HISTORY 601: Seminar in Historical Methods
Fall Semester, 2014
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
   by reading about the debates, challenges, and advantages of world history and with an
   example of revisionist interpretations of the Spanish conquest of the Americas in order to
   help prepare you for writing your historiography paper.

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 historian’s 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, to place your research within it and thus be able to articulate its significance to a larger audience of historians – to be in dialogue, in other words, with the arguments of the major works in the field. 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 we will read Matthew Restall’s revisionist historiographical arguments in *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*. These will help prepare you to write 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 a formal paper, 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. 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 the historical school of thought and the biographies of the author(s) of our reading, and prepare a short (5-10-minute) presentation on the materials, the school of thought, and the author(s). You also need to prepare a series of analytical questions (I recommend 5 or so) to stimulate discussion.

5. **Proposal and Bibliography for Final Paper (10%), due Tuesday, October 20 at the beginning of class:** Along with your reading assignment this week, you will turn in a 2-3-page proposal and a bibliography for your final historiography paper. I recommend that you start by locating 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 10 books and articles). Use the Chicago Style for citations.

6. **Presentation of Topic and Readings for Historiography Paper (5%), Tuesday, December 1 and December 15:** There are no common readings assigned for the last weeks of class. I
have done that specifically so that you will have enough time to do the necessary research and revision for your papers and have multiple chances to meet with me individually. Two of those weeks will be devoted to class presentations on your historiography papers, where you will give a 5-minute presentation of your paper topic and argument to the class.

7. First Draft of Historiography paper (20%) due Tuesday, December 1, by 4pm: The major writing assignment for this course involves the writing of a 15-page historiography paper that reviews the major historiographical arguments in your chosen field. For this paper, you need to define the general topic area(s) for your Master's thesis or exam 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. You will do two drafts of this paper – the first one is worth 20% of your grade and must be the very best work that you can do. I will grade it and hand it back with comments that you will incorporate into the final draft.

8. Final Draft of Historiography paper (25%), due Tuesday, December 15 by 4pm: The final draft of your historiography paper address the comments that I made for the first draft (though of course you have input on this too) and will likely involve substantial revision of the first draft. Papers that do not incorporate substantive changes (those that only address, for example, typographical errors) will receive a 0 – so be sure that you understand my comments well and know what you need to do to revise the paper, and leave yourself plenty of time to do so.

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.


The following items are on Blackboard:

**Course Schedule:**

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**Week 1, August 25:**

Introduction to Course

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**Week 2, September 1: Defining History**

**Reading:**


Restall, Matthew. *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, Introduction and Chapter 1, xiii-26 (on Blackboard).

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**Week 3, September 8: 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).

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**Week 4, September 15: Positivism and the Roots of the Modern Historical Profession**

**Reading:**


Gilbert, *History: Politics or Culture?* (on Blackboard).
Zilsel, “The Sociological Roots of Science” (on Blackboard)

Week 5, September 22: 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 29: ‘Dethroning Absolutisms’ and Cultural Marxism

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

Week 7, October 6: The Social Construction of Science

Reading: Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.

Week 8, October 13: 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)
Another article TBA on current state of the field

Week 9, October 20: 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 27: Postmodernism

Foucault, Discipline and Punish.

Week 11, November 3: Orientalism and the Subaltern
Reading: Said, *Orientalism*  
Prakash, “Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism” (on Blackboard).

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**Week 12, November 10: 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  

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**Week 13, November 17: Research for Historiography Paper**

No common readings: Individual meetings during class time; do research for final paper.

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**Week 14, November 24: Draft of Historiography Paper**

No common readings: Individual meetings during class time; do research for final paper.

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**Week 15, December 1: Drafts due and Class Presentations**

No common readings: Turn in final draft of historiography paper and meet in class for class presentations.

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**Week 16, December 8: Draft Revisions**

No common readings: Drafts handed back; individual meetings during class time to go over revisions.

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**Final Exam Week, December 15: Turn in Final Draft and Class Presentations**

No common readings: Turn in final draft of historiography paper and meet in class for class presentations.