

**Honors in History**  
HIST691H, Fall 2009  
Mondays 2-4:50 p.m., Hamilton 523

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What is to be done?

Welcome to History 691, the first semester of the history honors thesis seminar. Your honors thesis will be one of the most demanding experiences of your college education and, I hope, one of the most rewarding. You will employ all the skills of a professional historian: original research, creative thinking, complex analysis, and intensive writing and rewriting. By the end you will have produced an impressive work of historical scholarship.

The honors thesis is a polished work of research and argument, usually 50 to 75 pages long. It will include three chapters flanked by an introduction, conclusion, and bibliography. I recommend looking at your predecessors' accomplishments in the department's collection of honors theses in Hamilton 565. (On the left-hand side of the room—most of the room is filled with dissertations.)

Over the summer you should have begun your secondary and primary research, as you outlined in your summer plan. Now that you know something about your topic and what previous historians have written about it, in the next few weeks you need to focus your topic and begin to construct the arguments you intend to make about it. A good start is crucial to the rest of the process.

Of course, your research will continue as you begin your analysis. The majority of the sources should be available nearby. There are some limited funds for traveling to distant archives.

How will you do it?

Responsibility for structuring and developing your project rests primarily in your hands, but you will be doing this work in collaboration with others. Our seminar will be both a research seminar and a writing workshop. I will guide you during your weekly seminars, confer with you outside of class, and evaluate your writing. Your classmates will provide critical advice and support (intellectual as well as personal).

Your adviser will provide expertise on your particular topic as well as assist in your process of analysis and writing. I urge you to establish a good working relationship with your adviser as soon as possible. Draw up a mutually satisfactory schedule for meeting, and keep your adviser informed of the semester's timetable. Don't be shy about asking for guidance and advice. Your adviser wants to help you.

It is easy to get sidetracked during the long and difficult process of writing an honors thesis. I have therefore scheduled deadlines to keep you progressing through the stages of your project. You should have completed one chapter before the end of October and another by early December.

## How will you be evaluated?

I will evaluate your participation in seminar and the writing that you do this semester. At the end of the semester, I will consult with your adviser to determine a final grade. Students who complete the first semester of the program but do not continue in the spring will receive course credit for History 691.

## Reading

Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008) (available at the bookstore and on reserve)  
The Class Schedule (later in this syllabus) lists reading assignments from *Craft of Research* and from other sources that are available online.

## Class Schedule

### August 31—The Big Picture

#### Required Reading:

Booth et al., *Craft of Research*, chs. 2-3

### September 7—No Class—Labor Day

#### Assignment:

*By noon on Wednesday, September 9*, email your adviser and me a one- to two-page (double-spaced) sketch of your first chapter (or, if that doesn't suit you, of your entire thesis). Imagine it as a proposal to a book publisher or a PBS documentary producer.

1. Give the title plus the cast of characters
2. What is the problem, dilemma, or question(s) that launches the story?
3. What will be one or two moments of tension, conflict, or turning points?

(I know that this seems too early in the process, but it is a good time to think grandly, unburdened by knowing too much.)

### September 14—Finding Evidence

For the first hour of class, we will meet with UNC Research Librarian Robert Dalton. Please meet in Davis Library room 246 *promptly* at 2.

Required Reading: Booth et al., *Craft of Research*, ch. 5

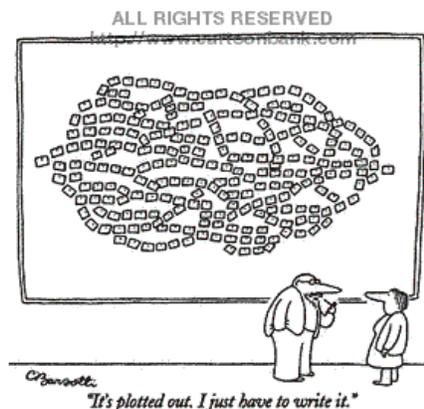
Optional Reading: Booth et al., *Craft of Research*, ch. 6

#### Assignment:

Select three sources that seem useful to your first chapter: a secondary book, an article, and a primary source (published or unpublished). Write down three pieces of evidence, one from each source: a quotation, a fact, an interpretation. Cite the sources.

September 21—Starting to Write

Required Reading: Booth et al., *Craft of Research*, ch. 12 and pp. 187-196 of ch. 13



Assignments:

1. Write two pages (not the first pages) with footnotes.
2. Compile an annotated bibliography that includes 10-15 sources you have turned up on your topic. For at least 5 of these, tell me how you found the source. At the bottom of the bibliography, write 1-3 sentences explaining how what you want to do will fit into the historiography. In other words, are you looking at new sources, asking new questions of them, arguing with previous historians' interpretations?

For both of these assignments, bring copies for your partner and me and give copies to your adviser.

September 28—Writing with Feeling and Voice

The class will meet in small groups at different times during the class period.

Required Reading:

Margaret Atwood, "In Search of Alias Grace: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction," *American Historical Review* 103 (December 1998), 1503-1516 (on JSTOR)

Assignments:

1. *By 5 p.m. on Friday, September 25*, email your partner and me two paragraphs of feedback on the two pages due last week. In the first paragraph, describe what you find the most interesting or effective. Be specific. (Don't just say "this is interesting" but instead "what I find interesting is the sharp distinction you made between the Garvey movement and the black press" or "I like how vividly you described King's ambivalence.") In the second paragraph, describe one way you think the pages can be improved. Be specific and constructive. Keep in mind what the author is trying to accomplish and try to help her or him get there.
2. (*to bring to class*) Historians have their feet in two quite different fields: the social sciences and the humanities. The best historical scholarship combines rigor of analysis with a smooth and compelling narrative. This assignment will help you work on narrative, which serves to help recreate a sense of the past for the reader. In no more than 2 pages, write a scene or episode from your topic. You have many options: an action-packed incident, a description of a place, a conversation between two people, or someone's memory of the past. Whatever you choose, it should arouse readers' imaginations. Let them see, hear, smell, taste, and/or feel what happened. Show rather than tell. Cite your sources.

## October 5—Getting Stuck, Getting Unstuck

### Required Reading:

Kathleen DuVal, "Indian Inter-marriage and Métissage in Colonial Louisiana," *William and Mary Quarterly* 65 (April 2008), 267-304 (on History Cooperative)

Lisa A. Lindsay, "Domesticity and Difference: Male Breadwinners, Working Women, and Colonial Citizenship in the 1945 Nigerian General Strike," *American Historical Review* 104 (June 1999), 783-812 (on JSTOR)

### Assignments:

1. Bring in a problem that you have run into: a gap in the evidence, an inconsistency between secondary and primary sources, trouble keeping on track, or something you just can't figure out.
2. Based on your experiences as a writer, what advice would you offer your classmates? Which tricks make writing easier for you? What pitfall should we avoid?
3. Bring in a page that you have written.

## October 12—Four Pages in Search of an Argument

The class will meet in small groups at different times during the class period.

### Optional Reading:

Booth et al., *Craft of Research*, ch. 7

### Assignments:

*By 3:30 p.m. on Saturday, October 10*, email your chapter's tentative argument, an outline of the chapter, and the chapter's first four pages to your group, your adviser, and me.

*By class time*, print out and read your group's pages and come ready to discuss them.

## October 19—Individual Conferences (Hamilton 466)

## October 26—No Class

### Assignments:

Draft of first chapter due to your partner, your adviser, and me

Group 1 by 10 a.m., Monday, Oct. 26

Group 2 by 10 a.m., Tuesday, Oct. 27

Group 3 by 10 a.m., Wednesday, Oct. 28

When you exchange drafts with your partner, arrange a time and place to meet during our regular class time next week (Nov. 2).

## November 2—Partner Meetings

### Assignments:

*By 9 a.m. on Monday, November 2*, email a three-paragraph response to your partner's chapter to your partner and me. First, report what you understand to be your partner's overall argument in this chapter and how the chapter seeks to prove that argument. Second, indicate what you find especially effective or interesting. Be as specific as you can. Third, describe the ways in which you think your partner could improve this chapter. How persuasive do you find the argument? Does the narrative move steadily forward or does it go off track? Are there gaps that your partner needs to fill? Are there things you don't understand?

Read your partner's comments before your partner meeting in the afternoon of Nov. 2.

I will be available in my office Nov. 2 from 2 until 4:30.

## November 9—Where Do We Go From Here?

The class will meet in small groups at different times during the class period.

### Assignment:

Bring to class three paragraphs, answering the following three questions:

1. What is the overall argument of my thesis?
2. What does my first chapter accomplish?
3. What will my second chapter accomplish?

(Hint: answers #2 and #3 should have something to do with #1.)

## November 16—The First Four Pages

The class will meet in small groups at different times during the class period.

### Preparatory Assignment (not to turn in):

Before you begin writing the pages to turn in, write one or two sentences in response to each of the following questions:

1. Who is in your mind as your audience when you write? Is s/he supportive or inhibiting?
2. Are you tempted to surround your ideas with qualifications and repetitions?
3. How would you describe your authorial voice?
4. What did you learn about writing while drafting chapter 1?

### Assignments:

*By 3:30 p.m. on Saturday, November 14*, email the first four pages of your chapter to your partner, your adviser, and me. (If you don't want to write the chapter's introduction yet, begin with one or two sentences explaining this chapter's argument, then write the first four pages of the chapter's body.)

Read your partner's pages and come prepared to discuss them.

November 23—No Class—Keep Writing

I will be available in my office during the class period.

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*"I wrote another five hundred words.  
Can I have another cookie?"*

November 30—No Class

Assignment:

Draft of second chapter due to your partner, your adviser, and me

Group 2 by 10 a.m., Monday, Nov. 30

Group 3 by 10 a.m., Tuesday, Dec. 1

Group 1 by 10 a.m., Wednesday, Dec. 2

December 7—Discussion of Drafts

Assignment:

Write a three-paragraph response to your partner's chapter. First, report what you understand to be your partner's overall argument in this chapter and how the chapter seeks to prove that argument. Second, indicate what you find especially effective or interesting. Be as specific as you can. Third, describe the ways in which you think your partner could improve this chapter. How persuasive do you find the argument? Does the narrative move steadily forward or does it go off track? Are there gaps that your partner needs to fill? Are there things you don't understand? Bring copies for me and your partner.

(cartoon credits: Charles Barsotti, *New Yorker*, June 24, 1996; Mick Stevens, *New Yorker*, Dec. 24, 2001)