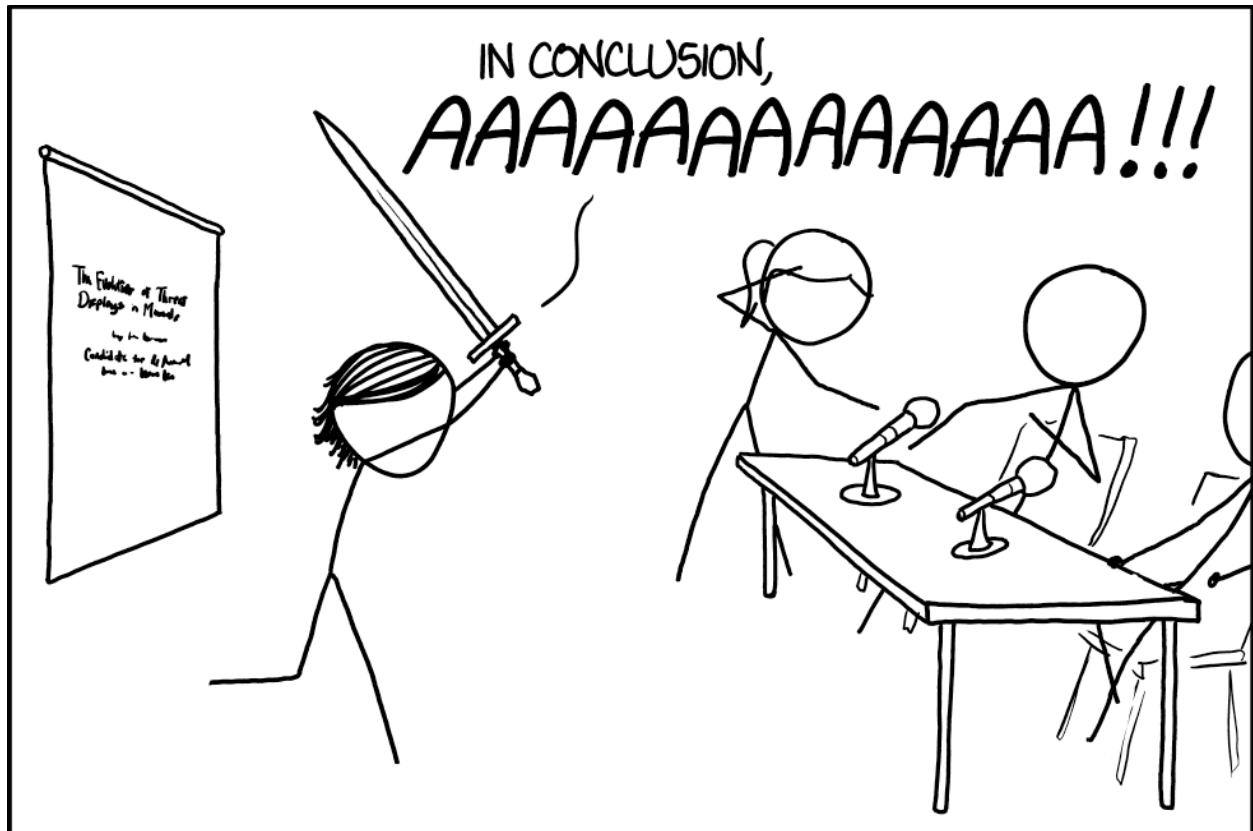


History 680/690: Senior Thesis Colloquium

Spring 2026

M 8:50-10:45AM

Grainger 2165



THE BEST THESIS DEFENSE IS A GOOD THESIS OFFENSE.

Cartoon source: *xkcd*

Professor: Patrick Iber (he/him) **Email:** piber@wisc.edu

Student Hours: M 1:30-3:30PM in Mosse 5123 or on zoom by appointment

COURSE DETAILS

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. The goal is for you to use the time to work on your thesis, and I have tried to minimize other burdens on your time.

Instructional Modality: This is an in-person class.

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 Hennesey, Daniel Williford, Kathryn Cancia, Daniel Ussishkin, Judd Kinzley and Mou Banerjee.

The syllabus and the schedule are not set in stone and may change slightly as we work through the semester, in response to your needs.

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.
- Constructively providing feedback for your peers, as well as receiving and implementing feedback from your advisor, your instructor, and your peers.
- Reflecting on your own learning and self-consciously tracking which skills you are working on at any one time.

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 have a completed prospectus or thesis at the end of the semester.

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.

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.

Class Organization

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. Please have a writing utensil on hand, as I may want you to put some of your ideas to paper.
2. Main discussion and workshop: The main part of discussion will focus on the topic of the day. We will work through a core set of problems related to the day's reading and/or activities. We may work in breakout groups, peer review sessions, brainstorming, or other types of interaction.
3. If time permits, we will try to have a *pomodoro* (25-minute bloc) of work time in class, with WiFi turned off. You'll want to have your laptops available.
4. We'll end each session by setting up what is coming next week. This might involve talking about an upcoming reading or assignment.

5. Please review the syllabus carefully to see what you need to do each week, and what you might need to bring to class. Occasionally, you may need to bring printed copies of your work so that others can give you feedback!

6. Large assignments must be submitted to canvas as Word documents so that I can leave comments on them. All assignments should use standard margins and fonts.

7. Again, 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. The thesis is a big task and it can feel overwhelming. I'm here to support your success.

Grades:

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

10%: In each week indicated, you should submit a **time journal**. This is very simple: all you need to do is keep track of the hours you spend working on your thesis and what you did during them. You can write "Tuesday, 2-4pm, reading Eric Foner's *The Second Reconstruction*; Wednesday 1-3pm, meeting with advisor." Etc. That's it! If you submit the journal, you will receive full credit – even if you submit "I did not work on my thesis this week." The purpose of this activity is for you to be honest with yourself. The best way to get a big task done is to do a little bit at a time.

20%: Written assignments. With the exception of paper drafts, written assignments will be completed in class and by hand. You will generally not need to bring written work to class, other than pieces of the thesis. However, you do need to complete any course readings before class. I reserve the right to ask about details in the readings that would not appear in an AI summary of the work.

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

30%: 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

The grade for this class is different than the grade that your thesis advisor will give you for your thesis. In theory, a student could do a great thesis and a poor job in this class, and the grades would diverge. The opposite could also happen, but if you do a good job in this class your chances of doing a great thesis should go up substantially!

Technology: You may need to bring your laptops to class for certain activities. However, we are going to use paper and pencil as much as possible. When not needed, laptops should be closed and your phones put away. 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.

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) 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 theses: <https://minds.wisconsin.edu/handle/1793/21274>

AI policy: In week two, we are going to work out a class contract for LLM use. *But under no circumstances should you submit written words produced by an LLM as your own.* An LLM cannot do original primary source research the way that you can. Plagiarism means passing off work which is not your own as your own. That includes any undisclosed use of generative AI to complete course assignments, and may result in a failure to pass the class.

We have both FSW (first semester writers) and SSW (second semester writers) in this class. The weekly assignments differ somewhat for the two groups, although sometimes they will converge.

Schedule

Week 1, January 26: Introductions & Time management

All class participants should be ready to discuss the following reading: Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird*, “Short Assignments.”

FSWs, watch this 10-minute video of advice given by students who have completed their thesis, communicating what they wished they had known
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bfjV488pWwg>

Week 2, February 2: What about LLMs? Can they help me do research?

On canvas, submit your time journal.

All class participants should be ready to discuss these following articles:

<https://www.technologyreview.com/2023/04/11/1071104/ai-helping-historians-analyze-past/>

<https://www.indexoncensorship.org/2025/11/history-is-being-written-by-the-ai-victors/>

Be prepared to participate in a conversation that will establish a class contract for LLM use.

Week 3, February 9: Formulating Historical Questions

On canvas, submit your time journal.

FSWs: Read: “Learning to Do Historical Research: A Primer How to Frame a Researchable Question” on Prof. William Cronon’s website.
<https://www.williamcronon.net/researching/questions.htm>

In class, be prepared to write 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.

SSWs should be ready to discuss the following reading: David Hackett Fischer – *Historians’ Fallacies*, chapter 1.

In class, be prepared to write a one-paragraph description of the question that your thesis seeks to answer. Be ready to talk about the ways that that has evolved over time.

Week 4, February 16: Building Your Archive with Primary Sources

On canvas, submit your time journal.

Today in class, we will experiment with the free software called Tropy, so bring your laptop and be prepared to install it.

FSWs: read Shawnakim Lowey-Ball, “History by Text and Thing,”

<https://www.historians.org/perspectives-article/history-by-text-and-thing-march-2020/>

FSWs and SSWs: Bring to class one of your most interesting and/or challenging primary sources. Please choose a source that you find to be rich—i.e., a source whose full meaning is not obvious on the surface and that requires you to use your highest-order skills as a historian. The source does not have to be text; it could be a photograph, a physical object, a map, a short video clip, etc. Bring it to class with you and be prepared to discuss it with others.

Week 5, February 23: Organizing your Sources

On canvas, submit your time journal.

Today in class, we will experiment with the free software called Zotero, so bring your laptop and be prepared to install it.

In class, come with a list of secondary sources related to your topic. (It doesn't need to be printed, just be ready with the sources.) If you are a FSW, you should have at least four sources. If you are a SSW, you may have many more. By the end of class, you will have Zotero output a correctly-formatted bibliography of these sources.

If you have not been meeting with your thesis advisor yet, make an appointment to meet your thesis advisor this week.

Week 6, March 2: Historiography

On canvas, submit your time journal.

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

FSWs: be prepared to write about the ways that your 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 do think this is so)? What might they have overlooked? Why do the primary sources that you have chosen give you an opportunity to look at a known phenomenon in a fresh way?

SSW: **Bring three printouts of a draft of your introduction.** An introduction should describe the question that your paper is trying to answer, answer the “so what?” question—why does this matter??—and describe the approach you are going to take in answering your question. The best introductions hook the reader in with something compelling and give an answer to your key question. If you’re not quite there yet on that very last step, don’t panic! We’re all here to help.

Week 7, March 9: Methodology

On canvas, submit your time journal.

Bring to class: A physical book/article whose methodology you find inspiring and relevant to your project. It may not be directly related to your subject. Pick out 1-2 pages in which the author applies the method that you find compelling. Be prepared to write about how the author is using their sources. What does their technique allow them to reveal? Be ready to discuss these questions.

Week 8, March 16: Branching and Pruning to get to the End

On canvas, submit your time journal.

If you haven't read this piece in a previous semester, do so now: Barbara Young Welke, "The Art of Manuscript Reviewing: Learning from the Example of Peggy Pascoe," *Perspectives of History*, September 1, 2011: <https://www.historians.org/perspectives-article/the-art-of-manuscript-reviewing-learning-from-the-example-of-peggy-pascoe-september-2011/>

In class, be prepared to write up a task list of the things that you think you want to do before your prospectus or thesis is ready.

FSWs: bring **three printed copies** of one part of the prospectus that you are struggling most with. Be ready to share and discuss this in class.

SSWs: bring **three printed copies** of a 3-5 page section of the **body** of your paper that you are struggling most with. Be ready to share and discuss them in class.

Week 9, March 23: Individual meetings

On canvas, submit your time journal.

Individual check-ins will be scheduled with all students.

March 30: SPRING BREAK

Week 10, April 6: Almost there

On canvas, submit your time journal.

Class time will be devoted to working together to finish your project.

Week 11, April 13: You did it

No need to submit a time journal this week.

FSWs, submit a full draft of your prospectus in *Word* format on canvas.

Set up meeting: If you have not done so for a second time, you should meet with your advisor this week to discuss your prospectus.

SSWs, submit a full draft of your thesis in *Word* format on canvas.

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

Week 12, April 20: Practicing Presentations

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 ready to go. Note that there is no need to upload anything on Canvas this week.

Week 13, April 27: Final presentations

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), should be uploaded onto canvas.

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 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](#) 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. 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.