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HSTR 200.02: Introduction to Historical Methods

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HSTR 200:02

Introduction to Historical Methods
Monday, 12-1pm; LA 244

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Course Description

This course introduces students to the practice of history and prepares them for upper-division courses in the field. Students will learn to conduct library research, familiarize themselves with electronic databases, analyze primary sources, read secondary sources critically, write clear and convincing historical prose, and cite sources in Chicago style.

Readings

Copies of the following book are available at the UM bookstore.

- Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

Additional readings will be available on the Moodle course page. These will be indicated in the syllabus below.

Assignments, Grading, and Expectations

- Exercises and assignments (50% of your final grade)
 1. Carr assignment (Feb 2)
 2. Enola Gay assignment (Feb 9)
 3. Darnton assignment (Feb 23)
 4. Research question exercise (March 2)
 5. Primary source exercise (March 16)

6. Historiography of 1917 exercise (March 23)
 7. Debates on the fall of Rome exercise (April 6)
 8. Pizarro and Potatoes exercise (April 13)
 9. Footnotes/Citation exercise (April 20)
 10. History and popular culture exercise (April 27)
- Research Proposal and Bibliography (no later than May 15) (40% of your final grade)
 - Attendance and participation (10% of your final grade)
 - All assignments must be turned in on time in class; late assignments will NOT be accepted
 - All assignments will be typed and printed. Use 12-point font and standard margins. Proofread carefully before submission. Do not turn in sloppy work hot from the printer without proofreading it 2 or 3 times first.
 - This course meets only once a week. Your attendance and active participation are essential. I expect that you will come to class having read the assigned readings carefully. You will bring the assigned readings to class each day. Invest in a printer or print out the readings at the computer lab. If you do not have the readings in front of you, we cannot have a meaningful discussion; I will ask you to leave and count this as an absence. More than 2 absences will result in a zero for your attendance/participation grade
 - No cell phones are permitted in this class. If I see you using a cell phone during class, I will count this as an absence.

Course Schedule

Unit 1: What is History and What Do Historians Do?

M, Jan. 26: Intro to the Course

M, Feb 2: What is History?

- MOODLE: E. H. Carr, “The Historian and His Facts,” in Carr, *What is History?* (New York: Vintage, 1967), 7-30.
- READ: Turabian, Ch 1
- WRITE responses to the following questions. Each question should be answered in a paragraph of 4-5 sentences. 1) How do Acton and Clark represent two different approaches to understanding what history is? 2) What does Carr mean when he says that facts never come to us pure, but are “always refracted through the mind of the recorder” (p 22) 3) Carr makes use of an extended metaphor that depicts the historian as a fisherman and the facts as fish. What does he mean when he says that *where* the historian “fishes” determines the kind of facts/“fish” he will catch? 4) What does Carr mean when he says that history is a dialogue between past and present?

M, Feb 9: The Past in the Present

- MOODLE: Michael J. Hogan, “The Enola Gay Controversy: History, Memory, and the Politics of Presentation,” in Michael J. Hogan, ed., *Hiroshima in History and Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 200-32.
- WRITE responses to the following questions. Each question should be answered in a paragraph of 4-5 sentences. 1) Why did the proposed Enola Gay exhibit elicit such controversy? 2) What sides can you identify in the debate and which positions did they take? 3) How does the Enola Gay controversy show us that “history is contested terrain” (p 231)?

M, Feb 16: PRESIDENTS’ DAY; NO CLASS

M, Feb 23: Why the Past is Not the Same as the Present; or, Reading and Thinking in Historical Context

- MOODLE: Robert Darnton, “Workers Revolt: The Great Cat Massacre of the Rue Saint-Séverin,” in Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 75-104.
- WRITE responses to the following questions. Each question should be answered in a paragraph of 4-5 sentences. 1) Why did 18th-century French workingmen think it was so funny to kill their master’s cats? 2) What does this episode tell us about past mentalities and the difficulties that historians face in trying to understand the past?

Unit 2: How Historians Work

M, March 2: Asking the Right Research Question(s)

- READ: “[How to Frame a Researchable Question](#)” (from the homepage of William Cronon, Frederick Jackson Turner Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin and president of the American Historical Society)
- READ: Turabian, Ch 2, 5, & 6
- REVIEW Turabian, Ch 20-24. Use these guidelines to improve the quality and clarity of your writing.
- DUE TODAY: Choose a historical topic that you are interested in and have read a bit about (for ex., WWII, the moon landing, the Russian Revolution; any topic at all will do). Draw up a list of 5 good research questions that you could ask about the topic you’ve selected. Draw up a list of 5 bad research questions. In a sentence or two, explain why each of the questions you’ve composed is either a good research question or a bad one.

M, March 9: Excursion into the Archives

- READ: Turabian, Ch 4
- Librarian Donna McCrea, Head of Archives, will acquaint us with the sources and databases for historical research available at the K. Ross Toole Archives.
- We will meet at the Archives on the 4th floor of the Mansfield Library.

Unit 3: Working with Primary and Secondary Historical Sources

M, March 16: Reading Primary Sources

- **READ ONLINE:** [“How to Analyze a Primary Source”](#) (from the History Department at Carleton College):
- **DUE TODAY:** Go back to the Archives. Choose a primary source. Using that source, answer the 12 questions in the link above. Your answers to each question should be about 2-3 sentences (some shorter, some a bit longer); number your responses.

M, March 23: What is Historiography?

- **READ:** Christopher Read, [“Writing the History of the Russian Revolution,”](#) from the Reviews in History website
- **WRITE** responses to the following questions. Each question should be answered in a paragraph of 4-5 sentences.
- 1) Where do Figes’ and Read’s interpretations of the Russian Revolution differ and on what points are they similar? 2) In what ways do these books differ from earlier historical interpretations of the Russian Revolution?
- **DISCUSS IN CLASS:** What is historiography? Is it possible to produce an objective and completely impartial account of an historical event? Or does the very act of creating a narrative (selecting facts, ordering events, using language itself) make objectivity impossible? If there are always going to be multiple (and valid) interpretations of past events, what makes one “better” than another?

M, March 30: SPRING BREAK; NO CLASS

M, April 6: Debates over Historical Interpretation

- **MOODLE:** “Were Internal Factors Responsible for the Fall of the Roman Empire?” in *The Ancient World to the Pre-Modern Era*, vol. 1 of *Clashing Views in World History*, ed. Joseph R. Mitchell and Helen Buss Mitchell, 3rd ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2010), 92-111.
- **WRITE** responses to the following questions. Each question should be answered in a paragraph of 4-5 sentences. 1) Summarize Antonio Santosuosso’s main argument. 2) Summarize Peter Heather’s main argument. 3) Choose the argument that is most convincing to you; explain why.
- **DISCUSS IN CLASS:** How might each author respond to the arguments made by the other? Is one argument “right” and one “wrong”? Why or why not?

M, April 13: What If? Causation and Contingency

- **READ:** William H. McNeill, “What if Pizarro Had Not Found Potatoes in Peru?” in *What If? 2: Eminent Historians Imagine What Might Have Been*, ed. Robert Cowley (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 2001), 413-27.
- **WRITE** responses to the following questions. Each question should be answered in a paragraph of 4-5 sentences. 1) How did the introduction of the potato to Europe change European society, economics, and culture? 2) Had Pizarro *not* brought the potato to Europe, would the changes that McNeill associates with its

introduction happened anyway? Would they have happened differently? Would they not have happened at all?

Unit 4: Citation, Quotation, and Plagiarism

M, April 20: Footnotes, Citation, Quoting

- READ: Turabian, Ch 7, 15, 16, 17, & 25
- READ: When to Use Footnotes (on Moodle)
- READ: Quoting and Citing in Chicago Style (on Moodle)
- READ: Working with Quotations (on Moodle)
- COMPLETE the Quoting and Citing in Chicago Style assignment on Moodle

M, April 27: Historical Events in the Popular Imagination

- READ: Harold Holzer, [“What’s True and False in ‘Lincoln’ Movie,”](#) *The Daily Beast*, November 22, 2012,
- READ: Andrew Burstein and Nancy Isenberg, [“It’s Not Just ‘Selma’: Hollywood’s History Problem,”](#) *Salon*, January 19, 2015,
- WRITE responses to the following questions. Each question should be answered in a paragraph of 4-5 sentences. 1) What are the challenges of representing historical events on film in an accurate way while still being dramatically compelling? 2) Does it matter if films (or TV) portray the historical past accurately? What effects can inaccurate representations of the past have on culture and society?

Unit 5: Posing Historical Questions

M, May 4: Framing the Question

- WRITE a 2-3 paragraph research proposal on a question of your choice. The proposal should indicate your research question(s), how your project would fit in to the existing historiography on the topic, and (briefly) some sense of the significance of your project. In addition to the proposal, prepare a bibliography of at least 30 sources (both primary and secondary), formatted in Chicago Style. Accompanying the bibliography, on a separate sheet, include 2-3 sentences per source indicating the advantages/insights of each source and the potential limitations. What are the advantages and possible shortcomings of each source you include? What aspect of the question would each source allow you to answer (i.e., does it provide background on the historiography of the question? does it include valuable first-person perspectives on the question? etc.)
- We will break into small groups and you will share your research proposal with your comrades for feedback and comments. You will submit a revised version of the proposal during finals week.

FINALS WEEK

- Revised version of your research proposal is due in my mailbox by noon on Friday, May 15. Early submissions are acceptable (and encouraged). Faculty mailboxes are in the department office (LA 256).

