HIS 210: The Craft of History

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Office Hours: MWF: 9-10, MWF; 11-12, MF
Or by appointment

Text (required for the course): Doing History: An Introduction to the Historian’s Craft, Pojmann, Reeves-Ellington, and Mahar. We will be doing exercises from this text so it is imperative that you acquire it.

Course Description: What does it mean to “do history?” What is the role of a historian in modern society? What careers are available to those trained in history? How does one “think and write historically?” HIS 210 is designed as an introduction to the historical profession as well as to begin to train history students how to read, write, and think historically. The course will utilize text and selected readings, discussion, and written assignments to introduce the student to the appropriate material and information.

Course Requirements: All students are required to complete all readings and assignments of the course. The textbook readings are designed to serve as a foundation as well as additional source material to the course lectures and discussions, and thus are essential for understanding the fundamental elements of the class. I will assume that every student has completed his/her textbook readings and that they will be responsible for the material.

HIS 210 is also a required course for History majors and thus should be approached with all seriousness. Much of the information and skills you will learn in this course will become vital for successful completion of 300 and 400 level courses at the university.

Historians write, that is the essence of the profession. Thus, HIS 210 will include a number of writing assignments—in fact, most of what we will do will focus on preparing students to write historically. It is thus imperative that students enter the class with the idea that they must more than adequately complete written assignments. I will be very adamant and stringent concerning due dates, correct format, and following instructions. Students should also be diligent about ensuring they understand what is required of all assignments in the course.

Historians also read. There is no need to labor over the written word if no one will read your prose. HIS 210 includes a substantial reading component in assigned texts as well as preparation for book reviews and the research paper. The most glaring deficiency I see among current college students is their almost maniacal aversion to reading. If you are going to study history, you must learn to get over such an affliction.

Attendance is also a vital element in understanding the course material. If you are not present in class you will be missing a great deal of critical information crucial to completing the course. Attendance will also be a graded element of the course (a large part of the participation grade); students who miss class are consigning themselves to do poorly.
**Program Learning Outcomes:** The SFA History Department has identified the following Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) for all SFA students earning a B.A. degree in History:

1. Students will evaluate the role of the historian in society
2. The student will assess the significance of historical events/phenomena and analyze their historical contexts.
3. The students will locate, identify, and critically analyze primary and secondary sources appropriate for historical research.
4. The student will interpret evidence found within primary sources and place those sources within their appropriate historical context.
5. The student will effectively communicate historical arguments in support of a central thesis, including proper citation of sources using the most recent edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

**Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs):** The SFA History Department has also designated HIS 210 to assess student learning more specifically. Assessment allows the department to gather data on student progress and helps to determine specific student skills appropriate to the B.A. degree in History. The specific outcomes for this course are as follows:

1. Students will complete a project in which they analyze the role historians played in a contemporary political, social, or cultural debate.
2. Students will complete an assignment in which they apply historical thinking to specific events in the past. It will measure student proficiency in the description of events/phenomena, analysis of historical context, analysis of multiple perspectives, and evaluation of change over time.
3. Students will complete an annotated bibliography project that will measure proficiencies in the following areas: identification of relevant sources, use of appropriate databases and other means of locating relevant sources, ability to distinguish between primary and secondary sources, and the ability to analyze sources for bias, reliability, and relevance.
4. Students will complete a primary source analysis exercise which will include proficiencies in the following areas: identification of key themes in the source, explanation of the context in which the source appeared, analysis of intended audience and author’s goals, and the evaluation of the source as historical evidence.
5. Students will write a research paper which offers an interpretative thesis and include elements of the following: identifiable thesis; effective and cogent structure and organization; proper and coherent interpretation of the evidence; clarity and general writing skills; and proper *Chicago Manual of Style* citation and documentation.
Assignments: We will have two types of graded activities in the course (as well as attendance, which will also be graded). We will be completing some exercises in our text book in the first half of the course, then we will focus on writing an entry for the “Handbook of Women’s History in Texas.” We will discuss these more extensively, and will have additional handouts on them later in the semester.

Grading: There are no formal “exams” in this course; the determination of the student’s grade will come from their participation/attendance, the textbook exercises, and your written assignment. Please read and understand how your grade will be determined. Keep up with your assignments and your grades as doing so will allow you to determine your progress in the course. It is not complicated and I guarantee you that if I can figure it out with my math-challenged capabilities you can as well. If students make the effort to know how they are performing, there will be no “surprises” at the end of a course.

Concerning grades, please take note of the following statement: While grading over curriculum elements such as writing assignments may superficially seem arbitrary, they are anything but. I grade according to a rubric designed explicitly for that assignment. Thus, instructors do not “assign” grades, but students “earn” grades in their courses. Toward the end of every semester I hear lamentations and wailing from students who “need” a higher grade than they have earned for various reasons. Take this advice: if you “need” a certain grade in the course for whatever reason, begin to earn that grade from day one. Do whatever work is necessary to earn that grade. Two or three weeks before the semester ends is NOT the time to begin worrying about your course performance. Also, other than opportunities that I give the entire class (such as attending a lecture or other special program) I do not offer “extra credit” so do not ask. I strongly believe that you should take responsibility for your actions. A college course is a semester long affair, not something that you “coast” through for ten weeks and then attempt a “monster” comeback at the end; it is not a sporting event and you are not Tom Brady, so do not try to complete that “Hail Mary” pass at the end of the semester.

The following is the grade breakdown for the course.

Participation/Attendance: 40 points: On Wednesday September 6 I will assign seats to each member of the class and it is your responsibility to sit in your assigned seat each day (if you have special requests for seating, for valid reasons, make them in writing to me by Sept. 4; after that I will arbitrarily assign seating). I will take attendance at the beginning of each class day. Tardiness has become a problem in recent semesters, and in this course it will be handled thusly: If you are more than five minutes late to class, DO NOT ATTEMPT TO ENTER THE CLASSROOM; it is disruptive and rude and I will not allow you to enter. Also, except for a truly emergency situation, students should not leave the classroom once class begins. We are only here for 50 minutes—you can wait until after we finish to do whatever it is you need to do. If you think you will need to use a restroom, do it BEFORE class. Students are counted “present” when they are in class at the required time; if they are not, they are absent—for whatever reason. That means that there are no “excused” absences in this class other than for official, university sponsored or sanctioned events. Illness, personal reasons, jail
time, or anything else you can think of does not exempt you from being counted absent. If you are not here, you are absent.

Each student is given two “freebies,” which are absences with no penalty. After those two, the penalties become more severe. On your third absence, you will lose five attendance points, and four absences will mean a demerit of ten attendance points. If (and when) a student misses five (or more) classes they will receive zero attendance points.

**Textbook and Other Activity Exercises:** Ten (10) at 10 points each: 100 points

**Handbook Entry:** 60 points:

Thus, the total possible point value in the course is two hundred (200) points. Your grade will be calculated as a percentage of the total points earned.

**Special Arrangements:** Any student who, because of a disabling condition, may require some special arrangements in order to meet the course requirements should contact the instructor as soon as possible to make necessary accommodations. Students should present appropriate verification from Disabled Students Services. Any arrangements made are strictly confidential.

**Student Absence for Observation of Religious Holy Days:** A student who is absent from classes for the observation of a religious holy day shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment scheduled for that day within a reasonable time after the absence if, not later than the fifteenth (15) day after the first day of the semester, the student had notified the instructor of each scheduled class that the student would be absent for a religious holy day.

**A Final Note:** HIS 210 is your “introduction” to advanced history courses and as such it attempts to familiarize you with skills and practices applicable to the historical profession. Given such parameters, there are a few things that you should understand about the expectations and materials of the course.

First, as mentioned earlier, historians read, interpret, and write. If you are not prepared to make an effort to practice and do all three this course will do you little good and will also be very difficult. HIS 210 will have an ambitious (but will not even approach an overwhelming) reading schedule. One of the goals of the course is to begin you on a journey of reading “historically” and then learning the skill of disseminating the information you have gleaned. **If you do not “like” to read or simply refuse to complete class readings, then you should know that this course will be very difficult for you to pass.** That said, reading for comprehension and critically understanding what you read is more than simply “passing your eyes” over written prose; it is a skill that must be learned and practiced—and hopefully this course can help you begin to cultivate such proficiency.

Secondly, historians write—it is the essence of the profession. A historian does not simply “memorize” or enjoy relating facts about the past. Rather, a historian interprets the past to give relevance to the present and future. You can not do this without learning to communicate
effectively, and historians communicate via the written word. Thus, there is an extensive writing component to this course, and it is categorized as a “writing enhanced” course within the catalog of the History Department. In this course we will begin to learn the skills of writing historically, an aptitude that is vital in later courses as well as in learning to be a historian. So, I give you another warning: **If you are not prepared to make the effort to research, write, edit, revise, edit, and revise again in your writing you will have a difficult time in this course.**

I offer the above not as a way to scare you about the course or to make it difficult. I do so to allow you to understand the expectations at the beginning of the semester. This is not an easy course, but it is also not an impossible one. If you put forth the effort, are prepared to take the necessary time, and focus your attention on your work, you can do well. Each of you have the essential skills required for the course; if you did not, you would not be at an institution of higher learning. But skills require attention to craft, work, and practice. Elite athlete’s skills would erode if they did not constantly work at development and advancement; the same principle applies to learning. You can all do it!

**Lecture, Assignment, and Reading Schedule:** The Chapters (or page numbers, if applicable) listed after lecture topics refer to the text. There will be a separate handout that will detail the “activities” in the workbook section of text that you will have to complete. All activity assignments are due one week from when they are assigned.

**Week One:**
Aug. 29: Introduction to Course
Aug. 31: What Does it Mean to “Do” History?”

**Week Two:**
Sept. 5: Why Historians Matter. **Handout material on Confederate Monuments**
Sept. 7: Discuss the historical significance of the Monument debate

**Week Three:**
Sept. 12: Historical Consciousness and Varieties of Approach; Chapter 1; **Complete Activities 1 and 3**
Sept. 14: The Different genres of history; Chapter Two; **Complete all activities associated with chapter**

**Week Four:**
Sept. 19: Careers in History: Life in and Out of the Academy
Sept. 21: Discussion on Careers and Directions

**Week Five:**
Sept. 26: Understanding Historiography; Chapter 3 **Complete activities (custom, not precisely those in the text)**
Sept. 28: The Use of Primary and Secondary Sources; Chapter 4; **In class oral activity**
Week Six:
Oct. 3: Class will meet in the ETRC in the Steen Library
Oct. 5: Beginning research: Topics, Outlines, and “Telescoping: Chapter 5: Activity: begin to prepare Handbook entry topic (explain in class)

Week Seven:
Oct. 10: Writing History: An Overview: Chapter 6: Complete Activity 1 and 2 in Chapter 6
Oct. 12: No Class: ETHA Meeting

Week Eight:

Week Nine:
Oct. 24: Revision, the art of the historian’s craft: Source listings for Handbook entry due.
Oct. 26: Plagiarism: What it is and how to avoid it

Week Ten:
Oct. 31: Individual meetings on Handbook entry
Nov. 2: No Class

Week Eleven:
Nov. 7: Individual Meetings
Nov. 9: Individual Meetings

Week Twelve:
Nov. 14: Individual Meetings
Nov. 16: Individual Meetings

November 20-24: Thanksgiving Break

Week Thirteen:
Nov. 28: Group 1 Oral presentations on Handbook entry
Nov. 29: Group 2 Oral presentations

Week Fourteen:
Dec. 5: Group 3 Oral presentations
Dec. 7: No formal class, but voluntary discussion of Handbook entry

Tuesday December 12, Final Handbook Entry due in ETHA Office (Ferg. 293) by Noon.