

Senior Seminar in History (HIST 400.01)

Spring 2011, Truman State University
BH 163, MWF 4:30-5:20
Office: KB 225A

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Description

Senior Seminar is the capstone experience for all history majors at Truman State University. Combining and building on the knowledge in historiography and skills in research you have acquired so far, it culminates in a major, original research paper that is subject to rigorous academic standards. Passing the course proves that you have earned your degree in history. You are to demonstrate an awareness of the intricacies of being a historian and to apply that awareness in your research paper.

Course structure

The course has two parts. First, we examine the debate among historians about the character of historical inquiry. What is at stake here is the very possibility of telling the truth about the past. This part culminates in a review essay. In the remaining months, we consider and engage the research project. Historical practice occurs within several sets of communities, only the smallest one being this class. We work collectively and in increments, following each step in the writing process together, from deciding on a topic, choosing sources and developing a bibliography to writing drafts and revising. We meet frequently to give progress reports and to give and receive feedback.

Readings

Following are the required books for this class. I expect that you already own a recent edition of Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers* and know how to use it.

The Apprentice Historian: A Collection of Student Essays Compiled by Phi Alpha Theta–Nu Chi. Carr, Edward Hallett. *What is History?* New York: Knopf, 1961. [ISBN: 039470391X]
Elton, G. R. *Return to Essentials: Some Reflections on the Present State of Historical Study.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002. [ISBN: 0521524377]
Jenkins, Keith. *Re-thinking History.* London, New York: Routledge, 2003. [ISBN: 0415304431]

Course policies

You will both give and receive input and criticism on your work from me, your peers in a smaller group, and from the members of the seminar as a whole. Because you are a member of an interpretive community where your contribution adds to and detracts from other members' ability to benefit from it, it is essential that you turn in all work on time. I will not read, listen to, evaluate, or give feedback on anything that is not delivered at the scheduled time, and I will not expect you and your peers to do so either.

Participation is an important part in the seminar and is a significant part in my evaluation of your performance. Participation means contributing to the learning of other students (and hence your own) by engaging them and the matter at hand seriously, rigorously, and critically.

A research paper is one that advances a persuasive and clear argument. An argument is an original and interesting claim that is at once truthful and falsifiable. This means that the argument needs to be your argument. Though it may build on a topic that you have begun to explore in another class, the paper must be a new project, not a recycled one. Plagiarism (whose definition includes recycled papers) means an automatic F in the course and is grounds for expulsion from the university. More importantly, it is part of your job as a historian to demonstrate that your work is original. This is why you always see a real historian contrast his or her work to what has previously been written on the subject.

The completion of a portfolio is a graduation requirement. (Even if you are not graduating, you turn in your portfolio in conjunction with the capstone course.) See <http://assessment.truman.edu/components/portfolio/>. In addition, consider presenting your paper at the Student Research Conference which will take place Tuesday, April 12 (see <http://src.truman.edu/>). The deadline for submissions is Friday, February 11. Finally, we will publish the papers from this class as a print-on-demand book with lulu.com.

Assignments and grades

Course grades will be based on the following assignments. You can check your grade progress in Blackboard (there is a total of 1000 possible points in the class). All work must be typed and turned in on time. Failure to do so will result in no credit for the class.

| <u>Assignment</u> | <u>Points</u> |
|-------------------|---------------|
| Participation | 100 |
| Review essay | 100 |
| Final paper | 800 |

Class Schedule (specific dates TBD)

Course Introduction

Read: Cohn, Bernard S. "An Anthropologist Among the Historians: A Field Study." In *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays*, ed. Bernard S. Cohn, 1-17. Delhi, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003 (on blackboard webpage).

Assignment: Write and turn in a one-page writer profile of yourself. What are your main strengths and weaknesses as a writer? Be prepared to share and discuss your profile and those of others.

Historians

Read: Carr, *What is History?*; Jenkins, *Re-thinking History*; Elton, *Return to Essentials*

Assignment: Write a ca. 5-page review essay that (1) summarizes and interprets the texts by Carr, Jenkins, and Elton; and (2) advances a theoretical position of your own vis-à-vis those texts. (You might agree with one or more of the texts, or parts of them, or develop an independent theoretical standpoint.) Be prepared to share, discuss, and defend your position in class.

The Apprentice Historian

Read: the papers in *The Apprentice Historian* critically and think about what their strengths and weaknesses are. Grade and rank them and be prepared to state the topic, problem, and argument of each paper.

Research paper proposal: Draft a research paper proposal, including a paragraph describing your project, the research questions you seek to address with the project, a hypothesis of what you expect to find.

Bibliography: Prepare and turn in a working bibliography to your paper. A working bibliography is like a reading list: primary and secondary sources (listed separately) that you will read as you develop your topic and argument; sources with which you think you will be working in the paper. Your paper needs also to have a working title.

Outline: Write a first introduction and an outline to your paper. In the tentative introduction, state the paper's topic, the problem that it addresses, its relation to existing work, and its argument. Outline in a manner you find efficient. Prepare a brief presentation about the progress of your research to the class.

Peer Review: Finish and turn in a **final draft** of your paper along with one for each of two peers. This full draft should, with the exception of an occasional flaw in structure and slip in formulation, read and look like a finished paper. Peer review two papers (one for content and the other for grammar).

Final paper