.
- 6) Peer review #1 (4%) (2 copies) (due 4/13)
The peer review will use Rael's "Peer Evaluation" format to complete a 1-2 page evaluation of the paper you are assigned.
- 7) Draft #2 (5%) (2 copies) (due 5/4)
The second draft should respond to issues raised in the evaluation of the first draft. The second draft should be a complete draft.
- 8) Peer review #2 (4%) (2 copies) (due 5/11)
The second review will focus on the opening paragraph, grammar, and style. It will also, however, note problems from the first draft that have not been addressed (heaven forbid).
- 9) Participation and presentations (10%)
Participation will be based on your attendance, contributions in class, your progress reports, your presentation of your nearly completed paper, and our individual meetings. If you miss more than one class, a scheduled individual session, or a presentation, you will receive an unsatisfactory participation grade.

A progress report should be organized and thoughtful. Final presentations are to share your research and to raise problems in the research process. For your presentation

provide about a ten-minute overview of your topic, focus, key primary and secondary sources, a summary of your research, problems, and questions for class discussion. And do share your successes and excitement as well. Supply a one-page sheet with this material listed in outline form for me to copy for the class. Otherwise, bring copies for class members. I will be evaluating the clarity of the overview you provide as well as the historical and writing issues you raise and your fielding of questions. Work on the timing of your presentation. You should reserve at least ten minutes for questions from the audience.

- 10) Final paper (50%) (A hard copy and an electronic copy are due Tuesday, 5/12 at the start of class.) (For formatting, see syllabus and Rael, "Formatting Your Paper") This paper will simply be the last step of a semester's process, if you have conscientiously completed all the other steps. Divide the bibliography into primary and secondary sources.

Here is the rubric with which all history seminar papers are assessed.

Standards for Historical Interpretation:

1. Paper analyzes one or more historical documents.
2. Paper synthesizes information from two or more historical documents.
3. Paper makes reasoned historical judgments about historical documents.

Standards for Historical Analysis

1. Paper analyzes an historical interpretation.
2. Paper compares and contrasts two or more historical interpretations.
3. Paper makes reasoned evaluative judgments about historical interpretations.

Standards for Historical Presentation

1. Paper has a recognizable historical thesis.
2. Paper is mechanically and grammatically sound.
3. Paper is presented in form consistent with the standards of the discipline.

Global Standard

- Paper offers a reasoned historical interpretation.