George Mason University
Department of History and Art History

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Spring 2023
W 7:20-10 p.m.
Research Hall 202

History 811: Doctoral Research Seminar

In HIST 811, you will produce a chapter-length essay based on original research in primary sources and situated in its appropriate historiographical context. Your final paper must be 25-35 pages (7,500-10,500) words in length, plus notes and bibliography, which must be formatted correctly in Chicago style. Your essay could be a dissertation chapter or a stand-alone article; either way, the goal is to help you envision your dissertation more clearly and develop the research and project management skills to be able to complete it.

Most of our shared readings and class discussions will therefore be about process and tools. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to producing historical scholarship, but exploring how-to questions systematically and learning about what has worked for others can be very helpful. We'll also use our time together to discuss publishing, the peer review process, and other professional development issues for advanced Ph.D. students.

Required book:
Zachary M. Schrag, *The Princeton Guide to Historical Research* (Princeton UP, 2021)

Recommended:
Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (9th ed.)

- Note that Mason Libraries provide access to *The Chicago Manual of Style Online* under Research Databases. We'll use the Notes and Bibliography (not Author-Date) format.

All other course materials mentioned in the schedule below are on Blackboard.

Schedule:
By Jan. 25 Consult with your dissertation advisor. Then write a one-paragraph description of the research project you plan to pursue in HIST 811, including a brief discussion of the primary sources you expect to use. **Submit this document to me by email attachment**, copying your advisor and asking them to email me to confirm their approval of your topic.

Jan. 25 How is History Produced?
Before class, read Sara Maza's "How is History Produced?" and listen to Episode 97 of the Ben Franklin's World podcast, which features Billy Smith discussing "How to Organize Your Research." In class (after introductions), we'll start by discussing how history is produced at the "meta" level Maza examines—something you've presumably been pondering, at least occasionally, since HIST 610. As you read, note (and bring to class) 1-2 of Maza's specific points, examples, articulations, etc. that strike you as especially valuable.

Once Maza's article has us revved up for the big race, we'll slam on the brakes and open the hood with Billy Smith. The first lesson of HIST 811 is that none of the scholarly innovations and impacts Maza describes can happen unless historians find ways to organize all the information they collect. From week one, I want you to choose your organizational methods and start maintaining a working bibliography, a version of which will first be due on Feb. 22.

Feb. 1 Asking Questions and Finding Sources to Answer Them

Before class, read Schrag, pp. 54-99. Also look at his Table of Contents for Part III of the book and give some thought to types of historical sources mentioned there that you might not have considered. Could any be relevant for your topic?

As you read pp. 54-99, review and annotate the one-paragraph description of your research project that you submitted before the start of the semester. Come to class prepared to discuss 1-2 specific changes—additions, subtractions, revisions—that Schrag's discussion made you want to make, if you were going to submit a new version. Some additional questions to consider are: Did any one of the half dozen dialectics Schrag describes seem especially apt for your topic? Why? Of all the angles and tips in the "Research Design" chapter, which one struck you as the most useful and why?

In the second half of class, we'll have a show-and-tell sources workshop in which each student presents a sample of what they found as they completed the Database Exercise.

Due: Database Exercise

Feb. 8 Historiography and the "So What?" Question

Find a historiographical essay related to your research topic. It must have been published within the past thirty years in either an academic journal or a volume of scholarly essays. The more recent it is, the better, but the depth and breadth and also the fit of the essay to your interests are important considerations. It may be necessary to think about your specific topic or question in broader terms to find a good fit. What is the larger field to which your research will contribute?

Based on your careful reading of this essay, what are the key questions and issues in the field and how have historians' interpretations of them changed over time? How might your project contribute to this scholarly conversation? As you think about these two questions, review Schrag, pp. 90-93. Can you explain your work's relationship to the historiography in terms of one of the "I am" statements he provides? If so, you can make that statement the thesis of your essay, although the bulk of the essay should focus on explaining the questions and issues in the field, not your possible contributions. Write an essay of 800-1000 words, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. Give it a descriptive title, number your pages, and include Chicago-style footnotes and a bibliography for the historiographical essay and any other sources you draw on.

Due: Essay of 800-1000 words

Feb. 15 Scaling Up: Project Management and Organization

Skim Schrag, pp. 225-275. We'll take some time at the start of class to revisit the how-to discussion we started on the very first night of class.

Our main topic for this evening, though, is "scaling up" in a different sense: bigger projects require not only more sources and organization of them, but also more points, more paragraphs, and therefore a more sophisticated structure than any paper you may have ever written. Reverse outlining is a helpful technique for seeing how scholarly works are put together.

Spoiler alert: Schrag provides a reverse outline of Christopher Wells's essay "The Road to the Model T" on pp. 306-07 of his book. To get the most out of the exercise, I'd like you reverse outline Wells's essay yourself first, labeling its key components (introduction, thesis, historiography, etc.) and identifying its main arguments. *Then* read Schrag, pp. 276-308. In class, we can compare your outlining efforts with Schrag's and discuss his "Organization" chapter.

Due: A copy of Wells's essay with your annotations

Feb. 22 Writing and Arguing

By this point in the semester, you should be starting to put a lot of words on the page. (I encourage you to review Schrag, pp. 273-75 on the "Working Draft"). Writing is a craft historians work at throughout their careers, and I hope to see substantial development of students' voices and styles as their 811 papers go through multiple drafts and peer review.

Nevertheless, the *sine qua non* of the scholarly write-up is to make sure you're answering the "So What?" question. Who cares if you've answered your research questions if it's not clear why those questions are even worth asking?

So, while I want you *writing*—doggedly, if not fast and furiously—from this point on, we're going to focus on *arguing* for this week's discussion. Read Gerald Graff and Cathy Beckenstein, "So What? Who Cares?" and "How Researchers Think about Their Aims" and come to class prepared to talk about how these two readings impacted your current thinking about how to answer the "So What?" and "Who Cares?" questions. Did any of the specific, fill-in-the-blank sentence formats suggested in these two readings seem especially helpful?

Due: A preliminary bibliography for your project, formatted correctly in Chicago style, with primary and secondary sources listed separately. (See Blackboard for models of how your bibliography should look on the page. We'll also take some time in class to preview the template you'll need to use for your dissertation).

March 1 No class meeting; required individual meetings by appointment

March 8 Getting Published

Read Schrag, 377-399 and watch the hour-long video (audio only is ok, too) at http://thesawh.org/getting-your-work-published/ (the password is Toolkit). This slow-paced but informative Zoom video from spring 2021 is part of the Mentoring Toolkit of the Southern Association for Women Historians; see http://thesawh.org/mentoring-toolkit/. FYI, the speakers, in order, are Denise Bates (Arizona State), Cathleene Helier (Colonial Williamsburg), Claire Lewis Evans (University of Alabama Press), Randall Hall (*Journal of Southern History*), and Bea Burton (freelance editor and indexer).

March 15 Spring Break

March 22 (Re)Articulating the Project and the Process

Due: Submit a revised and expanded description of your project that also discusses your process thus far. Explain how and why your topic and questions have evolved. Discuss the major primary sources you are using and where they are located. To what extent have you been able to access them? Where are you in the research process? What have you accomplished thus far and what else do you need to do before you can complete a full draft?

You should think of this assignment as an informal version of a prospectus or proposal, thus driving home the point that a "proposal," in the sense of a fellowship or grant narrative, is something you can only write well *after* you've already done a lot of work on a project. Your proposal should be 2-3 pages (600-900 words) in length, with an up-to-date version of your working bibliography attached. Be prepared to provide an informal, 5-minute oral summary of your proposal in class.

Due: Proposal of 600-900 words

March 29 Conventions of Peer Review

Read Welke, "The Art of Manuscript Reviewing" and the Referee Guidelines posted on Blackboard. In class, we'll discuss the peer review process, then practice it (along with the art of reading one's own work aloud) on each other's introductions.

Due: Submit online and bring a printed copy of a draft introduction of your essay that is at least three double-spaced pages (900 words) in length. Remember (and look back at Schrag, p. 306 to see) that the introduction generally includes a lede, research questions, and historiography as well as a thesis statement. It may also include historical background or other context and a discussion of the work's primary source base or theoretical framework. Make sure to cite sources in full Chicago-style footnotes, but no bibliography is required.

April 5 No class meeting; required individual meetings by appointment; bring your working outline for your essay in as concise a format as possible to aid our conversation

April 12 No class meeting

April 19 No class meeting; complete drafts with abstracts of 150 words or less, due by email attachment to me and your assigned peer review partner by 5 p.m.

April 26 Peer Review Workshop

Read your peer review partner's rough draft, providing editorial mark-up and comments in the margins as appropriate. Also prepare a written critique of 300-600 words, keeping in mind the conventions of scholarly peer review. Bring two hard copies of this critique to class, one for the author and one for me. Be ready to present a short (no more than 5 minutes) oral summary of your critique. Your oral presentation should make sure to summarize the paper's thesis, discuss its use of primary sources, highlight at least one strength, and offer constructive criticism of one aspect of the work that needs improvement.

In class, we'll take each person's work in turn. First, everyone will read the paper's abstract. Then the peer reviewer will give their oral critique. Then we'll open the floor to questions and discussion of each project.

Due: Peer review of 300-600 words (two hard copies) plus mark-up to author

May 3 The Dissertation and Beyond

Read Bell, "Beat the Clock!" and Gregory, "Managing the Terror." In addition to discussing the dissertation process, we can use this final class to explore any professional development issues you may be curious about.

Final papers are due by email attachment by 5 p.m. on Wednesday, May 10.

Class policies and grading:

Research paper (first and second versions)	70%
Participation in class and completion of other written work	30%

I will grade the research papers according to the following criteria:

- Clarity of the thesis and the author's case for its originality, significance, or contribution
- The degree to which the paper is situated appropriately in the existing scholarship
- Use of primary sources in support of the thesis
- Range and depth of the research, especially the research in primary sources
- Use of diverse sources and sophistication of historical analysis
- Attention to the "so what?" and "who cares?" questions about why the work matters in relation to larger political, social, or cultural issues
- Organization and logical flow of the written narrative
- Clarity and correctness of the written narrative

Failure to attend class regularly, be prepared for and participate in discussions, complete written work on time, and provide constructive support for classmates in the peer review process may result in a failing grade for the semester, even if a research paper is submitted.

Accommodations:
Students who require academic accommodations should contact me promptly and must make arrangements through the Office of Disability Services (ods.gmu.edu; 703-993-2474).

Academic Integrity:
I expect students in this course to live up to George Mason University's Honor Code, which states: "Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work." I will pursue any concerns about academic dishonesty and will report suspected students to the University's Honor Board for disciplinary action, including a failing grade in the course.

Other useful information:
Writing Center: https://writingcenter.gmu.edu/ or 703-993-1200
Counseling and Psychological Services: https://caps.gmu.edu/ or 703-993-2380
Last day to drop with 100% tuition refund: Monday, Feb. 6
Last day to drop with 50% tuition refund: Monday, Feb. 13