

History 771
Research Seminar in U.S. History

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Tues. 5:00-8:00 p.m.
Mason Hall G437

Office Hours: Thurs. 2:00-4:00 p.m. and by appt.

Course Webpage: CTools: History 771 001 W11 [<https://ctools.umich.edu/portal>]

The primary goal of this seminar is to produce an original research paper of about 30-35 pages in length that is based in primary sources and engaged with relevant historiographical and methodological debates in the scholarly literature. The second key obligation is to provide peer feedback to other members of the seminar during the scheduled weekly meetings. The course is open to all graduate students in U.S. history, working in any time period and on any topic/subfield, as well as interested students from transnational fields and interdisciplinary or interdepartmental programs.

This seminar is designed so that you can complete your research papers by the end of the semester, and you are expected to meet the **April 29** deadline for submission of the final draft. During the initial meeting, we will discuss the trade-offs and strategies involved in conceptualizing a seminar paper that is a manageable project within the confines of a semester. You should begin to explore your potential topic and identify relevant archival sources immediately (if not already)—potentially including material in digital databases, collections in research libraries nearby (the Labadie, the Bentley, the Clements, the Ford, the Reuther/Wayne State, perhaps Michigan State, etc), and archives to which you could travel on long weekends and/or over spring break. In planning your research project and bringing it to a conclusion during a four-month period, you may or may not end up writing a paper that becomes an explicit part of your dissertation, but you hopefully will be moving toward greater specificity and clarity regarding your intellectual and scholarly interests. Or, perhaps, you may switch directions in the future but be gaining valuable experience in the present regarding how to develop a topic, conduct research in primary sources, engage with historiographical and methodological debates, and marshal arguments and evidence with analytical rigor and a compelling narrative organization. Or you may be experimenting with a topic that captures your interest to see whether or not it contains the seeds of a viable long-term project. In one way or another, your seminar paper should function as an important step on the path toward writing a dissertation and becoming a professional historian, like all of your coursework is designed to do, but what this actually entails is contingent and in fact inherently uncertain at this point. In theory, the final paper should be modeled on journal articles of publishable quality, but what this means in practice is that the paper should contain the original research and interpretative strength to be capable of transformation into a journal article or a dissertation section down the road. For our purposes, “publishable quality” means papers that demonstrate academic historical skills in formulating a research problem, drawing on multiple primary sources, deploying evidence to support a significant thesis, and grappling explicitly with the secondary literature.

CTools: At various stages in the process, seminar members will post work-in-progress on the CTools site, read everyone else's submissions before the start of the class period, make oral presentations to the group, and provide/receive feedback during the weekly discussions. Guidelines for these interim deadlines can be found in the course outline below. Unless we collectively negotiate otherwise, as reality intrudes on planning, work should be posted to CTools by **noon on Sunday** before the Tuesday meeting, to give everyone sufficient time to read the documents before class. Please submit your work to the relevant discussion thread as a **.doc file**, so that I can type comments directly into the documents and return them to you electronically. Seminar members will be divided into two groups (A and B), and during the last third of the semester each group will present writing samples and rough drafts on alternating weeks, with individual members of Group A designated to provide the lead commentary on the work of individuals members of Group B, and vice versa. The CTools site also includes links to the articles for Weeks 1-2, designated as [CT] below.

Evaluation: Your grade in the class will be based predominantly on the final seminar paper but will also take into account class participation in terms of peer feedback and the energy and quality of work submitted at the interim deadlines throughout the semester. It is worth noting that letter grades are not the most important method of evaluation in graduate coursework. Instead, instructors undertake a holistic evaluation of your efforts, provide written feedback to the History Department (and to you individually), and incorporate your performance during the coursework phase into a broader assessment of your graduate career if called upon to write letters of recommendation in the future.

Consultation: Outside of the scheduled class meetings, you should consult periodically with your graduate adviser(s) as well as with the instructor. At three points during the semester, I will schedule individual meetings with each member of the seminar, and you are welcome to set up additional meetings with me as well.

Course Outline

Week 1 (Jan. 11)—Strategizing the Seminar Paper

**AHA Committee for Graduate Students, “Notes to Narrative: The Art of Crafting a Dissertation or Monograph,” *Perspectives* (Jan. 2009), including articles by Judith Walkowitz (“On Taking Notes”), Brad Gregory (“Managing the Terror”), and Deborah E. Harkness (“Finding the Story”) [CT]

**AHA/Committee for Graduate Students, “Research Trip Tips” [CT]

**AHA/Committee for Graduate Students, “Practical Advice for Writing Your Dissertation, Book, or Article” [CT]

**Sample Seminar Papers from American History Workshop Archive [CT]

***Roundtable Discussion with U-M Dissertators*

Week 2 (Jan. 18)—Methods and Perspectives

- **Phyllis Mack, “Religion, Feminism, and the Problem of Agency: Reflections on Eighteenth-Century Quakerism,” *Signs* (Autumn, 2003), 149-177 [CT]
- **Walter Johnson “On Agency,” *Journal of Social History* (Autumn, 2003), 113-124 [CT]
- **Philip J. Deloria, “From Nation to Neighborhood: Land, Policy, Culture, Colonialism, and Empire in U.S.-Indian Relations,” *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History: Past, Present, Future*, ed. James W. Cook, et. al, 343-382 [CT]
- **William Cronon, “A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative,” *Journal of American History* (March 1992), 1347-1376 [CT]
- **Paula Fass, “Cultural History/Social History: Some Reflections on a Continuing Dialogue,” *Journal of Social History* (Autumn, 2003), 39-46 [CT]
- **Robert Self and Thomas Sugrue, “The Power of Place: Race, Political Economy, and Identity in the Postwar Metropolis,” *A Companion to Post-1945 America*, ed. Agnew and Rosenzweig, 20-43 [CT]
- ****Optional:** James Cook and Lawrence Glickman, “Twelve Propositions for a History of U.S. Cultural History,” *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History: Past, Present, Future*, ed. Cook, et. al, 3-39 [CT]

Week 3 (Jan. 25)—Preliminary Topic Proposals

**Post to CTools (by Jan. 23) a 2-3 page exploratory think piece (not a formal prospectus) about your potential topic or general area of interest, addressing issues such as how to approach your project, what challenges you might face in turning your ideas and interests into a research paper (including logistical ones), what sources/archives are available and what questions you are interested in answering or historiographical problems you want to address.

**In class: workshopping preliminary proposals.

Week 4 (Feb. 1)—No Class Meeting

**Schedule individual meetings with the professor between Feb. 1-4, and you should also have consulted formally with your adviser(s) by this point in the semester.

Week 5 (Feb. 8)— Methodology: Engaging within and across Subfields

Post to CTools (by Feb. 6) a 2-3 page project development exercise that summarizes and analyzes **two or three methodological articles (in journals, forums, edited collections, etc.) that have helped to shape one or more of the subfields with which you are engaged, and that have

direct relevance for how you plan to approach and frame your research project. Choose articles such as those assigned in Week 2 that reflect broadly on the methods of particular subfields (cultural, social, gender, sexuality, Native American Studies, legal, urban, political, etc.), rather than historiographical work on particular places, periods, or topics. Reflect explicitly on how your project might fit within these methodological debates, and perhaps seek to bridge across two or more of them. Feel welcome to consult with your adviser(s) and the professor on your selections.

**In class: presentation and discussion of methodological reflections.

Week 6 (Feb. 15)—Historiography and Primary Sources

Post to CTools (by Feb. 13) a 2-3 page historiographical review essay that covers at least **three secondary sources (focus on books, although you can add articles) that are directly relevant to the geographic, temporal, and/or topical focus of your research project. Also post to CTools a primary source (newspaper/magazine article, image, scanned document from the archives, etc.) along with a brief analysis of the source and how it might fit into your project.

**In class: presentation and discussion of historiographical essays; workshopping primary source analyses.

Week 7 (Feb. 22)—Research Agenda: Prospectus/Annotated Bibliography

Post to CTools (by Feb. 20) a polished prospectus that provides a clear description of your topic—including its geographic, chronological, and thematic parameters. Also include an **annotated bibliography of primary and secondary sources, including specific information about archival and digital collections, and a research agenda and timetable moving forward.

**In class: presentation and discussion of prospectuses/bibliographies/research plans.

Week 8 (March 1)—Spring Break/Research Week

Week 9 (March 8)—Outlines, Reports from the Archives, Troubleshooting

**Post to CTools (by March 6) a detailed outline of your research paper.

**In class: discussion of outlines, reports from the archives, general troubleshooting session.

Week 10 (March 15)—No Class Meeting

**Schedule individual meetings with professor between March 15-18.

Week 11 (March 22)—Workshopping Introductions/Writing Samples (Group A)

**Group A: Post to CTools (by March 20) an 8-10 page writing sample that includes the introduction to your paper, or another section if you prefer to write the introduction last, along with a revised and updated outline for the other parts of the paper.

**In class: discussion of writing samples, with one member of Group B serving as the lead commenter for each paper in Group A.

Week 12 (March 29)—Workshopping Introductions/Writing Samples (Group B)

**Group B: Post to CTools (by March 27) an 8-10 page writing sample that includes the introduction to your paper, or another section if you prefer to write the introduction last, along with a revised and updated outline for the other parts of the paper.

**In class: discussion of writing samples, with one member of Group A serving as the lead commenter for each paper in Group B.

Week 13 (April 5)—No Class Meeting

**Optional: schedule individual meetings with professor between April 5-8.

Week 14 (April 12)—Rough Drafts (Group A)

**Group A: Post to CTools (by April 10) a full rough draft of your seminar paper, including comprehensive footnotes. If necessary or useful, you should include a headnote explaining any issues regarding the paper about which you would like to receive feedback.

**In class: discussion of rough drafts, with one member of Group B serving as the lead commenter for each paper in Group A.

Week 15 (April 19)—Rough Drafts (Group B)

**Group B: Post to CTools (by April 17) a full rough draft of your seminar paper, including comprehensive footnotes. If necessary or useful, you should include a headnote explaining any issues regarding the paper about which you would like to receive feedback.

**In class: discussion of rough drafts, with one member of Group A serving as the lead commenter for each paper in Group B.

April 29: Final Drafts Due. Please put a hard copy in the professor's mailbox and upload a digital copy to the Assignments Folder on CTools.