

**History 399: The Historian's Craft**

T/Th 12:00–1:20, 375 McKenzie Hall

Professor: Brett Rushforth

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 2:00–4:30

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“History *can* be an art, it is *never* a science, it is *always* a craft, and to develop craft skills takes discipline, knowledge of the traditions and accomplishments and errors of the past, and above all motivation.”

~Bernard Bailyn, Professor of History, Harvard University, 1994

“By liberalizing the mind, by deepening the sympathies, by fortifying the will, history enables us to control, not society, but ourselves—a much more important thing; it prepares us to live more humanely in the present and to meet rather than to foretell the future.”

~Carl Becker, President, American Historical Association, 1915

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**INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES:**

This course provides an introduction to the historian's craft, exploring the diverse meanings and methods of modern historical interpretation. Its ultimate goal is to train students to become more effective consumers and producers of historical writing. As readers of history, students will learn to recognize authors' arguments, assess their use of evidence and reason, and place their work within its historiographical context. As writers of history, students will learn to identify important historical questions, locate and critically analyze primary source materials, and communicate original historical interpretations in clear prose.

The course will explore both the *why* and the *how* of historical interpretation. Students will examine the intellectual, ethical, political, and cultural considerations that influence how historians work, and they will conduct practical exercises to develop concrete skills. Daily engagement with primary sources will form the foundation of everything we do. Students are expected to learn:

- ✓ How historians debate the past and evaluate new research
- ✓ How to formulate historical questions and design research strategies
- ✓ How to find and interpret different kinds of primary sources, including texts, objects, maps, images, and oral histories
- ✓ How to write a better paper with a clear thesis and persuasive evidence
- ✓ How to properly cite primary and secondary sources
- ✓ How to utilize digital technologies while recognizing their limitations
- ✓ How to practice academic honesty and avoid plagiarism

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past*
- Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*.
- Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*.
- John Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction* (\*optional\*).
- All other readings will be available online or posted on Canvas.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING:

There are FIVE graded components to this class, listed below with the percentage of your final grade that each represents:

- 1) Blog Posts (5% each, 10% total): Two posts, due April 5 and May 24.
- 2) Short Analytical Essay (15%): One 4-5 page essay assessing historians' competing interpretations, due April 19.
- 3) Library, Database, and Source Assignments (10%): Includes out-of-class primary and secondary source exercises, due May 8; and research questions exercise, due May 10.
- 4) In-Class Work and Participation (25%): Includes all in-class exercises, discussions, peer evaluations, and presentations.
- 5) Research Paper (40%): 10-12 page analytical research paper, due June 14. The "Research Blueprint" will not be graded separately, but any student failing to submit a satisfactory blueprint by the May 10 deadline will be docked a full letter grade from their research paper grade. Full instructions on Canvas under "Research Paper Requirements and Guidelines."

A note on calculating grades: Grading in the humanities is, by its nature, a subjective process, but it may help to have a reminder of what each grade represents. To receive an A, you must do work that you and I agree is exceptionally insightful, thoughtful, original, and interesting. You must be able to say to yourself and to me that your work is truly superior. B work goes beyond what is merely required and demonstrates insight and critical thought, but lacks the depth and ingenuity that would warrant an A. Average work that meets all requirements, gets the "facts" right, but goes no further will receive a C. Substandard work will receive a D. Unacceptable or incomplete work will receive a failing grade.

POLICIES AND REMINDERS:

I have a zero tolerance policy for plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. Anyone presenting work as their own that was actually done by another, or for which they have received credit in another class, will fail this class and be reported to the university. Details on the university's Student Conduct Code can be found here:

<https://policies.uoregon.edu/vol-3-administration-student-affairs/ch-1-conduct/student-conduct-code>

Regarding cell phones and laptops: It is unacceptable to use a cell phone for any reason during class. If you have a laptop there will be times that I will ask you to use them **\*in group settings only\***: e.g., to practice database and other digital searches, to discuss digital humanities projects, or to evaluate primary or secondary sources. *Any use of technology that is not \*directly required\* by class activities will result in a full letter grade being deducted from your final grade.*

The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or [uoaec@uoregon.edu](mailto:uoaec@uoregon.edu).

The UO is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of prohibited discrimination and sexual harassment (sexual assault, domestic and dating violence, and gender or sex-based bullying and stalking). If you have experienced any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or harassment, know that help and support are available. UO has staff members trained to support survivors in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more.

Please be aware that all UO employees, other than designated confidential resources (see <https://safe.uoregon.edu/services>) are required to report credible evidence of prohibited discrimination, including sexual harassment and sexual violence. This means that if you tell me about a situation of sexual harassment or sexual violence that may have violated university policy or state or federal law, I have to share the information with my supervisor or the University's Title IX Coordinator or the Office of Affirmative Action.

If you wish to speak to someone confidentially, you can call 541-346-SAFE, UO's 24-hour hotline to be connected to a confidential counselor to discuss your options, as confidential counselors are not required reporters. You can also visit the SAFE website at <https://safe.uoregon.edu/services> for more information. Each resource is clearly labeled as either "required reporter," "confidential UO employee," or "off-campus," to allow you to select your desired level of confidentiality.

## READING AND ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

### WEEK 1: The Power of History

T (4/3): Introduction

Required Reading:

- Wislawa Szymborska, “No Title Required” (read in class)

Th (4/5): History and Power

Required Reading:

- Joyce Appleby, “The Power of History,” *American Historical Review* 103 (February 1998), 1-17. (Canvas)
- Lynn Hunt, “Introduction,” in *Writing History in the Global Era*, 1-11. (Canvas)
- Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “The Power of the Story,” in *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, 1-30.

**Assignment:** Blog Post

- Starting with the news stories below, and drawing on this week’s readings, write a 250-300 word blog post summarizing the dispute over \*one\* of the following: AP US history curriculum, Texas history textbooks, Confederate monuments.
- Post to Canvas \*before\* class starts.
- (You might need to read an additional short article or two on your chosen subject. Provide links or website addresses for any outside material you use. Don’t worry very much about citation style for this assignment, just be sure that someone reading the blog post could find the sources you cite.)
- Anya Kamenetz, “The New, New Framework for AP U.S. History,” NPR audio ([Link](#))
- “How Textbooks Can Teach Different Versions of History,” NPR audio ([Link](#))
- Eric Foner, “Confederate Statues and Our History,” *New York Times*, Aug. 20, 2017. ([Link](#))

### WEEK 2: Big Pictures, Little Stories

T (4/10): NO CLASS – READING DAY

Th (4/12): The Landscape of History

Required Reading:

- Gaddis, *The Landscape of History*, 1-151.

### WEEK 3: Historiography

T (4/17): Changing Times, Changing Interpretations

Required Reading:

- *OAH Magazine of History*, Special Issue: “History and Historians Since 1907,” pp. 3-38. (Canvas)

Th (4/19): How Historians Argue

Required Reading:

- Historical Controversies (Paired Articles on Canvas) – CHOOSE ONLY ONE OF THE PAIRS

**Assignment:** Analytical Essay

- In a formal essay of approximately 1,000 to 1,250 words, summarize the disagreement in your chosen pair of articles, focused on the competing claims

made by each author, as well as the evidence and logic they use to persuade readers. Include a discussion of which position you found most persuasive and why. You *must* cite all sources according to the Chicago Manual of Style. See Rampolla, *Pocket Guide*, Chapter 7, if you need further direction.

#### **WEEK 4: Formulating Research Questions – Inspiration from Primary Sources**

T (4/24): Example 1 – Lost Friends and Family Ads

Required Reading:

- Heather Andrea Williams, *Help Me Find My People: The African American Search for Family Lost in Slavery*, 1-17. (Canvas)
- Spend 10-15 minutes browsing the ads that inspired Williams’s study: Lost Friends Database – Advertisements from the *Southwestern Christian Advocate* ([Link](#)) We will delve more deeply into these sources in class.

Th (4/26): Example 2 – Inquisition Trial Records

Required Reading:

- Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, Introduction and pp. 1-58.

#### **WEEK 5: Formulating Research Questions – Inspiration from Secondary Sources**

T (5/1): Contextualizing Sources

Required Reading:

- Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, 59-121.
- Listen: “A Peasant vs. the Inquisition: Cheese, Worms, and the Birth of Microhistory” ([Link](#))

Th (5/3): Old Debates, New Questions

Required Reading: Read any **TWO** of the following **AND** listen to the Morgan podcast – we will discuss how each of these historians came to their central questions and what research they did to answer those questions

- Stephanie Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women & Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*, Introduction, 1-11. (Canvas)
- Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery*, Introduction, 1-11. (Canvas)
- Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*, Introduction, 1-8. (Canvas)
- Gunlög Fur, *A Nation of Women: Gender and Colonial Encounters among the Delaware Indians*, Preface and Introduction, vii-viii, 1-13. (Canvas)
- PODCAST: Jennifer Morgan, “How Historians Research,” Ben Franklin’s World ([Link](#))

#### **WEEK 6: Research Strategies**

T (5/8): Searching for Sources

Required Reading:

- Rampolla, *Pocket Guide*, Chapter 2, 5-21.

**Assignment:**

- Secondary Source Search: Databases and Library (instructions on Canvas)
- Primary Source Search: Databases and Library (instructions on Canvas)

Th (5/10): Evaluating Sources

Required Reading:

- Read the sources for your research questions assignment.

Assignment:

- Research Questions Due (must post on Canvas \*before class\* for discussion)

### **WEEK 7: Thesis vs. Topic**

T (5/15): What is a thesis statement, and what makes a good one?

Required Reading:

- Rampolla, “Writing a Research Paper,” in *Pocket Guide*, 39-52.
- Thesis Statements from Five Academic Articles, 15pp. (Canvas).

Th (5/17): Developing and Testing a Provisional Thesis

Assignment:

- Research Blueprint Due (must post on Canvas \*before class\* for discussion)

### **WEEK 8: Digital Technologies, Digital History**

T (5/22): Digital Sources

Required Reading:

- Douglas Seefeldt and William G. Thomas, “What Is Digital History?,” *Perspectives on History*, May 2009 ([Link](#))
- Caleb McDaniel, “Why I Study Digital History” ([Link](#))

Th (5/24): Digital Scholarship

Required Reading: ONE of the following

- Voyages: The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database ([Link](#))
- Musical Passage: A Voyage to 1688 Jamaica ([Link](#))
- Maps and the Beginnings of Colonial America ([Link](#))
- Freedom on the Move ([Link](#))
- Nineteenth Century American Whaling ([Link](#))
- Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America ([Link](#))

Assignment:

- Spend ONE hour reading and exploring one of the digital history projects listed above. \*You must spend exactly one hour—no more, no less—because part of your assessment will be to evaluate how much can be gleaned from the site in a limited amount of time.\* Write a 250-300 word informal blog post introducing the project to people who have never used it. It must a) briefly summarize the project, its objectives, and its intended audience; b) identify some of the interesting, surprising, or useful information you gleaned from your one-hour exploration of the site; and c) recommend (or not recommend) the site to those who you think could get the most from it.

### **WEEK 9: Academic Integrity**

T (5/29): Plagiarism and the Ethics of Citation

Required Reading:

- Mary Lynn Rampolla, “Plagiarism: What It Is and How to Avoid It,” in *Pocket Guide*, 70-76.

- Scott McLemee, “Amazing Disgrace,” *Inside Higher Education*, May 29, 2010 ([Link](#))
- American Historical Association, “Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct” ([Link](#))

Th(5/31): NO CLASS – RESEARCH/WRITING DAY

### **WEEK 10: Bringing It All Together**

T (6/5): Clear Writing and Clear Thinking

Required Reading:

- Donald Hall and Sven Birkerts, “Reading, and Reading Well,” from *Writing Well*, 25-46. (Canvas)

Th (6/7): Writing as Communication

Required Reading:

- Rampolla, “Following Conventions of Writing in History,” in *Pocket Guide*, 53-69.

Th (6/14): FINAL PAPER DUE

Assignment:

- Final Research Paper Due via Canvas upload on Thursday, June 14, by 11:59pm.