

## **History 680/690 | Thesis Colloquium**

**2 credits**

### **INSTRUCTOR DETAILS**

Dr. Mou Banerjee(she/hers)

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Office Hours: Wednesdays, 11am-12:30pm, and only by prior email appointment. Office Hours will generally be held in-person. If in extraordinary circumstances Office Hours are held on zoom, students can arrange to meet Dr. Banerjee in her [virtual zoom room](#).

### **COURSE DETAILS**

Semester: Spring 2024

Course Designations and Attributes: Colloquium for Thesis Writers. Students enrolled in History 680 take the class as an Honors class.

Requisites: Declared in Honors program (for History 680).

How credit hours are met: This 2-credit course has 2 hours of group meetings per week (each seminar counts as two hours according to UW-Madison's credit hour policy). The course also carries the expectation that students will spend an average of at least 2 hours outside of class for every hour in the classroom. In other words, in addition to class time, plan to allot an average of at least 4 hours per week for reading, writing, and preparing for discussions.

Meeting Time and Place: Mondays, 8:50AM - 10:45AM, VILAS 4008

Instructional Modality: This is an in-person class.

Canvas Course URL: <https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/440981/>

Course Description: Writing an undergraduate thesis is going to be a challenging process, though it will also bring you joy and satisfaction. It will require you to learn how to craft a research question, analyze secondary literature, work in the archives to find primary sources, and finally find a research thesis that answers the bedrock question of historiography - "So What?" - why your research matters, what your thesis will be adding to an ongoing historiographical question. This colloquium is designed to help guide you as you research, plan, and write your senior thesis.

The colloquium is designed to help you with the process rather than the content of your thesis. You will each already be working with a faculty advisor, and our class will supplement this work.

Syllabus: The current version has been developed and modified over the last several years by faculty of the UW-Madison History Department, including Cindy Cheng, Pernille Ipsen, Colleen Dunlavy, Louise Young, Brett Sheehan, Michael Chamberlain, Sarah Thal, Liz Hennessey, Daniel Williford, Kathryn Ciancia, Daniel Ussishkin, Judd Kinzley and Mou Banerjee.

You should note that the syllabus or the schedule is not set in stone and may change slightly as we work through the semester.

### **Course Learning Outcomes:**

By the end of the class, everyone should have improved the following skills:

- Refining your research question and developing a thesis (central argument) that can be supported with evidence.
  - Identifying, summarizing, and situating your argument within a historiographical or broader scholarly field.
  - Identifying and analyzing primary sources that help you to build your argument.
  - Becoming a more original and creative thinker and writer.
  - Communicating your work in an accessible way that conforms to professional standards in the field of history, through both writing and oral presentations.
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- Constructively providing feedback for your peers, as well as receiving and implementing feedback from your advisor, Dr. Banerjee, and your peers.
  - Reflecting on your own learning and self-consciously tracking which skills you are working on at any one time.

### **Understand How the Class is Organized**

The Arc of the class:

Each week, we will take a component part of the research and writing process and try to figure it out together (of course, everything is connected, but we need to break it down to keep things manageable). Class sessions will follow a familiar pattern:

1. Check-in: This is your opportunity to set the agenda for the first part of discussion. Come prepared to ask questions and to share both challenges and tips that you have found helpful. This part of class might also involve some journaling or free writing so please have a pen and paper at

the ready.

2. Main discussion: The main part of discussion will focus on the topic of the day and the work that you have prepared for class. It may also involve breakout groups, peer review sessions, brainstorming on the blackboard, and other types of interaction.

3. Preparing for the next week: We'll end each session by setting up what is coming next week. This might involve talking about an upcoming reading or assignment.

4. Please review the syllabus carefully to see what you need to submit on Canvas and/or bring to class.

5. Any assignments that are due on Canvas must be submitted by no later than 11 AM the previous Friday so that I have time to read them.

6. If you turn in an assignment late without asking for an extension, it will be graded down by 2 percentage points for every 24 hours after the submission deadline (see grading scale above).

7. Assignments must be submitted as Word documents, rather than pdfs. All assignments should have at least 1-inch side margins, use 12-pt. font (Times New Roman).

8. **It is your responsibility to meet with your faculty advisor regularly.**

We all face pressures, academic and non-academic. Please be kind to yourself and to one another. Let me know if you are struggling and need extra time or help. Attendance at all meetings is mandatory unless there is a valid reason for an absence, such as illness or an emergency. Unaccounted absences will severely impact your final grade, so please let me know via email if you can't make a class. Come to the office hours and email me to make an appointment. If you would like to meet and are unable to attend my regular office hours, please let me know and we can figure out an alternative time. Your health and happiness are of paramount importance and I am here to help you in any way I can.

## **Grades:**

The overall grade will be broken down in the following ways:

**40%:** Satisfactory and on-time completion of all written assignments.

**40%:** Active participation and attendance, including group activities and peer feedback.

**20%:** Final oral presentation

## **Grading Scale:**

A = 92.5-100  
AB = 87.5-92.4  
B = 82.5-87.4  
BC = 77.5-82.4  
C = 70-77.4  
D = 60-69.9  
F = below 60

**Technology:** You will need to bring your laptops to class for peer review. However, at other times laptops should be closed and your phones put away and set to “do not disturb” during class time. We will begin class on time, so please make sure that you arrive a few minutes early. Persistent tardiness will lead to a significantly lower participation grade. If you need accommodations, please be in touch with the McBurney Center and please inform me as soon as possible.

**Required books:** There are no required books for this class. All readings will be placed on Canvas, with students being able to gain access one week in advance of the relevant class session.

## Schedule

### January 27: Course introductions

Assignments: None

Class plan: We will talk about the class and course expectations. We will also introduce ourselves and our work.

### February 3: Research Questions

Readings: Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (University of Chicago Press, 2007) 5-22.

Assignment: Prepare a five-minute presentation of your work. In it you should lay out your topic, your research question, why this question is important, and your plan for answering this question.

Class plan: We will start by talking about research questions. Then we will spend the rest of the time having everyone present and receiving suggestions from your peers about how to tighten your questions.

## **February 10: Thinking About Writing**

Assignment: Be prepared to discuss this week's readings

Readings:

1. Lynn Hunt, "The Art of History: How Writing Leads to Thinking," *Perspectives on History*, Feb 1, 2010;
2. Liena Vayzman, "Issues in Graduate Education: Practical Advice for Writing Your Dissertation, Book, or Article," *Perspectives on History*, Dec 1, 2006.

### **3. Sample Senior Thesis**

Class plan: Using the readings as a jump off point, we will talk about the writing process (including the challenges!). We will finish by discussing our responses to the sample thesis.

## **February 17: Historiography**

Assignment: Write two paragraphs based on the **They Say, I Say text** (below). The first will sum up the argument of a book in your field. The second will bring in your own work, as you draw a contrast between the argument made in the first paragraph and the argument you are thinking about in your thesis.

Readings:

Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, *They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*, 19-29, 55-77.

Class Plan: We will discuss how to use secondary sources and to engage with the scholarship in your field. You will also reflect on the process of writing up your paragraphs for class.

## **February 24: Primary Sources**

Assignment: Post to canvas and also bring to class one of your more interesting and challenging primary sources. Write up a paragraph on the source, where you summarize the source, analyze it, and discuss how you will deploy it in your thesis. Be prepared to present this source in class.

Readings: Briefly take a look at your classmate's sources on Canvas.

Class Plan: Everyone will present their primary source and their analysis of it in class. After each presentation we will discuss it as a group.

## **March 3: No meeting. Students work on their own research and writing, and upload on Canvas a 300-word reflection of their progress so far.**

Readings: For inspiration and comfort: Anne Lamott, "Shitty First Drafts," *Language Awareness: Readings for College Writers*, edited by Paul Eschholz, Alfred Rosa, and Virginia Clark (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2005), 93-96

## **March 10: Writing Day 1**

Assignment: Upload and bring to class a 1-2 page or so piece of writing that is connected to your thesis. This may or may not make it into the final draft, but it is an opportunity to begin writing (and thinking). Also prepare a one paragraph statement explaining what this writing is and how it is connected to the thesis. Take a brief look at your classmate's work.

First semester writers: your piece of writing will consist of a 1-2 page statement of the historical context for your thesis. This should include all of the relevant context that you need to explain to a reader for them to understand your contribution. Prepare one paragraph, explaining how this context connects to your own work.

Class plan: The class will be divided into groups of two and the groups will read and offer a brief critique of one another's work. Then we will reconvene as a group to exchange ideas and offer feedback.

## **March 17: Outlines**

Assignment: Write an outline/plan for your thesis and post it to Canvas. Also include a one paragraph statement of the challenges you are facing in terms of thinking about structure. Feel free to draw on the Turabian reading for this week for examples of an outline. Take a look at your classmate's outlines before class. Be prepared to present your outline and offer suggestions for your classmates.

First semester writers: You should also write an outline, though it will certainly be less detailed than those of the second semester writers. In addition, start putting together an annotated bibliography. This bibliography should include a list of your primary and secondary sources and a brief (one paragraph or so) description of how each source fits within your project.

Readings: Turabian, *A Manual for Writers*, 62-70

Class Plan: Everyone will present their outline in small groups and then we will reconvene to receive feedback from the class.

## **March 22 - March 30 Spring Break -- No class**

## **March 31: Writing II: The Introduction**

Assignment: Post and bring in the first stab at your introduction. This draft should be five pages maximum. Also bring in one paragraph discussing your writing process and challenges that you faced in writing. Make sure you also read your classmates' submissions.

First semester writers: Post and bring to class your annotated bibliography. In addition, post a one paragraph statement of the argument of your thesis as it currently stands.

Class Plan: Everyone will present their outlines in small groups and reconvene to receive feedback from the class.

## **April 7: Writing III: The Full Draft**

Assignment: Post and bring to a class a full rough draft of your thesis. Also include a paragraph discussing challenges, advice you need on the draft, and specifics places that you would like feedback on. Skim the drafts of your classmates.

First semester writers: Post and bring to class a rough draft of your prospectus (5-7 pages). Include one paragraph explaining the challenges that you have faced in writing this and feedback that you need to improve it.

Class Plan: We will spend the first part of class doing peer review. The second will focus on discussing the process of drafts and thinking about revisions.

#### **April 14: Writing IV: Final-ish Drafts**

Assignment: Post and bring to class a full and final-ish draft that incorporates the feedback and suggestions from the class. Include one paragraph pointing to problems you are facing and issues you would like your classmates to focus on.

First semester writers: post and bring to class a final-ish draft of your prospectus.

Class Plan: We will peer review work for the first part of class. Then we will talk about next steps for writing and revision

#### **April 21: Rehearsal for Final Presentation**

Assignments: students should be prepared to present a 10-minute version of their honor's thesis in preparation for the Final Presentation event the next week. Make sure to have completed your powerpoint slides.

Class Plan: Everyone will rehearse their presentation and receive feedback from their classmates.

## **April 25 and April 28th: Final Presentation Events**

Class plan: The presentations will be held at the Pyle Center (location and timings TBA). Refreshments for presenters and audience members will be provided. You are warmly encouraged to invite your parents/family/loved ones/friends.

**\*\*Your complete prospectus or thesis must be uploaded into the correct folder on Canvas by no later than 11am on Wednesday, May 2, 2025\*\***

## **APPENDIX A: Participation Grading Scale**

A: You participate enthusiastically and regularly in classroom discussions and small group-work, including peer review. You listen to your peers and articulate your own ideas as clearly as possible. You do not appear distracted but are instead fully engaged in the discussion. Your comments are thoughtful and demonstrate that you have prepared carefully.

B: Your contributions show that you have done some preparation but, in general, you are less well prepared than a student with an “A” grade. You participate in classroom discussions and small group-work, listening to your peers and articulating your own ideas, although not with the regularity or depth of a student achieving an “A.”

C: Your comments in class do not show that you have done sufficient preparation and/or are poorly or vaguely articulated. You provide some feedback for your peers but do not fully engage with their work (and are more likely to say that it is “fine”). You contribute only rarely to class discussions and/or make comments that do not demonstrate that you have prepared for discussion.

D: Your comments are very irregular, and you show no evidence that you have prepared for class.

F: You do not attend class regularly.

## **APPENDIX B: An Inclusive Classroom**

One of my priorities as an educator is to help create an inclusive classroom in which all can thrive and in which everyone's wellbeing is supported and fostered. As a class community, we should work together in order to create a supportive space for everyone. I also ask that we all commit to listening to feedback and to reflecting on our own attitudes and actions. Please read the following information on how we can work together to ensure that everyone is welcome and that you know the resources that can help you gain help outside of our classroom setting.

## **Students with Disabilities**

The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform faculty of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. I will work either directly with the you or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA. (See: McBurney Disability Resource Center).

## **Mental Health and Wellbeing**

Students often experience stressors that can impact both their academic experience and personal well-being. These may include mental health concerns, substance misuse, sexual or relationship violence, family circumstances, campus climate, financial matters, among others. Students are encouraged to learn about and utilize UW-Madison's mental health services and/or other resources as needed. Visit [uhs.wisc.edu](https://uhs.wisc.edu) or call University Health Services at (608) 265-5600 to learn more.

## **APPENDIX C: Further Resources and Policies**

### **Writing Resources and Guidelines**

The University's Writing Center is a wonderful resource that allows you to work with a consultant to improve your written work. Take a look at their [website here](#) for more information.

The [History Lab](#) is a resource where expert PhD students work with you and your history/history of science projects 1-on-1. No matter your stage in the writing process—choosing a topic, conducting research, composing a thesis, outlining your argument, or revising your drafts—the History Lab staff will help you sharpen your skills and become a more successful writer. Visit the website here early and often to schedule an appointment with a Lab TA or to find writing tips, guides, and resources.

## **The Use of Artificial Intelligence**

Some people find that AI chatbots, such as ChatGPT, can be a useful tool in thinking through a question, generating ideas, planning an essay, and even writing. However, there is much that is lost when we rely on AI in these ways—and we need to be aware of the loss, as well as the presumed benefits. Not only is AI prone to “hallucinations” (i.e., the fabrication of information) and liable to reproduce larger societal biases, but it also deprives us of engaging in some of the creative processes that allow us to think for ourselves—not least the process of thinking that is deeply entwined with the process of writing (and not simply editing the writing that a chatbot has created).

While I deem it acceptable to bounce ideas off the chatbot or even use it to think about possible structures for your thesis, if you find this process generative in some way, using a chatbot to produce text for you, even as a first draft, will not allow you to achieve the goals for this class, which include becoming an original writer and thinker. I personally consider using AI grounds for failing this course. You should all talk individually with your thesis advisor as soon as possible to determine their policy on AI. You should adhere to your advisor’s policy (remember that they are the ones who are ultimately grading your thesis; I am running a seminar to guide you through the process as a group).

## **Academic Integrity Statement:**

By virtue of enrollment, each student agrees to uphold the high academic standards of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Academic misconduct is behavior that negatively impacts the integrity of the institution. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these previously listed acts are examples of misconduct which may result in disciplinary action. Examples of disciplinary action include, but are not limited to, failure on the assignment/course, written reprimand, disciplinary probation, suspension, or expulsion.

## **Privacy of Student Information & Digital Tools**

The privacy and security of faculty, staff and students' personal information is a top priority for UW-Madison. The university carefully reviews and vets all campus-supported digital tools used to support teaching and learning, to help support success through learning analytics, and to enable proctoring capabilities. UW-Madison takes necessary steps to ensure that the providers of such tools prioritize proper handling of sensitive data in alignment with FERPA, industry standards and best practices. Under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA which protects the privacy of student education records), student consent is not required for the university to share with school officials those student education records necessary for carrying out those university functions in which they have legitimate educational interest. 34 CFR 99.31(a)(1)(i)(B). FERPA specifically allows universities to designate vendors such as digital tool providers as school officials, and accordingly to share with them personally identifiable information from student education records if they perform appropriate services for the university and are subject to all applicable requirements governing the use, disclosure, and protection of student data.

### **Academic Calendar: Religious Observances and Election Day Observances**

Students must notify me within the first two weeks of class of the specific days or dates on which they request relief, either for a religious observance or because of their commitment to work as an election official. I will also provide flexibility to students reporting they may be tardy or absent on the day of an election due to waiting to vote at the polls.

### **Course Evaluations**

You will be provided with an opportunity to evaluate this course and your learning experience. I really value your feedback—it helps me reflect on what is working and what might need to change. As such, it also benefits future groups of students. Note that UW-Madison now uses an online course evaluation survey tool, [HelioCampus](#). In most instances, you will receive an official email two weeks prior to the end of the semester when your course evaluation is available. You will receive a link to log into the course evaluation with your NetID where you can complete the evaluation and submit it, anonymously.