

Department of History  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
College of Letters and Science

**HONORS THESIS COLLOQUIUM /  
SENIOR THESIS COLLOQUIUM**  
History 680/690  
Section 1

Fall 2007  
Wednesdays, 1:20-3:20  
2115 Humanities Building

Professor Jim Donnelly  
5112 Humanities Building  
jsdonnel@wisc.edu  
Office Hours: Thursdays, 2-3  
and by appointment

Course Description

The purpose of this course is to help you to write an excellent senior thesis. While you will be working mainly under the direction of your primary thesis advisor, in this colloquium you will learn how historians define problems, identify and handle evidence, and construct arguments. We will also work on the mechanics of doing research, the techniques for effective writing, and the ways to avoid pitfalls. Finally, you will learn how to write about your research, talk about it, and present it formally.

The course will take us through the major stages of carrying out a research project—defining a topic, turning a topic into a problem, and writing up a detailed outline, a comprehensive bibliography, a prospectus, and the early pages of your first draft. At each major stage you will read one another's work and discuss it in the seminar. You will also be consulting regularly with your primary thesis advisor throughout the semester.

Required and Recommended Books

Required textbook (available at the University Bookstore within two weeks):

Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, The Craft of Research (Chicago, 1995).

Highly recommended book:

David Hackett Fischer, Historians Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought (New York, 1970).

Note that although Fischer's book is not required reading, I hope that it will find an honored place on your bedside table as you work your way through your thesis.

You might also wish to visit the website of the Writing Center in the English Department. See [Writer’s Handbook > Common Writing Assignments > “Resources for Proposal Writers”](#) and [“Resources for Dissertators.”](#)

### Peer Paper Swap

At three points in the semester—the drafting of (1) the thesis-and-purpose statement, (2) the critical book review, and (3) the prospectus—you will be paired with another student from the class to swap papers and give your partner critical and constructive feedback. We will discuss strategies for peer review in Week 1 and will review and adopt a set of guidelines. Together with the use of these guidelines, constructive feedback involves reading the draft through; writing up a set of brief comments; and meeting with your partner to explain and elaborate on your comments. For the standards and techniques of conducting peer reviews, go to the website of the Writing Center in the English Department. Print out, study, and retain the following document: [Writer’s Handbook > Stages of the Writing Process > “Peer Reviews.”](#)

### Writing Workshops

There will be two intensive writing workshops during the semester. I have noted the main topics for the Writing Workshops under the weekly schedule of activities and directed your attention to certain documents that you should acquire at the website of the Writing Center in the English Department. Please feel free to suggest additional topics that you would like us to address.

### Evaluation

Since the goals of this course are (1) to provide a forum for preparing you to conceive, research, and begin to write your senior thesis; (2) to have you engage in a variety of shorter writing projects on the way toward this larger goal, including a thesis-and-purpose statement, a critical book review, and a prospectus; (3) to encourage you to collaborate with your peers in the discussion and assessment of these projects; and (4) to help you improve your ability to carry out serious research and to write with enhanced fluency, the bulk of the grade for this course will be based on attendance, participation, the completion of writing assignments, and the timely meeting of deadlines. The quality of your oral presentations, your written work, and your feedback to your peers will of course also influence the final grade.

Attendance and participation	20%
Two presentations	20%
Critical book review	10%
Prospectus	20%
Other writing assignments	10%
Timely feedback to peers	20%
	100%

## Weekly Schedule of Activities

**Week 1 (Sept. 5):** Introduction: “Developing a thesis statement.” We will discuss the steps in the process of drafting such a statement (1-2 pages, double-spaced) and will fix a timeline for its submission. Visit the website of the Writing Center in the English Department. Print out the following documents and bring them to class: Writer’s Handbook > Stages of the Writing Process > “Developing a Thesis Statement,” and Writer’s Handbook > Common Writing Assignments > “Thesis and Purpose Statements.” In discussion with your primary thesis advisor over the next three weeks, you should move in the direction of selecting the subject or topic of your thesis. Once your topic has been chosen and defined to the satisfaction of your primary thesis advisor, you should begin to conduct a survey of the secondary literature and the primary sources that appear relevant to the subject chosen. **Members of the seminar should submit their thesis-and-purpose statements to me in a Word attachment by email no later than 5 p.m. on Monday, October 1, in the fifth week of the semester. You are asked to share these statements with other members of the seminar by email by the same date.**

**Week 2 (Sept. 12):** Sources and Guides to Research. Presentation by Barbara Walden on source materials in Memorial Library, other campus libraries, and the Wisconsin Historical Society Library, as well as through Interlibrary Loan and on the Internet, that should or could be consulted by students working on their senior theses. This presentation will include a discussion of various guides to scholarly resources and other bibliographic aids; it will also include a discussion of recently acquired electronic resources and special holdings. Come to the colloquium prepared to ask questions about the paths that you might take to finding the resources that you will need to make solid progress in developing and researching your thesis topic. **Reading assignment:** Booth, Colomb, and Williams, Craft of Research, pp. 29-81.

**Week 3 (Sept. 19):** Writing Workshop I. In this meeting of the colloquium we will concentrate on improving your writing style. Visit the website of the Writing Center in the English Department. Print out the following documents, examine them carefully, and bring them to class: Writer’s Handbook > “Improving Your Writing Style”—“Clear, Concise Sentences” and “Using Transitions”; and Writer’s Handbook > Grammar and Punctuation > “Twelve Common Errors: An Editorial Checklist.” **Then draft a statement of 2-3 pages, double-spaced, in which you summarize your progress in delineating your thesis topic. Submit the statement when the seminar meets on Sept. 19.**

**Week 4 (Sept. 26):** Writing Workshop II. For a second week the emphasis will be on bettering your writing style. Review the documents on style that you read for the previous week. **There is a special assignment for this week. In preparation for this seminar meeting, ask your advisor for the title of one of the best recent books in her or his field—one that is not directly related to your thesis. After reading the book, write a short critical review of it (no more than 5 pages, double-spaced).** Before doing so, you should visit the website of the Writing Center in the English Department. Print out the following document and apply its lessons to your critical book review:

Writer's Handbook > Common Writing Assignments > "Critical Reviews." Make sure you consult the five subheadings: "overview," "understand the assignment," "write the introduction," "write the body," and "write the conclusion." See also the following document: Writer's Handbook > Common Writing Assignments > "Reading a Nonfiction Book to Review It." **Paper copies of the critical book review should be submitted in class on Wednesday, Sept. 26. Email copies of this review should be sent to me and to the designated peer reviewer no later than 5 p.m. on the same date. The comments of the peer reviewer should be returned by email to the author and to me no later than 5 p.m. on Sunday evening, Sept. 30.**

You might also be mindful of the following questions as you tackle this assignment:

1. What argument or larger issue is the writer addressing?
2. How does the problem as defined by the author fit into the larger issue in his or her field?
3. How does the author deal with previous scholarship?
4. What body or bodies of evidence has the author used to deal with the problem, and is the evidence adequate to answer the questions raised?
5. What are the author's principal arguments?
6. What warrants does the author advance to support his or her claims? Are the author's warrants precise and sufficient?
7. Does the book succeed in what it sets out to do?

**Week 5 (Oct. 3):** Presentations of Statements (1). This meeting of the seminar and the next will be devoted to the presentation and discussion of the thesis-and-purpose statement that each of you have been developing and writing over the previous four weeks. Presentations should last no more than 5 minutes. Remember to structure your statement by beginning with a brief introduction of your subject. Then, in the body of the statement, address how you have narrowed the subject into a manageable topic, how you have reduced your topic into a set of questions, how you have worked your questions into a problem, what approaches you are taking to your problem, what kinds of evidence you have identified to help you deal with the problem, and what difficulties you are encountering—or expect to encounter—with your evidence. **You should make enough paper copies of your statement to share with the other members of the colloquium. Remember to send an electronic copy of your statement to all those on the class list by the previous Monday, October 1. Peer reviewers should return their comments to me and to the author no later than 5 p.m. on Sunday, October 7.**

**Week 6 (Oct. 10):** Presentations of Statements (2). This week we will complete the presentation of the thesis-and-purpose statements. We will also begin to tackle our next subject—how to quote and how to paraphrase sources, both primary and secondary. Visit the website of the Writing Center in the English Department. Print out, study, and bring to class the following document: Writer’s Handbook > Citing References in Your Paper > “Quoting and Paraphrasing Sources.” This document in its full form contains six parts, from “How to avoid plagiarism” to “Additional resources.” Print out all parts.

**Week 7 (Oct. 17):** Matters of Style. It is very important that you adopt and follow with absolute consistency certain stylistic conventions in the body of your thesis and in the construction of your footnotes or endnotes and your bibliography. You should discuss with your primary thesis advisor whether he or she wishes your thesis to be adorned by footnotes or endnotes. Although there are other styles used by some historians and social scientists, we are going to learn the rules and conventions of what is known as the University of Chicago/Turabian style. In preparation for this meeting of the colloquium, visit the website of the Writing Center in the English Department. Print out, study, and bring to class the following document: Writer’s Handbook > Citing References in Your Paper > “Chicago/Turabian Documentation.” This document in its full form contains four parts, from “Get a quick orientation to note systems” to “Create a Chicago/Turabian Works Cited page.” Print out all parts.

**Week 8 (Oct. 24):** Claims and Evidence. By this stage of the semester you should be well launched into serious research on your topic. You should be in the process of forming ideas about the evidence you are encountering in your sources and the claims that this evidence allows you to make. Our textbook offers guidance on these matters, and the reading assignment for this meeting of the colloquium is Booth, Colomb, and Williams, Craft of Research, pp. 111-145. In addition, there is a brief writing assignment. **Write a short account (2-3 pages, double-spaced) of the claim or claims that you are making, and demonstrate how your evidence supports your claims—in other words, your warrants.** We will assume for the moment that your evidence is accurate, precise, and authoritative (i.e., that you have identified the most reliable primary sources and secondary studies), but you should prepare yourself to defend its sufficiency and significance. While writing this account, ask yourself at every stage what objections could be made to your claims, what your evidence is, and how you are crafting the warrants that link your evidence with your claims. Specific individuals, chosen by lot, will be asked to make presentations lasting 5-10 minutes.

**Week 9 (Oct. 31):** Preparation of the Bibliography. For this meeting of the seminar you should assemble your bibliography and submit it in class. The style of the bibliography should conform to that which we discussed in Week 7, except that this is not simply a “works cited” bibliography. It should include all the works that you have already consulted or that you plan to examine. Draw this distinction by placing those sources not yet consulted in **bold-face type (like this)**. Make a basic division between “contemporary works” and “later works,” or between “primary sources” and “secondary sources.” For this exercise books and articles among “secondary sources” or “later works” should be listed separately. For works that you have already consulted, you may

wish to include brief annotations (positioned after the standard bibliographical information) in which you pithily summarize the significance of the book, article, or other source in question. The bibliography should be preceded by an extended bibliographical note (three pages, double-spaced) in which you engage in a critical discussion of the strengths and shortcomings of your sources in relation to your thesis topic. Our discussion in the colloquium will focus on problems encountered in the research projects of members of the seminar. We will try to identify techniques or resources that might be used to resolve such problems.

**Week 10 (Nov. 7):** Outline of the Thesis. At this stage of the semester you should be in a position to draft the first outline of your thesis. Your outline should bear a direct relationship to the thesis-and-purpose statement that you submitted in Week 5. If your focus has shifted significantly during the interim, then you will need to submit an amended statement. Your outline might have as its major divisions the sections or chapters into which you presently think your thesis will be divided. But the structure of the outline should be mostly determined by the major arguments or claims that you plan to make, and by the kinds of evidence that can be used to support your claims. The outline should not exceed 3 pages (with a combination of single and double spacing, or with double spacing alone). After a suitable period for reflection in the seminar, we will engage in an on-the-spot peer review of the outlines.

**Week 11 (Nov. 14):** Presentations of the Prospectus, Part 1. In the colloquium this week and for the next two weeks, we will have presentations of a prospectus (8-10 pages, double-spaced) by each member of the seminar. The presentation should last no longer than 15 minutes. To meet this time limit, you will have to be concise and summarize the main points of your prospectus. The prospectus should address at least four things: (1) the scope, purpose, and direction of your thesis now that you have reaped benefits from substantial research and made any necessary adjustments to your original plans in consultation with your primary thesis advisor; (2) the major links in your chain of argumentation, as guided by the evidence that you have so far examined carefully; (3) the conclusions that you have drawn on the basis of this evidence; and (4) any gaps in your research that remain to be filled, along with your practical plans for doing so. After any revisions that may be made in the aftermath of the presentations, the prospectus must be presented to your primary thesis advisor for her or his approval. Approximately one-third of colloquium members will make presentations each week on November 14, 21, and 28. Peer review will occur in accordance with previously specified arrangements, and time will be allotted for questions from the floor. **Copies of each prospectus to be presented and discussed on any of these three dates must be sent to me and to the designated peer reviewer by email no later than Sunday evening at 5 p.m. on the weekend before the Wednesday presentation.**

**Week 12 (Nov. 21):** Presentations of the Prospectus, Part 2. Peer review will occur in accordance with specified arrangements.

**Week 13 (Nov. 28):** Presentations of the Prospectus, Part 3. Peer review will occur in accordance with specified arrangements.

**Week 13 (Nov. 28):** Students are asked to write and submit a brief report (1-2 pages, single-spaced or double-spaced, as seems fitting) on the substance of meetings with their primary thesis advisors. Care needs to be taken to give advisors at least one week to review a prospectus before these meetings. Your report should incorporate both favorable comments and any significant criticisms offered by your advisor. The report should indicate how you plan to accommodate any suggestions for revision or criticisms that your advisor has offered on the prospectus. **Reports are due no later than December 5.** There will be a review of important matters of style in this gathering of the seminar.

**Week 14 (Dec. 5):** Writing the Introduction. Students should be writing the introduction or the first section of their thesis by this date. It should conform to the agreed style in all respects (inclusive of endnotes or footnotes), and this earliest piece of the thesis should be presented to the field advisor before the end of the semester (Dec. 14). **No formal meeting of the colloquium will be held on December 5, but I will be available during the usual time of our seminar to consult with individual students.**

**Week 15 (Dec. 12):** Evaluation of the Colloquium. There will be a general discussion of what worked well in preparing students for undertaking this major intellectual exercise, and of what could be done in future to improve and strengthen the content and organization of the seminar.

Department of History  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
College of Letters and Science

**HONORS THESIS COLLOQUIUM /  
SENIOR THESIS COLLOQUIUM**

History 680/690  
Section 2

Fall 2007  
Wednesdays, 1:20-3:20  
2115 Humanities Building

Professor Jim Donnelly  
5112 Humanities Building  
jsdonnel@wisc.edu  
Office Hours: Thursdays, 2-3  
and by appointment

Course Description

This course is designed to help you to write your senior thesis by giving you opportunities to present work to your peers and to resolve problems of organization and argument (“Presentation Sessions”), with hands-on training to improve your writing (“Writing Workshops”), and by furnishing you with a set of deadlines to ensure that the thesis actually gets written. Three times during the semester you will be paired with a peer to read and give constructive feedback on paper drafts (“Peer Paper Swap”). We will end the course with a class conference, where you will present your papers in a public forum designed to mirror a professional history conference.

Peer Paper Swap

At three points in the semester you will be paired with another student from the class to swap papers and give your partner critical and constructive feedback. We will be discussing strategies for peer review in our first Writing Workshop and will review and adopt a set of guidelines. Together with the use of these guidelines, constructive feedback involves: reading the draft through; writing up a set of brief comments; and meeting with your partner to explain and elaborate on your comments. For the standards and techniques of conducting peer reviews, go to the website of the Writing Center in the English Department. Print out, study, and retain the following document: Writer’s Handbook > Stages of the Writing Process > “Peer Reviews.”

Writing Workshops

There will be three writing workshops held over the course of the semester. I have noted below the main topics for the Writing Workshops and directed your attention to certain documents that you should acquire at the website of the Writing Center in the English Department. Please feel free to suggest additional topics that you would like us to address.

Writing Workshop I: Organization and Argument: Visit the website of the Writing Center in the English Department. Print out the following documents: Writer’s Handbook > Common Writing Assignments > “Critical Reviews” (make sure you consult the five subheadings: “overview,” “understand the assignment,” “write the introduction,” “write the body,” and “write the conclusion”); Writer’s Handbook > Citing References in Your Paper > “Quoting and Paraphrasing Sources.” This second document in its full form contains six parts, from “How to avoid plagiarism” to “Additional resources.” Print out all parts.

Writing Workshop II: Writing in Depth: Visit the website of the Writing Center in the English Department. Print out the following documents and bring them to class: Writer’s Handbook > “Improving Your Writing Style”—“Clear, Concise Sentences” and “Using Transitions”; and Writer’s Handbook > Grammar and Punctuation > “Twelve Common Errors: An Editorial Checklist. Study these documents carefully.

Writing Workshop III: Effective Revisions: Review Writer’s Handbook > “Improving Your Writing Style”—“Clear, Concise Sentences” and “Using Transitions”; and Writer’s Handbook > Grammar and Punctuation > “Twelve Common Errors: An Editorial Checklist. Study these documents carefully. Visit the website of the Writing Center in the English Department and print out for ready reference the following document: Writer’s Handbook > Citing References in Your Paper > “Chicago/Turabian Documentation.” This document in its full form contains four parts, from “Get a quick orientation to note systems” to “Create a Chicago/Turabian Works Cited page.” Print out all parts.

### Presentation Sessions

We will break into smaller groups for discussion of challenges that you are facing as you work. Bring a sentence outline of your thesis and a short outline of your presentation to distribute to the class. Keep your presentation to a 15-minute limit.

### Rough-Draft Deadlines

Let us assume that your thesis will be between 30 and 50 pages in length (though this is a matter between you and your primary advisor). Rough drafts of the first 10-15 pages (or the first third of your paper) are due **October 3**, of the first 20-40 pages (or the first two-thirds) are due **October 31**, and of the entire 30-50 pages (the whole draft) are due **November 14**. **Your primary faculty advisor may give you an earlier set of deadlines.**

### Close Collaboration with Advisors

It is important that you remain in regular contact with your thesis advisor, especially in this last stage of the writing process. If you are sensitive to the fact that she or he is in the same position you are in—overworked and staggering under the relentless pressure of deadlines—you can manage the relationship more effectively. Plan well, give plenty of advance notice when you will need something from them, and observe the following basic rules to get the most out of this important relationship:

- Make regular appointments.

- Come to appointments with a written list of specific questions and issues to discuss.
- Work out with them a set of deadlines for intermediary drafts, or give them the deadlines established for this class.
- Email them a week in advance of each deadline, alerting them that you will be submitting a draft to them, and ask for an appointment a week later to discuss your draft.
- Thank them profusely. Gratitude is free and everyone likes to be appreciated.

### Student Conference

The Student Conference will be held during the final three class sessions. Everybody will circulate to the class a 5-page abstract (double-spaced) of their thesis and an outline. Each student will give a brief presentation of his or her abstract and be assigned a peer to provide comments on it. Students will have the opportunity to respond to these comments and to field questions from the floor. **Abstracts and outlines should be submitted to the class list by Friday at 5 p.m. in the week before you will give your presentation.**

### Evaluation

Since the goals of this course are (1) to provide a forum for resolving issues in collaboration with your peers; (2) to help you improve the facility with which you write large research papers; and (3) to facilitate the timely completion of an excellent senior thesis, the bulk of the grade for this course will be based on attendance, participation, and the timely meeting of deadlines. The quality of your presentations, your drafts, and especially your feedback to your peers will of course also influence the grade.

Attendance and participation	30%
First two presentations	10%
Draft deadlines and timely feedback to peers	30%
Conference (circulation of written materials, presentation, and comments on peer's paper)	<u>30%</u>
	100%

### Course Schedule

- 9/5 Introduction
- 9/12 Writing Workshop I: Organization and Argument
  - Writing with outlines
  - Working critically with sources
  - Tools for peer review
- 9/19 Presentations I: Group 1A
- 9/26 Presentations I: Group 1B

10/3 No meeting. Professor Donnelly is available for appointments. (Email by Sunday night.)

**Rough-draft deadline 1: peer paper swap**

Email your draft to your assigned peer and to jsdonnel@wisc.edu

10/10 **Peer comments due** (with a copy sent to jsdonnel@wisc.edu)  
Professor Donnelly is available for appointments. (Email by Sunday night.)

10/17 Writing Workshop II: Writing in Depth

- Style and word choice
- Effective use of evidence

10/24 Presentations II: Group 1A

10/31 Presentations II: Group 1B

**Rough-draft deadline 2: peer paper swap**

Email your draft to your assigned peer and to jsdonnel@wisc.edu

11/7 **Peer comments due** (with a copy sent to jsdonnel@wisc.edu)  
Professor Donnelly is available for appointments. (Email by Sunday night.)

**Rough-draft deadline 3: peer paper swap**

Email your draft to your assigned peer and to jsdonnel@wisc.edu

Writing Workshop III: Effective Revisions

- Reverse outlines
- Introductions and conclusions
- Follow-up: improving your writing style

11/21 **Peer comments due** (with a copy sent to jsdonnel@wisc.edu)  
Professor Donnelly is available for appointments. (Email by Sunday night.)

11/28 Class Conference Session I

12/5 Class Conference Session II

12/12 Class Conference Session III