

HIST 607: Seminar – Open Research
CRN 12894
Meets Wednesdays, 2:00 – 4:50 pm

Instructor: George Sheridan gjs@uoregon.edu

General Description

This course has as its central purpose the drafting of a chapter of the thesis or dissertation for the M.A./Ph.D degree, or of one of the two papers required for the M.A. in lieu of the thesis. **Ph.D. students who have passed their qualifying exam may use the seminar to write a substantial prospectus for the dissertation, in place of a chapter.**

The course strives to advance these writing projects in the following ways:

- The course provides a schedule and a succession of steps towards design and writing of the chapter or paper, and in this way assures completion, by the end of the term, of a final or near final product advancing the thesis, dissertation, or MA research paper.
- The course serves as a forum for ongoing commentary by fellow students and by the instructor at every stage of designing and writing the chapter or paper. This gives incentive and the opportunity to receive specific suggestions for enhancing the quality of the work as historical scholarship and for producing writing comprehensible to the educated reader, not only to the specialist.
- While undertaking their core writing projects, students will reflect on matters of historical scholarship that have been raised in recent years and that have expanded the horizon of historical analysis, interpretation and use of sources. Such matters will be engaged in the common readings discussed in seminar sessions in the initial weeks of the seminar. While each student's individual project has its own approach to conceptualization of topic and use of sources, this reflection on broader matters can direct attention to issues relevant in some way to each project and otherwise not readily apparent or previously considered. The seminar, in short, provides each student the occasion to articulate and identify explicitly what is implicit in the writing of the chapter or paper.

The primary focus of historical writing in the seminar is content– analysis, use of evidence, and so forth - rather than the craft of writing history, which is addressed in HIST 607: Writing History. The subject matter of each one's chapter or paper will be engaged in terms of the approach adopted by its author. Other seminar participants will do this as outsiders to be sure, but with an interest in the production of a quality product that reflects the author's priorities. Comments and suggestions on presentation will be welcome, but technique and writing skills – the stuff of the craft of writing – are not the focus.

Graduate students are welcome in the seminar regardless of the current stage of their research and writing on the thesis, dissertation, or MA paper. Expectations concerning the size and scope of the seminar project can be adjusted according to the state of prior work. As long as enough research has been done to write the equivalent of a chapter or paper that will be subsequently revised for inclusion in the thesis, dissertation, or MA paper, this is satisfactory for completing the writing project of the

course. Students should not plan, however, to use the seminar for undertaking a significant amount of new research.

Organization and Approach

In the first four weeks of the term, seminar sessions will be devoted to two themes (1) discussion of common readings on the nature and methodology of historical writing, (2) presentation and discussion of each participant's topic, source materials, and project design. The latter will be undertaken in weekly writing exercises that, in step-wise fashion, lead to the formulation of a plan for the chapter or paper. The exercises will be submitted in advance of each session to be read by other participants and to serve for discussion of each one's project. Beginning around the fifth week of the term, sessions will be devoted entirely to presentation and discussion of individual projects. Instead of "exercises," weekly assignments will execute stages leading to completion of the final product. These stages include a detailed outline of the chapter or paper, draft of introductory paragraphs, extracts or sample writing intended as part of the body of the work, and a substantial first draft of the chapter or paper. All participants will read each other's work ahead of the weekly session. Everyone's work will receive careful attention over the course of these sessions, on a rotating basis if necessary.

The themes of the common reading and discussion in the initial weeks of the course will be:

- **Historical topics:** what history, whose history, presence and absence in the choice and rendering of subject
- **Historical methodology:** the archives and similar sources
- **Historical interpretation:** evolution and revolution in interrogating history, especially with regard to cultural vs. social scientific approaches, class and gender

Core texts for the above are:

- Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*
- Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*
- Lynn Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History*

Please contact George Sheridan if you have any questions regarding the seminar, especially if you are considering whether this seminar will be useful to you at this stage in program.