

Senior Thesis Colloquium

History 680/690 – Department of History, UW-Madison

Goals

This course is designed to *enhance and support* your senior thesis work in two ways. First, it offers a forum in which you and your fellow thesis writers can address questions common to all fields of historical research: What does it mean to "do history"? How does one define a workable research topic? How does one decide what kinds of sources to use? How does the choice of sources shape one's approach to a topic—perhaps even alter the topic itself? In other words, we will address the generic dimensions of writing a senior thesis—those common to historical research, regardless of topic, time period, or geographic locale. All the while, you will also consult closely with your thesis advisor about issues specific to your particular topic.

Together, we will also function as your research-and-writing support group. At each step in the process of research and writing—from your initial formulations of your research “problem” to the first pages of your draft—you will share your work with your colleagues in seminar. Sometimes you will have particular issues to bring before the colloquium for our collective advice; at other times, you may have valuable suggestions or insights to offer others.

Rhythm of the semester

During the first couple of weeks, we will do some reading in common, but you will devote the bulk of your time this semester to reading and research on your own project. If the demands of this colloquium should ever hinder your progress on your thesis, please let me know immediately.

During the first half of the semester, the colloquium will also offer guidance in the techniques of research and writing upon which all historians rely. As you begin to develop your topic and explore possible sources, we'll tour campus libraries and learn how to acquire information electronically.

Midway through the semester, as you dig into your research and as your project takes on concrete shape, the seminar will shift fully into workshop mode. As you (plural) take your own projects through the successive stages of the process of historical research—prospectus and bibliography, detailed outline, first pages of draft—you will present your work to the colloquium, draw on your colleagues for advice and insights, and give like in return.

Throughout the semester, of course, you should also consult closely and regularly with your thesis advisor.

Reading

You will do a tremendous amount of reading this semester, but most of it will be directly relevant to your own project. The only common, required readings for this colloquium are the following, both available at University Bookstore or online:

- Arnold, John H. *History: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 7th ed. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007. – be sure to use this edition!

As time permits or need requires, you will find additional guidance in the following books. The libraries has multiple copies of each:

- Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (New York: Vintage Books, 1953) or later edition. – still one of the most inspiring books available.
- Strunk, William, Jr., and E. G. White. *The Elements of Style*. 4th ed. New York: Longman, 2000. (The original edition is also available [online](#).)
- Browne, M. Neil, and Stuart M. Keeley. *Asking the Right Questions: A Guide to Critical Thinking*. Any recent edition. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 200x.
- Fischer, David Hackett. *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought*. New York: Harper & Row, 1970.
- Williams, Raymond. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Rev. ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Semester schedule

Note that the details below are incomplete or may change, as the need arises—though always with advance notice.

- September 4 Introductions, preliminary thoughts about your projects
- September 11 No regular colloquium meeting; instead, we will meet on **Friday, 4:00-6:00 p.m.**, for a social gathering with the other thesis colloquium. Location: Prof. Chamberlain's home, 614 West Doty, #107. To quote from Prof. Chamberlain's syllabus: "Please do not drink any alcoholic beverages if you are under 21. And don't miss it: by the time you have deposited the final draft you will have lost all your so-called friends from your first years here and only fellow thesis writers will understand you. So get to know them."
- September 18 Discussion of *History: A Very Short Introduction* and of chapters 1-4 and 14 of Turabian's *Manual for Writers*. Question: what do historians do, how do they do it, and why?
- September 25 Brief individual presentations of your project and your current thinking about it. Read Turabian, 13.1-13.2 as you prepare for this.
- October 2 Status of projects; tour of card catalogs and Cutter stacks at Memorial library

- October 9 Prospectus-writing workshop (read Turabian, chapter 5); finding sources.
- October 16 Prospectus is due – no colloquium; Prof. D. will have walk-in office hours instead.
- October 23 Read each other's prospectuses (on our Learn@UW website) for collective discussion.
- October 30 If you are at a stage where it makes sense to produce a detailed bibliography, please bring it to colloquium; otherwise, plan to turn it in by mid-November at the latest.
- To this colloquium, please bring your best primary source (a few copies, if that's feasible). We will also discuss the last few prospectuses.
- November 6 No colloquium – push ahead with your research; I'll have extra office hours on Tuesday, Nov. 4.
- November 13 Workshop
- November 20 Optimally, a detailed outline will be due now (otherwise, within two weeks). Begin drafting a portion of your thesis, if you haven't already.
- In this colloquium we will discuss the drafting process as well as preparations for your presentation at our joint meetings after the holiday.
- November 27 – no meeting (Thanksgiving)
- Week of December 4 (date/time TBA) – Joint conference with Prof. Chamberlain's colloquium – student presentations
- Week of December 11 (date/time TBA) – Joint conference with Prof. Chamberlain's colloquium – student presentations

Contact Info and Office Hours

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