

**History 680/690: Honors Thesis Colloquium**  
**(2 credits)**



Image Credit: *Clio, Muse of History*, Charles Meynier (French, 1768–1832), The Cleveland Museum of Art

This syllabus is subject to revision. The current version has been developed and modified over the last several years by faculty of the UW-Madison History Department, including Kathryn Cancia and Daniel Williford.

**Instructor: Dr. Mou Banerjee**

**Email:** [mbanerjee4@wisc.edu](mailto:mbanerjee4@wisc.edu)

**Office hours:** Mosse Humanities Building, Room 5103: Wednesdays, 11.00 am-1.00 pm, 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](#). (Passcode: 839733)

**Teaching Assistant: Abigail Towl Corcoran ([atcorcoran@wisc.edu](mailto:atcorcoran@wisc.edu))**

**Course Description:** Authoring 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 already be working with a faculty advisor, and our class will supplement this work.

We have both FSW (first semester writers) and SSW (second semester writers) in this class. SSW will work more closely with our TA, Abby Towl Corcoran, on certain weeks, while I will work with the FSW during those times.

**Semester:** Fall 2025

**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, HUMANITIES 2653

**Instructional Modality:** This is an in-person class. **Attendance at seminars and participation is mandatory.** You must have a valid excuse for missing a meeting. Please remember that I teach a class on the process of writing an undergraduate thesis, which is separate from your supervision by your faculty advisor, and both are equally important to the production of your undergraduate thesis.

**Learning Outcomes:**

This course is designed to enhance and support your senior thesis work in three ways.

**First**, it offers a forum in which you and your fellow thesis writers can address collectively the challenges common to writing and research in every historical field:

- a. Finding a good research question.
- b. Finding the right sources.
- c. Using and analyzing sources.
- d. Organizing the thesis.
- e. Finding a balance between evidence and analysis.

In other words, we will address the generic dimensions of writing a thesis. Throughout the semester, you must also consult closely with your thesis advisor about issues specific to your particular topic and about your schedule for finalizing the thesis.

**Second**, the goal is professionalization. The colloquium will enhance your skills at:

1. Presenting your own work in a professional manner
2. Critiquing others' work constructively
3. Receiving critical feedback in a professional manner
4. Listening to oral presentations and responding to them intelligently quickly.

These are skills that will stand you in good stead.

**Third**, the colloquium also has a social dimension that will enhance your thesis: we will function as your support group. At each step in the process of writing a senior thesis – from your initial attempts to put thoughts on paper through final revisions of the thesis – you will share your work with your peers in brain-storming sessions. At times you may have specific issues to bring to the colloquium; at other times, you may have valuable suggestions or insights to offer others.

It is my job as your instructor to keep you on track so that you are well positioned to begin drafting your thesis by the end of the semester.

### **Maintain Contact with your Advisor:**

It is crucial that you remain in regular contact with your thesis advisor throughout the semester. Set up regular appointment times with your advisor as well as a timeline for completion of your senior thesis. Please respect foremost the deadlines that your thesis advisor and you have come up with for drafts, draft revisions, and for the final write-up. You are more than welcome to share with your advisor the timeframe established in this course.

### **Support Outside of Class Meetings:**

If at any point and for whatever reason you feel like you need more guidance and one-on-one time, please do come see me during office hours or e-mail me for an appointment. SSW can also go to our TA for consultation on their work.

### **How to Succeed in this Class:**

- a. Keep up with weekly assignments.
- b. Find a way to organize your sources and your notes and actually use them.

- c. Communicate with me and with your peers when you run into challenges.
- d. Know that research is an iterative process and progress is rarely ever made in straight lines.
- e. When stuck, talk out your ideas with friends, family, classmates, anyone who will listen, even record yourself talking to your phone – it is often the best way to get clarity on what you are trying to say, and figure out how to say it so it makes sense to others

### **Plagiarism and Generative AI:**

The easiest way to avoid plagiarism is to only present work written by you as your own. The use of generative AI will significantly impact your learning in the class and will prevent you from developing as an original thinker and writer, and it is therefore not allowed. 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).

Plagiarism, which includes any undisclosed use of generative AI to complete course assignments, may result in a failure to pass the class. If you think you have a good reason to incorporate generative AI in your work as a meaningful learning experience, please discuss this with your faculty advisor 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).

Please read an important MIT study on how using AI impacts our brains (negatively):  
<https://time.com/7295195/ai-chatgpt-google-learning-school/>

### **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 next week: We will 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 11.00 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 every 24 hours after the submission deadline (see grading scale).**

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 cannot make a class. Come to 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 with regards to using technology for notetaking or any other academic purpose, 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, in the "Readings" Folder.

**Scholarship and Presentation Opportunities:** The best way to find out about scholarships and fellowships in any department at UW – not just History – is to go to the Wisconsin Scholarship Hub, aka WiSH: <https://wisc.academicworks.com>

You can then search for “History” or whatever other topic you want to find awards for which you are eligible.

The History Department's own scholarship/fellowship competition for fall 2025 should be opening soon; students can go to the History website, then to the undergrad program page, and there will be links there with descriptions of some of the awards:

<https://history.wisc.edu/undergraduate-program/academic-opportunities-student-life/scholarships-awards-and-prizes/>

But you have to apply through WiSH anyway so you might as well start there.

As a History major, you should also read the emails our undergraduate advisor Christina Matta ([christina.matta@wisc.edu](mailto:christina.matta@wisc.edu)) sends every week (or so). She lists every conference/presentation opportunity that shows up. She includes everything at least two weeks in a row – sometimes more than that if it is a big opportunity.

**Repository of History undergraduate these:**  
<https://minds.wisconsin.edu/handle/1793/21274>

## Weekly Schedule

## **Week 1 (September 8):**

### **Introductions:**

Please come prepared to introduce yourself, and please watch the video “Senior Thesis Q&As”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bfjV488pWwg>

### **Preparation (FSW and SSW):**

1. Watch: The Senior thesis advice from a group of students from last year here. Reflect and be prepared to discuss the following question: What kinds of patterns do you see in the comments/advice?

2. Read this syllabus and come with any questions, expectations, and anticipated challenges for the semester. You may also want to familiarize yourself with the History Department’s webpage on writing a senior thesis. (If you would rather share concerns with me, but not the whole class, please send me an email and we can chat during office hours).

3. Be ready to discuss:

Very initial ideas for your thesis (FSW) or details of your thesis-in-progress (SSW):

- Why have you decided to write a senior thesis?
- What do you plan to write about? If you have several options to choose between, that is fine, too!
- How did you come up with your idea?
- What makes you particularly excited about this idea and what challenges do you anticipate?
- Any way that I and Abby might be able to help you do better in this process.

## **Week 2 (September 15):**

### **Writing and Planning a Research Proposal**

#### **Preparation (FSW):**

1. Read: Barbara Young Welke, “The Art of Manuscript Reviewing: Learning from the Example of Peggy Pascoe,” Perspectives on History, September 1, 2011 ([Online](#)).

### **Preparation (SSW):**

1. Read: Barbara Young Welke, "The Art of Manuscript Reviewing: Learning from the Example of Peggy Pascoe," Perspectives on History, September 1, 2011 ([Online](#)).
2. Write and submit: A one-page update on what you did over the summer and a plan for the rest of the semester with dates (indicate meetings with advisor, any additional research trips, deadlines with advisor, etc.).

### **Week 3 (September 22):**

#### **Creating a (Very Preliminary) Research Question Preparation**

##### **Preparation (FSW only):**

1. Read: "Learning to Do Historical Research: A Primer How to Frame a Researchable Question" on Prof. William Cronon's [website](#).
2. Write and submit: A one-paragraph description of what your project is about. This should include your preliminary research question and an explanation of why you find that research question important and worthwhile and/or what your inspiration was to explore the question.

The paragraph should also include a justification as to how your research question is "doable" and preliminary details of the secondary and primary sources that you have found and/or are interested in looking for.

3. Write and submit: A question that you would like to be sent to the librarians ahead of our visit next week. This will help guide the librarians on the relevant material to present and come prepared to answer.

##### **Preparation (SSW):**

- Write and Submit: Submit a part of your thesis (two pages maximum) that you are currently writing, with a one-paragraph explanation of how it fits into your thesis and what you would like feedback on.

### **Week 4 (September 29):**

#### **Trip to Memorial Library**

##### **Preparation (FSW only):**

- No preparation necessary. Do not go to our regular classroom. You will meet at Memorial Library with me to talk about finding primary and secondary sources with a librarian and archivist.

### **Preparation (SSW only):**

- Regular class meeting with Abby (our TA).
- Write and Submit: Submit a revised version of your assignment from last week. You should also include a one-paragraph explanation of how you have implemented the feedback that you gained last week.

## **Week 5 (October 6):**

### **Primary Sources**

#### **Preparation (FSW and SSW):**

1. Read: Shawna Kim Lowey-Ball, "History by Text and Thing," Perspectives on History, February 26, 2020 ([Online](#)).

2. Write and submit:

a) A copy of one of your most interesting and/or challenging primary sources. Please choose the source or sources that you find to be richest - i.e., a source whose meaning is not obvious on the surface and that requires you to use your highest-order skills as a historian. Think broadly and outside of your comfort zone, if you can! The source does not have to be textual; it could be a photograph, a physical object, or a map.

b) A separate paragraph (one that is not intended for inclusion in the thesis) in which you briefly summarize the source, state how it relates to your provisional research question (which you should restate) and reflect honestly on potential problems with using it. What are its limitations? Are you able to acknowledge and/or offset any potential criticism in your paper?

## **Week 6 (October 13):**

### **Creating a Bibliography/Organizing Your Sources**

#### **Preparation (FSW and SSW):**

- Read: The handout on Bibliographical references from the Chicago Manual of Style (on Canvas).
- Write and submit: A bibliography of sources that relate in numerous ways to your provisional research question. You should include: your current research question; a properly formatted list (according to the Chicago Manual of Style bibliography), separated into primary and secondary sources (there are no restrictions here, but FSW might want to think of around 4 secondary sources and 2 primary sources at this stage—it'll be more for SSW). If you already have a lot of primary sources, you may also find it useful to break the sources into subgroups of different genres (for instance, memoirs, government documents, photographs, etc.)
- Set up meeting: If you have not been meeting regularly already, make an appointment with your thesis advisor for this week.
- Be ready to: Discuss how you organize your sources. If you would like to find out more about Zotero and other citation management systems, you can consult with an expert at one of the libraries. See here for more details.

## **Week 7 (October 20):**

### **Rethinking your Research Question**

#### **Preparation (FSW):**

1. Write and submit: A new draft of your research question and a one-paragraph reflection on what has changed and why since you originally articulated your research question in Week 3. Some areas of the changes might include: the precise subject, periodization, geographical focus, and approach. Some of the reasons might be related to what you are beginning to see in your primary sources and a better sense of the field that you are learning from the secondary sources.

#### **Preparation (SSW):**

1. Read: The “outline examples” handout on Canvas.
2. Write and submit: A detailed plan of your paper, as well as a short reflection about one dilemma you have in terms of outlining.

## **Week 8 (October 27):**

### **Inserting Yourself into a Historiographical Conversation**

### **Preparation (FSW):**

1. Read: The excerpts from Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, *They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*, 19-29, 55-77. (Uploaded to Files section on Canvas)
2. Write and submit: A brief (around one-page) analysis of how your provisional research question fits within the secondary literature that you identified on your bibliography last week. Have other scholars answered this question? If so, how have they answered it? If not, what questions have they prioritized (and why is this)? What have they overlooked (and why)?

### **Preparation (SSW):**

1. Reread: The excerpts from Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, *They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*, 19-29, 55-77.
2. Write and submit: A draft introduction (5 pages maximum) and a short reflective piece in which you discuss how you tried to ensure that the introduction meets the criteria of a successful introduction.

## **Week 9 (November 3):**

### **Methodologies**

#### **Preparation (FSW and SSW):**

1. Bring to class: A book/article whose methodology you find inspiring and relevant to your project. It does not have to be a work of history and it may not be directly related to your subject. Pick out 1-2 pages in which the author applies the methodology that you find compelling.
2. Write and submit: A brief (around one-page) explanation of how the author is using his or her sources. What does it allow the author to reveal? You should also discuss briefly how you feel you might apply a similar methodology to your own sources. How will this approach help you to make your argument? What are potential problems with this approach?

## **Week 10 (November 10):**

### **Distancing Yourself from your Sources**

#### **Preparation (FSW and SSW):**

1. Write and submit: A brief (around one-page) explanation of some problematic terms from your sources that you do not want to reproduce in your analysis and some suggestions of some strategies that you might use to distance yourself from sources.

### **Week 11 (November 17):**

#### **Free Week (AKA: Tackle what you hate)**

##### **Preparation (FSW):**

1. Write and submit: A brief (around one-page) draft of one part of the prospectus that you are struggling most with. In a separate paragraph, explain what you are finding the hardest part to write and discuss why that might be. Be as specific as possible, as you try and identify the problem. Be ready to discuss this in class.

##### **Preparation (SSW):**

1. Write and submit: A five-page draft of one part of your paper that you are struggling most with. In a separate paragraph, explain what you are finding the hardest part to write and discuss why that might be. Be as specific as possible, as you try and identify the problem. Be ready to discuss this in class.

### **Week 12 (November 24):**

#### **Individual Check-Ins (FSW – Dr. Banerjee/ SSW – Abby)**

Draft Prospectuses/Paper Due today

##### **Preparation (FSW):**

1. Write and submit: A full draft of your prospectus. 2. Set up meeting: If you have not already done so, you should meet with your advisor this week to discuss your prospectus.

##### **Preparation (SSW):**

1. Write and submit: A full draft of your thesis.

2. Set up meeting: If you have not already done so, you should meet with your advisor this week to discuss your draft thesis.

## **Week 13 (December 1):**

### **Practicing for Presenting your Research Orally**

#### **Preparation (FSW and SSW):**

1. Be ready to: Give a draft presentation of your research. This should be as polished as possible so that you can rehearse in front of your classmates. Have your Power Point presentation (if you are using one) ready to go. Note that there is no need to upload anything on Canvas this week.

## **Week 14 (December 8):**

### **Final Presentations**

#### **Preparation (FSW and SSW):**

Be ready to: give a final presentation. The presentations will be at the Pyle Center (Room and Time TBD). Lunch for presenters and audience will be provided. Your complete prospectus (FSW) or thesis (SSW), along with a paragraph on what you have changed from the draft based on my feedback, must be uploaded into the correct folder on Canvas by no later than Friday, December 12, at noon.

## **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.

### **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.