HISTORY 601: Seminar in Historical Methods
Fall Semester, 2012
Tuesday, 4-6:40pm, AL #524

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Goals of the Course:
This course is fundamental to your formation as a historian in that it provides the basis for
developing both the practical and theoretical tools that you will need in the semesters and years to
come. This course has four main goals:

1. To teach you the “history of history,” or of modern historical writing. This is what
   historiography essentially is, and thus this goal addresses the course’s content. The content
   is organized in a roughly chronological order beginning with the formation of the modern
   western historical profession in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and continuing
   through the various trends and philosophical debates that have transformed the profession
   and its methods over the course of the twentieth century. Specifically we will read, or read
   about, the works of Marx, Ranke and Burkhardt that provided a “positive” (though much
   contested), modernist basis for the historical profession in the west. We will then spend a
   few weeks examining the applications and permutations of this basis in the works of social
   historians and historians of science in the early- to mid-twentieth century. The 1960s in
   particular experienced a “democratization” of the historical profession which contributed to
   a growing critique of the modernist narrative evident in the development of cultural history,
   postmodernism, and “externalist” perspectives in the history of science. We will conclude
   with what may be the next major step in the development of historical methodology: the
   interdisciplinary, inclusive methods of “big history.”

2. To teach you the historian’s craft and allow you to begin to define your own
   methodology. Knowing the basic historiography outlined above is crucial to your
   development as a historian. In order to be taken seriously in the profession, you need to be
   well-versed in the major debates that have allowed historical writing to evolve over the last
   three centuries. An even more important reason for learning historiography, however, is
   that in doing so, you are learning about the different methods that historians have used to
   write history – what types of historical questions, sources and evidence they consider
   important, and which theories (or lack of them) they use to form their arguments. Those
   different methods have everything to do with a historians’ perspective – based on the
   historical context in which he or she lived, and on his or her own values and philosophy.
   Much of the debate about history and historical methodology, as you will see, revolves
   around the issue of “truth” and if historians can ultimately uncover the truth about the past,
   or a true past. In this course, you will learn to discern and analyze each historian’s approach,
   which will in turn allow you to evaluate their methodology and begin to form your own ideas
   about historical truth. In order to do this, over the course of the semester you will want to
   consider what underlying assumptions you have about history and historical writing, what
   motivates you to want to be a historian, and which tools, -- methods, sources, theories, or
   approaches – you feel most comfortable using. In this way, you will be defining your own
   methodology.

3. To teach you how to write a historiography paper. Just as it is crucial to know general
   historiography and have a sense of your own methodology, it is also important to be able to
identify and explain historiographical debates within your own field of history. Therefore, at
the beginning of the semester we will read about how to write a historiography – a paper
which focuses on how historians write history rather than on the historical content itself –
and at the end of the semester you will do a historiographical review of the secondary
literature in your chosen field. Identifying historiographical debates and writing about them
involves a new kind of analysis that you probably have not done before and is a skill that you
need to learn early on in your career. It will serve you well in the years to come.

4. To help you become a more articulate speaker, writer, and thinker. On a more
pragmatic, less philosophical level, this course is also designed to help you develop the
necessary verbal, writing, and thinking skills that you need to be a successful historian.
Seminars revolve around student participation; I facilitate discussion, but the success of the
course depends upon your participation. You should plan to speak several times during each
class period, and each member of the class will lead discussion at least once during the
semester. In doing so you will gain experience, skill, and thus confidence in articulating your
ideas in a public forum. Similarly, you will have writing assignments to turn in each week
and two formal papers, all of which will be graded both on the quality of your writing – your
writing style – and on the content and logic of your arguments – your ability to think
critically and analytically. I will focus on helping you to develop each of these skills over the
course of the semester and will expect (and you should too) to see improvement in all areas.

Course Format:
We meet one time per week in a 2 hour 40 minute block. This course is a seminar, meaning that the
majority of our time will be spent discussing the weekly readings. I will lecture in class only when
additional background or historiographical material is necessary. Given this format, everyone is
responsible for making our discussions interesting and informative. In this way, you are an active
participant in your own education – and as mentioned above, the success of the class depends on your
effort and input. Furthermore, it is important to remember that your responsibilities go beyond reading
the material and coming to class prepared with comments. They also include listening to and respecting
your colleagues’ comments in order to create an atmosphere in the classroom where everyone feels
comfortable speaking.

Office Hours:
My office hours are listed on the first page of the syllabus at the top. If you are not able to come at
the time listed, I will be more than happy to make separate appointments with you. Individual meetings
are often very helpful, especially if you find you are having trouble with some aspect of the course
or find the first year of graduate study somewhat bewildering (a common occurrence!). For
whatever reason, however, I strongly encourage you to come and see me outside of class.

Course Requirements and Grading:
Your grade is based on the components described below. Read this over carefully before you come
to me with questions about a particular assignment.

1. Attendance: You need to come to every class. Absences will negatively affect your grade in the
course. If you have extenuating circumstances and need to miss a class, come and
discuss it with me.

2. Participation (15%): Participation is a key part of this course, and it does not simply mean
showing up for class. I will assume that you will be in class every day, and that you will
come prepared. Being prepared means the following:

- that you do not come late to class
- that you are alert and paying attention throughout the entire period
- that you have done the reading
- that you are prepared to participate in class discussion
that you add meaningful and knowledgeable comments to class discussion
that you listen to and build on your colleagues’ comments in class
that you contribute to an atmosphere of thoughtfulness and mutual respect in the classroom

More general behavior guidelines are listed in the California Code of Regulations, Section 4101, included in the San Diego State University General Catalogue. Also take into account that I will call on you at random to answer questions in class. This means that you need to be prepared at all times. The degree to which you fulfill these requirements will determine your participation grade.

3. Discussion Papers (15% altogether): Each week – except for the week you lead discussion – you will be required to turn in a typed, single-spaced 1-page review of the week’s readings and bring a copy of it for each member of the class. There should be three parts to the review. First, you will need to summarize the argument of each reading, and explain how the author attempted to prove that argument. What historical methodology does the author use and/or advocate? What assumptions does the author make about historical truth? Next, explain how the reading(s) illustrate the development and evolution of modern historiography – in other words, how does this week’s material relate to readings from previous weeks? Finally, explain what your reaction is to the reading(s) and provide a brief critique of the work(s). Do you agree with the author’s assumptions? Would you come to the same conclusions?

4. Discussion Leading (10%): You will be asked to lead discussion one time during the semester. Depending on how many students are enrolled in the course, you may or may not have a partner. In order to lead discussion, you (and your partner, if appropriate) are to read the week’s materials carefully and thoroughly, do outside research on their historical school of thought (in preparation for the research paper discussed below) and prepare a short (5-10-minute) presentation on the materials and the school of thought. You also need to prepare a series of analytical questions (I recommend 5 or so) to stimulate discussion.

5. Research paper on Historical School of Thought (20%): On the week that you sign up to lead discussion (which will begin the third week of class), you will also turn in a 5-7-page paper on the type of history, or historical school of thought, that has been highlighted for the week. The paper should include a discussion of the author(s) we have read, the type of historical methodology and perspective that he/she represents, and the evolution of that methodology – how it relates to those from which it developed and how it changed the field of history. You would want to discuss the major figures of the school and their work – not only the authors whose work we read in class, but also including others as well. You would also want to explain the major tenets, approaches, and works of the school, and how it relates to earlier methods of historical scholarship – the way it applies these methods or the ways in which it differs from them. In doing so, you would also want to discuss the impact that the school has had on the historical profession. We should meet to discuss the paper before you begin researching and writing – I can alert you to sources you might not be aware of, but the paper will involve significant background research on your part, so be sure to plan ahead and give yourself plenty of time. As mentioned above, the research you do should also serve to inform your presentation and discussion leading for the week.

6. Proposal and Bibliography for Final Paper (5%), due Monday, October 23 at the beginning of class: Along with your reading assignment this week, you will turn in a 1-2-page proposal and a bibliography for your final historiography paper. I recommend that you get 5 to 10 books and articles on topic, selecting the ones that are written by prominent authors, and published most recently by prominent university presses. Read the articles in full and the introductions to the books. The introductions, in particular, are the places where authors review the historiographical themes and literature for the topic, so you can use their references to find further relevant material. Once you have a handle on the most prominent
works in your field and the issues they address and debate and the methods and approaches they use, you are ready to write the proposal. The proposal should be written in the form of a formal essay and should include the following information. First, you need to introduce your topic. Begin broadly, describing the wider context of the topic and its historiographical significance. Then you will narrow down to the specific texts and authors you will review in the paper, outlining their contribution to the topic. Finally, you will want to conclude with a series of questions that you plan to ask and answer in the final paper. Keep in mind that these will be tentative and it is fine if they change when you do go to write the paper. Also include a bibliography of the works you consulted (there should be at least 5 books and articles). Use the Chicago Style for citations.

7. **Presentation of Topic and Readings for Historiography Paper (5%), December 4:** There is no reading assigned for the last week of class either. I have done that specifically so that you will have enough time to do the necessary research for your papers. In order to encourage you to use this time wisely, I have designated this final class meeting as a time for you to do a 7-10-minute presentation to the class on the topic for your historiographical paper, the various sources you are using to write it, and the different debates, approaches, and methods that these sources utilize.

8. **Historiography paper (30%), due Tuesday, December 11 at 4pm:** The final paper for this course involves the writing of a 15-page historiography paper which reviews the major historiographical arguments in your chosen field. For this paper, you need to define the general topic area for your Master’s thesis and then conduct a survey of the major secondary works in that area. You will then write a historiography that lays out the major debates and the evolution of different methodologies in the field, and the ways in which your approach to the field will be both new and necessary. In order to write a successful paper, you will need to have consulted thoroughly at least 4 books and 3-5 articles, though the number can vary depending on the needs and writings of your field – see me if that is the case.

If you are confused about anything in the course, do not hesitate to ask about it!

**Books and Readings:**

These books are **required** for the course. If you run into problems with availability, let me know. Most of these readings are also on two-hour reserve in the Reserve Reading Room at Love Library. For information on the Reserve Reading Room, see [http://libpac.sdsu.edu/screens/rbr.html](http://libpac.sdsu.edu/screens/rbr.html).


One of the required books for the class is available as an e-book (though any edition of it is fine):

There following items are on Blackboard:

Course Schedule:

**Week 1, August 28:**

Introduction to Course

**Week 2, September 4: Defining History**

**Reading:** E.H. Carr, *What Is History?*


**Week 3, September 11: History and the Search for Truth: Is Objectivity Possible?**

**Reading:** Appleby, Hunt, Jacob, eds., *Telling the Truth About History*, 1-125.

Haskell. “Objectivity is not Neutrality: Rhetoric vs. Practice in Peter Novick’s *That...*
Noble Dream” (on Blackboard).

**Week 4, September 18: Positivism and the Roots of the Modern Historical Profession**

**Reading:** Marx, Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (ebook).
Gilbert, *History: Politics or Culture?* (on Blackboard).
Another article TBA

**Week 5, September 25: The Annales School and the Longue Durée**

Harsgor, “Total History: The Annales School” (on Blackboard).
Ferraro, *Venice: History of the Floating City*.

**Week 6, October 2: ‘Dethroning Absolutisms’ and Cultural Marxism**

**Reading:** Appleby, Hunt, Jacob, eds., *Telling the Truth About History*, 129-197.

**Week 7, October 9: The Social Construction of Science**

**Reading:** Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

**Week 8, October 16: Cultural History and Gender**

**Reading:** Appleby, Hunt, Jacob, eds., *Telling the Truth About History*, 198-309.
Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis” (on Blackboard)
Scott, “Women in History: The Modern Period” (on Blackboard)

**Week 9, October 23: Local History**

**Reading:** Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*.
Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, pp. 5-30 (on Blackboard).

Turn in proposal for final historiography paper.

**Week 10, October 30: Postmodernism**

**Reading:** Foucault, “Two Lectures,” in Colin Gordon, ed. *Power/Knowledge*, pp. 78-108 (on
Blackboard). (READ THIS FIRST)
Foucault, *Discipline and Punish.*

**Week 11, November 6: Orientalism and the Subaltern**

**Reading:** Said, *Orientalism.*
Prakash, “Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism” (on Blackboard).

**Week 12, November 13: Modernism Reconstituted? Big History**

Depending on your area of specialization, also read the following:
- Asia: pp. 175-188, 309-328,
- U.S./Europe: pp. 329-349, 421-427
- Africa/Caribbean: pp 206-219, 59-68
- Middle East: pp. 293-300, 276-284, 175-188
- Latin America: pp. 301-307
- Inner Eurasia/Steppe empires: pp. 197-204
- Gender: pp. 441-478
- Religion/Medieval: pp. 433-437
- Trade: 427-431

**Week 13, November 20: Research for Historiography Paper**

No readings. Do research for final paper; individual meetings.

**Week 14, November 27: Research for Historiography Paper**

No readings. Do research for final paper; individual meetings.

**Week 15, December 4: Presentations on Historiography Paper**

No readings. Do research for final paper and prepare presentation

Final Historiography Paper is due Tuesday, December 11 at 4pm.