Introduction to Historical Interpretation I
HIST 495A-1

Monday, 2:00-4:30
Bowden 323

Spring 2018

Prof. Matt Payne
119 Bowden
Office Hours: Wednesday, 1:00-2:30
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Overview

This class, unlike any of the lecture or seminar classes you have had in the department, is a research practicum. It is a venue to put into effect the skills you have learned as an history major to construct a viable research project to pursue your thesis work. As a practicum, it is not simply a preliminary class focused on theory, historiography or methodology, but a workshop in which research design is executed in a step by step manner. While all of you have honed your research skills in upper-level classes and, especially, colloquia, the sort of focused and extensive research required for a successful honors thesis requires careful conceptualization, proper methodologies and the right source s to conduct that research. In sum, you need a plan and by April 30th you will have a plan—a fully developed thesis proposal that will guide you not only in your research, but also in how you approach your thesis writing. In fact, by April you will make a public defense of your research proposal where students and faculty will comment on your proposed research, just as our doctoral candidates do. This seminar is an integral part of learning historical research design and in the process of pursuing this work you will experience false starts, grinding preparatory work (no one likes putting together a bibliography!), intellectual revision and sudden epiphanies.

Due to the nature of this practicum, we will have very few common readings (which will be on e-reserve) as the assignments will be tailored to each student's project and needs. That said, students will be expected to critique each other's work and push each other for greater clarity and insight. While very few students' thesis projects overlap, we are all historians and can all contribute meaningfully to areas outside of our specialty, especially on issues of conceptualization, source critique and methodology. The class is intended, among other things, to create an intellectual community in which students engage each other’s work and share useful research strategies. Ideally, your colleagues should prod you, praise you and demand more of you. The heart of scholarship is peer review, so remember to take your responsibilities as a peer as seriously as you take your own research.

The research skills we will focus on include:

- The ability to move from a set of declared, but vague, interests to a precise, testable research question.
- The gathering of a rigorous bibliography.
- Précis-writing.
- Understanding sources, source-types, and the value of different kinds of material.
- Acquiring familiarity with the notable subfields in history, and with the differences that mark out various kinds of journals, presses, and book formats.
- Getting up to speed with citations and how they work.
- Reframing your research question in terms of the literature and the field.
- Producing a cogent - potentially fundable - research proposal. (Remember the Department funds research through Cuttino, Jack and Rourk prizes while the College does through Undergraduate Research Program grants)
Requirements and Grading

The major assignment in this class will be a well-conceptualized, thorough, and maturely-written thesis proposal. You will develop this proposal in close consultation with your thesis advisor but it will be developed, written, and presented in this class. This thesis proposal will be vetted by your advisor and presented to the Departmental Honors Coordinator. The thesis proposal is the research plan for your honor's thesis and has the very practical purpose of presenting your work to potential funders (say the Undergraduate Research Program) and prospective committee members. All other assignments contribute to this final product and compliment it in various ways. All assignments will be submitted on our Canvas site and all students are expected to download and review other students' submissions (peer review!).

In chronological order these will be our assignments (see weekly schedule as well):

- **Research Sketch (1 page)**  
  This is our pump-priming assignment. As such, don't worry if you do not have a clearly articulated idea of all aspects of your project. Your project will become more precise and focused over the course of the semester. This research sketch will outline your topic, introduce your research question (what you want to find out), and position your project in its overall historical context. You should have progressed beyond your honor's application in your thinking about your topic, but don't fret if you haven't yet determined a basic methodology or source base—that is what the class if for. However, be specific. Research sketches of the type, "I'm interested in Communism—Soviet or Chinese or maybe Cuban" will be returned for further cogitation on topic selection.

- **Annotated Bibliography**  
  This assignment consists of a 1) one-page overview (a written text) of the literature pertaining to your project and 2) the full bibliographical information on six articles published in scholarly journals or edited collections. Each article will be accompanied by a paragraph-long (5-10 lines) abstract, summarizing the goal and content (findings) of the article. For help on the bibliographical information and how to cite articles, consult Turabian.

- **Four monographic précis (750-1000 words)**  
  A précis is a one-page, single-spaced report that includes the bibliographical reference (see Turabian), a short amount of biographical information on the author (such as place of employment, other books), along with summaries of the book’s main thesis, its sources, methods, and findings, its historiographical stance (if any), and its most salient chapter contents. In other words, the précis should assess if the book delivers! And, no, a mere summary will not suffice. I will return the first précis until it is done right to free you from the bondage of the book review.

  Choose well, because these books will become the core reading at this time for your thesis and may have a strong influence on your thinking about your project. You could read, for example, a detailed work that focuses specifically on your topic; an overview that contextualizes the historical period; or a theoretical work that reflects upon different approaches to the study of history. Your précis should answer some basic historiographical
questions about the book. What sort of methodology does the monograph deploy (gender history? economic history? biography?)? What other histories does it engage with (historiography)? How and how well does it amend, correct or challenge previous work on the topic? Use scholarly language and if you are looking for a model, check out the short book reviews in a scholarly journal close to your topic (for instance, in Russian history it would be Kritika or Slavic Review).

- **Thesis Report**

   What makes a good thesis? How did others do it? You will choose one recent honor’s thesis in your field (American, European, or World history) at the Woodruff Library and write an assessment (1-2pp.) that conveys what its strengths and weaknesses and discuss your findings in class. What can you learn from it? What should you avoid doing? It is here that you can examine the work of your peers. Next year, an Emory senior may examine your thesis. By conducting a critical examination of the work, you should be prepared to apply the same strict standards to your own work. Try to choose a thesis close to your own topic (added bonus—the reviewed thesis will likely have a germane literature review that will help you with the next assignment!).

- **Preliminary Bibliography**

   A properly formatted (see Turabian!) longer bibliography (not annotated) divided between primary sources and secondary sources (scholarly monographs and articles). You should be able to identify at least four primary sources (even if they are archival), ten monographs and fifteen scholarly articles (don't limit yourself to J-STOR). This bibliography is your first crack at what you will most likely be reading for your thesis so choose wisely and please, please, please! consult with your advisor.

- **Project Presentation**

   In April, we will hold two student conferences at which you will present your thesis project. Each of you will make a succinct 15-20 minute presentation during which you will put forward your research question(s), introduce the evidence you draw on and explain the significance of your project. You will need to prove you have identified enough primary and secondary sources, as well as have a strategy to analyze them, and that you are conversant with the scholarly literature in your field. Please highlight potential problems so you can get feedback on how to improve your research plan. Your advisor should be present. Please remember that this is primarily a venue for positive feedback, so polish your presentation and don't try to hide the blemishes!

- **Thesis Proposal, including full bibliography**

   This is the main product of our course. The final proposal (five pages of text [be concise!] plus bibliography) needs to be accepted by your thesis advisor and submitted to the Honor's Program Coordinator (Professor A. Tullos). This will be the official version of your thesis proposal. The full bibliography contains primary and secondary sources, listed in separate categories. This is mandatory for the final thesis proposal and must adhere to proper citation style (see Turabian). The full bibliography is not annotated.
The proposal will come in two parts: The draft (10%) and the final product (20%). Both are formal pieces of writing.

- **Class participation**  
  Given the nature of this class, active and constructive participation is essential at all times. Participation means engaging with all members of this class and improving the quality of the seminar. You need to be able to communicate your ideas effectively and you should always be prepared to present your work to the class at short notice.

- DON’T PANIC! Each assignment will be explained in class ahead of time. (And you'll perform as brilliantly as Pushkin)
Books
Course Policies:

This course follows the rules outlined in the Honor Code, especially where plagiarism is concerned. In addition to being posted to the common content area in Canvas, all assignments will be posted to Canvas SafeAssign, which flags copied text. This software works with a huge data base and can discover “patching,” the practice of copying a sentence and exchanging a word or two. So don't do it. Your prose is far superior to purloined words, so don't cut corners. If you are not fully aware of what plagiarism is, ask me and/or check the History Department’s explanation of and policy on plagiarism at:

http://www.history.emory.edu/undergrad/plagiarism.html

Assignments must be turned in on the day and time indicated on this syllabus. Late submissions will be marked down by half a grade per day late. For example, if you have written a B paper, you will receive a B- if you have turned it in one day late, a C+ for two days late, etc. If this seems draconian, it has its purpose—the greatest obstacle to finished theses is time management. We're going to address that issue very aggressively from day one in this class.

Students are expected to attend class regularly, complete the assignments as indicated on the syllabus, and come prepared to participate in class discussions. Since this seminar convenes only once a week, each absence will strongly impact your ability to contribute to the class and stay on track with your thesis project. More than one unexcused absence during the semester will result in a lower class participation grade. An excused absence (including illness, family emergency, or university event) will not negatively impact your participation grade; however, you will need to be able to make a compelling case that your absence was unavoidable. If you have missed a class, it is your responsibility to catch up on the material covered during that meeting.
Course Schedule:

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<th>Week 1 – January 22nd</th>
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<tr>
<td>Visit by the Honors Coordinator, Dr. Allen Tullos</td>
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<tr>
<td>- The History Honors Program</td>
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<td>- Finding an advisor and committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Time management: planning ahead for April 2019</td>
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<td>- Choosing, finding, and framing a topic</td>
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- **Homework (ungraded):**
  1. Please write a short **intellectual biography** of yourself: How did you become interested in history? What let you to your topic? Make it a personal story (this is not your project proposal), no longer than 2pp. Please post the text on our Canvas by January 28th.
  2. In consultation with your advisor, please **identify the four books** that you intend to **review for this class**. Keep in mind that reviewing these books will constitute substantial reading towards your thesis. Make sure that these books are pertinent for your work in terms of subject matter, methodology, as a comparative case, or in any other capacity. Don't just cruise Euclid! Go to the stacks, look at more than four books and choose the most fitting ones. Check out reviews of the books from *The American Historical Review* through J-STOR. Please bring the list to class on January 29th.

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<th>Week 2 – January 29th</th>
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<td><em>The Historian’s Craft</em></td>
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<td><strong>Readings:</strong></td>
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<td>Tosh, <em>The Pursuit of History</em>, ch. 1 (Historical Awareness), ch. 2 (The uses of history); Turabian, ch. 1 (What Research Is and How Researchers Think About it), ch. 2 (Moving from a Topic to a Question to a Working Hypothesis); Rampolla</td>
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- **How to … write a book review?** (HistoryProfessor.Org)
- **Homework (ungraded):**
  1. Write a short description of your research topic and proposed methodological and historical approach. Please remember to have a chronological, spatial and disciplinary definition of the topic. For instance, “I will look at the Soviet kulak in state propaganda from 1925 to 1935 mostly in Russian-language press and using the tools of literary deconstruction.” “I will look at the coming of the Civil War in Rome Georgia, from 1847 to 1860 with special attention to the public debates surrounding abolitionism.” Mention some of the major works in your field and what primary sources you might use.

  - **Intellectual biography due**
  - **List of 4 books to review due**

| Week 3 – February 5th |
Time, Space, Place, Territory – When and Where does my History Take Place?

Readings:

- How to … assemble the annotated bibliography? (From CalState LA libraries)
- Research sketch due

Week 4 – February 12th
Library as Laboratory I
1st Library session: Locating secondary literature (Woodruff Library – room TBA)
Readings:
Tosh, The Pursuit of History, ch. 3 (Mapping the Field)

- Reading scholarly literature: articles (Making Digital History UK) vs. monographs (HistoryProfessor.org) [for a nice, if cheesy, youtube on the topic see this]
- What is a précis again? (Bid4Papers)

- Annotated bibliography due

Week 5 – February 19th
Library as Laboratory II
2nd Library Session: Locating Primary Sources (Woodruff Library – room TBA)
Readings:
Tosh, The Pursuit of History, ch. 4 (The Raw Materials)

- 1st précis due

Homework: Locate a short primary source for our next meeting (see Week 6 instructions below)

Week 6 – February 26th
“Can I eat ‘em?” How to read, watch, touch, and listen to your primary sources

Readings:
“Introduction,” in: Miriam Dobson, Benjamin Ziemann: Reading Primary Sources. The Interpretation of Texts from 19th to 20th Century History (London: Routledge, 2009), 1-18 (on Canvas as PDF).
Tosh, The Pursuit of History, ch. 5 (Using the Sources)
Each of you also reads two more chapters from the same volume (all 3 on Canvas as PDFs);
please choose according to your own interests two of the following:

**Exercise:** Each of you will **bring one short primary source to class** that pertains to your topic. It can be a letter, a memo, a picture, a photo, an excerpt from a speech or diary. Please be prepared to contextualize this source for your classmates: what does it convey, why does it matter, what does it help you to understand, which insight about your topic does it support?

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<th>2nd précis due</th>
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**Week 7 – March 5**

*Scholarly writing: How to be precise, comprehensive and ... entertaining*

*Readings: Tosh, The Pursuit of History, ch. 6 (Writing and interpretation)*

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<th>3rd book précis due</th>
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**Week 8 – March 12**

*NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK*

**Week 9 – March 19**

*What makes a good thesis?*

- The components of a thesis: From cover to bibliography

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<th>4th book précis due</th>
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**Week 10 – March 26**
**Shadows of Theses Past**

- Oral presentations and discussions of students’ individual reading of past history honors theses.

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<td><strong>Student Conference I</strong></td>
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<td>Individual conferences with Dr. Payne in Bowden 119</td>
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<td>Please schedule appointments with me during this week. I would like to speak to you individually to take stock of your project after the student conferences.</td>
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<th>Week 12 – April 9th</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Student Conference II</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual conferences with Dr. Payne in Bowden 119</td>
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<td>Please schedule appointments with me during this week. I would like to speak to you individually to take stock of your project after the student conferences.</td>
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<td><strong>Public Presentation of Prospectus I</strong></td>
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<th>Week 14 – April 23rd</th>
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<td><strong>Public Presentation of Prospectus II</strong></td>
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<th>Week 15 – April 30th</th>
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<td><strong>Defending your thesis—making sure you have a strong committee and timeline</strong></td>
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- Final thesis proposal due on Monday, Dec. 3, 12pm

Course evaluation
Now harvest all these insights for writing a great thesis!