

## **HIST 499 004 Senior Research Seminar: Latin America & the United States**

West 1008  
M, 1:30-4:10  
Fall 2012

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Office hrs: W, 12:30-2:30  
and by appt.

### **Course Description:**

This seminar is the capstone course for history majors. The overall topic is Latin America's conflicted and fascinating relationship with the United States. Within that topic, students will devise their own research projects with my approval. Students may choose to explore some aspect of diplomatic or military history, or they may choose to focus on questions of cultural influence or perception. The causes of the U.S.-Mexican War and the influence of baseball in Cuba are equally acceptable topics. Once they have chosen a topic, students will familiarize themselves with the relevant scholarly literature, carry out extensive primary-source research, and produce a 20-30 page paper. Students will be expected to present their papers in class and to review the work of their peers.

### **Goals:**

1. To provide students the opportunity to practice history, rather than just study it.
2. To enable students to understand that historical research is the process of devising and supporting an argument about the past and situating that argument within an ongoing scholarly conversation; it is not simply an exercise in gathering information.
3. To give students the opportunity to demonstrate their mastery of the skills of research, analysis, and written communication.

### **Books Required for Purchase:**

Peter H. Smith, *Talons of the Eagle: Latin America, the United States, and the World*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (Oxford)

Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities: Santo Domingo and New York after 1950* (Princeton)

### **Two Important Hints for Picking a Good Topic:**

Success in this course depends heavily on your ability to select a good topic. Toward that end, here are two issues to keep in mind:

1. Specificity. Your topic should be as narrow as possible. (If someone has written an entire book on a subject, that subject is far too broad for a 25-page paper.) For instance, you cannot write a paper on the history of Latinos in Washington DC, but you could do one on Salvadoran activism in DC during the 1980s. You cannot write a paper about the Spanish-American War, but you could do one on depictions of the conflict in one or two African American newspapers. A narrow topic might seem

boring at first, but part of your challenge will be to contextualize your research question, so that you can demonstrate how it speaks to larger questions.

2. Primary Source Availability. It is absolutely essential that you produce an argument that you can support with evidence drawn from primary sources. As you consider possible topics, think about what types of sources they will require, where you might find those sources, and whether you will be able to read them. An ability to read Spanish or Portuguese is NOT required for this course, but if you do not have that ability, you need to think about topics that can be addressed with English-language primary sources. One way to generate a good topic is to work backwards: find a set of interesting primary sources and then consider what questions you might be able to answer with it.

**Requirements (for due dates, see class schedule below):**

1. Class Participation. You are expected to complete assigned reading before class and come prepared to discuss it. You are also expected to participate in our class discussions about research and writing methods.
2. Statement of Research Question. This is your first attempt to choose a topic. Your statement should be 1-2 pages long and must include the following:
  - a) at least one question you intend your research to answer
  - b) a statement of why this question is important
  - c) a brief description of the existing scholarship on the topic
  - d) a description of the primary sources you intend to use
3. Preliminary Bibliography. This is a list of the sources you intend to use for your paper. Your bibliography should contain two categories: secondary sources and primary sources. You must have at least 15 secondary sources, at least 8 of which are books and at least 10 of which were written in the last 20 years. Your primary source entries should indicate the kind of source (newspaper, memoir, government record, etc), the medium (microfilm, online database, published book, etc) and the location (Fenwick library, the National Archives, etc).
4. Research Log. You will be required to make a total of four weekly entries in an ongoing research log. These are to be submitted to me via email. They should be about one paragraph long and should describe your progress during the past week. What sources did you consult? How have you revised your research problem? What are your next steps?
5. First draft. You must turn in two hard copies of your first draft, one for me and one for your peer evaluator. Your first draft must include footnotes as well as a final bibliography that meets the criteria described above. The more complete and polished the draft, the better the feedback you can expect to receive. Note that students will be assigned arbitrarily to either Group A or Group B and that the due date for the first draft is different for the two groups.

6. Peer Evaluation. You will be assigned one classmate, whose first draft you will read and assess. Write a two-page written critique. Give one copy to me and one copy to the author. For class discussion, prepare a short summary (no more than five minutes) in which you summarize the thesis, discuss the paper's greatest strength; and point out its greatest weakness. You must suggest at least one concrete means of improving the essay. Focus on the argument and the use of evidence, not on writing style.
7. Final paper. A successful paper must be substantially revised after the first draft. You must turn in two hard copies of your paper as well as your first draft (with my comments on it).
8. Oral Presentation. Each student will make a 5-minute presentation of his or her principal argument and evidence. Be prepared to answer questions from the class.

For your bibliography, first draft, and final draft, be sure to use an appropriate citation form (Chicago or Turabian are best.) Be consistent.

All written assignments (2-7) must be turned in on time. Late papers will be penalized one half-grade per day.

Grades will be determined as follows:

|                                |     |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| Class Participation            | 10% |
| Statement of Research Question | 5%  |
| Annotated Bibliography         | 5%  |
| Research Log                   | 5%  |
| First draft                    | 10% |
| Peer Evaluation                | 10% |
| Final paper                    | 50% |
| Oral Presentation              | 5%  |

**Class Schedule:**

8/27 Introduction: How to Choose a Topic

[9/3 NO CLASS (Labor Day)]

9/10 Discussion: the U.S. and Latin America  
Due: Smith, all

9/17 Discussion: Transnational History  
Due: Hoffnung-Garskof, all

9/24 Research Methods: Finding and Analyzing Sources  
Due: Statement of Research Question

10/1 Writing Strategies: Supporting an Argument

Due: Research Log I (via email before class)

**10/9 [Tues]** Individual meetings to discuss progress and plan for completion  
Due: Annotated Bibliography; Research Log II (Bring both to meeting.)

10/15 –10/29 NO CLASS MEETINGS; independent research and writing  
Research Log III due on 10/15.  
Research Log IV due on 10/22.

**Group A first drafts due Thursday, Nov 1 at noon** (hard copy in my box; email to peer evaluator)

11/5 Discussion: Group A Papers (only group A must attend)  
Due: group A peer evaluations

**Group B first drafts due Thursday, Nov 8 at noon** (hard copy in my box; email to peer evaluator)

11/12 Discussion: Group B Papers (only group B must attend)  
Due: group B peer evaluations

11/19-11/26 NO CLASS MEETINGS; Revise your papers.

12/3 Oral Presentations. If more time is needed, we will finish the oral presentations during the scheduled final exam period: Mon, 12/17, 1:30-4:10

**Final Papers due in my mailbox by noon on Monday, 12/10.** You must turn in 2 hard copies of your paper plus your first draft with my comments on it.

**Criteria for Oral Presentations:**

- \*Demonstrates ability to present one's work in a clear and organized manner
- \*Completes the essential elements within the allotted time
- \*Engages and maintains the audience's attention
- \*Demonstrates ability to handle questions from the audience
- \*Demonstrates ability to synthesize elements from different discipline

**Criteria for Research Papers:**

- \*States an original thesis or historical interpretation
- \*Uses primary sources effectively
- \*Relates work to existing secondary literature in the field
- \*Synthesizes and analyzes diverse sources
- \*Links the subject to broader historical questions and historiography
- \*Integrates skills and knowledge acquired in other disciplinary contexts
- \*Writing is clear and grammatical; essay is well-organized and coherent

**Statement on Plagiarism:**

Plagiarism includes a wide spectrum of violations. Put most simply, it is appropriating another person's words or ideas as if they were your own. It includes, but is not limited to, the use of another person's words without attribution or proper citation; submission of work that is not one's own, whether the work is stolen, purchased, or used with the author's permission; the too-close paraphrasing of another person's words or ideas. If you don't know if something is plagiarism, ask. Violations are against the GMU Honor Code. Suspected violations will be turned over to the Honor Committee for resolution.

This class is designated as a **Research and Scholarship Intensive Course**, which means that students are given the opportunity to actively participate in the process of scholarship and will make a significant contribution to the creation of a disciplinary-appropriate product. In this RS course, students will:

- Create an original scholarly or creative project.
- Communicate knowledge from an original scholarly or creative project.

This class is also a **Writing Intensive Course** and a **Synthesis Course**.