

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
SEMESTER I, 2009-2010

History 829- Research Seminar in Latin American History

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Course Description:

The purpose of this seminar is to provide a forum where students at different stages in their research careers can learn more, as well as share their knowledge, about the process of research in Latin America. We will start from three assumptions. First, that the process of research is a human and personal one, and that knowledge and self-knowledge about the human dimension of research can help us be better researchers as well as better analysts of others' research. Second, that the process of research is itself a political and historical one, and that applying our analytical skills to an understanding of research and writing situations helps us successfully to negotiate the challenges and pitfalls we face. And third, that the analysis of documents and other sources is both a search for information, and an exercise in textual criticism.

Unit I of the course, lasting six weeks following our introductory session, will consist of common readings on the methodologies and process involved in analyzing primary documents. In the first four weeks, we will concentrate on sections of *Remembering a Massacre in El Salvador* (see below, in assigned readings section) as a hands-on introduction to documents in context. In the last two weeks, we will combine readings on the social relations and methodology of oral history with a discussion of documents and research problems provided by the students themselves. When we are discussing a document facilitated by a seminar participant, we will ask for a short contextual introduction from the person facilitating the document.

Throughout Unit I, when we read a primary source, we will look at it both as a source of information and as a text. When looking for information, we will ask about connections between this document and other documents, and between it and secondary sources. Depending on what questions we ask, the documents will yield different information. And the questions we ask will be contingent on dialogue among sources, and between sources and our own research agendas. When considering documents as texts, we will be interested in unearthing, as far as it is possible, the process through which they have been produced. What are the relations of power contained therein? What are the interests or agendas of the documents' producers? What emphases and silences might be the result of such interests and power relations?

Between Oct. 23 and Nov. 27, Unit II of the course will alternate weeks of independent research, during which people will work on their projects full-time and I will hold office hours during our class time to help with any issues or problems that come up along the

way, with seminar meetings to discuss research issues and problems more collectively. At our first meeting we will think about which issues we would like discussed at these meetings, in addition to our own projects, and will set up panels or presentations as needed.

December 4-11, the last two weeks of the class, will be reserved for student presentations. Depending on the final size of the class, we might need to go an hour later in order to fit in a discussion of everyone's work. Although a finished paper is not expected at the time of the discussion, each presenter must make available a paper of some kind upon which the discussion will be based. Rather than spend 20-30 minutes per person explaining the project, each presenter will give a five-minute orientation to the issues of their project, and two other students will each give a five-minute comment based on an especially close reading of the draft paper. The rest of the class will then participate in an open discussion of the issues raised by the paper and the topic.

Requirements:

***This course is organized in a modular way, in order to provide the greatest amount of flexibility for people with different research needs and at different stages. Although each student is required to produce the equivalent of a 20-40-page research paper, the actual content of this assignment can be chosen from the following menu of options. The paper will constitute 60% of the overall grade in the seminar.

1) M.A. or dissertation research proposal:

A proposal must generally be around 10 pages long. A review of the literature or theoretical introduction, or a sample chapter, can make up the rest of the page requirements. In most cases, proposal writers will begin with a Library Practicum (see attached sheet). The content of such a practicum, as well as the balance between proposal and review/sample chapter, will be worked out individually with me.

2) M.A. thesis draft, M.A. chapter draft, dissertation chapter draft. Relatively self-explanatory. Specifics can be worked out individually with me; people feeling the need to do a practicum can also talk it over with me.

3) Background research and conceptualization in preparation for field research. In most cases, this will be after the proposal is already written but before the person has gone into the field. The written assignment here will be an extended literature review/theoretical introduction or reflection. For Latin American History students, one option here is Part I-B of their Preliminary Examinations. Special arrangements can be worked out with me.

***Everyone is encouraged and expected to participate in the discussions, both of common readings, and especially of student research. Attendance at all sessions, moreover, especially those where your colleagues are presenting their materials, is the first and most important requirement of the class! Participation will constitute 30% of the overall grade. Taking the time and energy to contribute to class discussion, whether with a comment, question, doubt, or criticism, is **the** crucial component of class

participation. Active participation does not always mean speaking a lot, but it does mean listening to and engaging other people's ideas and comments, and being willing to risk asking a "stupid" question in order to move the discussion forward.

NB: For the last two weeks of Unit I, and as needed in Unit II, each seminar participant will need to copy, or at least have access to, reading materials. I will set up a "Course File" that will be tacked to the corkboard to the right of my office door. In it will be two copies of the readings for the week. People are encouraged to come by early in the week and take one of the copies for xeroxing purposes. Remember that a number of people will need access to these materials, so please don't keep them away from the envelope for a long time. The same procedure will be followed with student papers at the end of the semester.

UNIT I- Common Readings

Sept. 4- Introduction and Organizational Meeting

Book assigned, Weeks 2-6: Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, Erik Ching, and Rafael A. Lara-Martínez, Remembering a Massacre in El Salvador: The Insurrection of 1932, Roque Dalton, and the Politics of Historical Memory (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007). Copies are available at Rainbow Bookstore Cooperative, 426 W. Gilman, 257-6050. A copy is also on three-hour reserve at the College Library in Helen C. White.

Sept. 11- Lindo-Fuentes et al. , pp. 1-96, 273-83.

Sept. 18- Lindo-Fuentes et al. , pp. 97-181, 263-73

Sept. 25- Lindo-Fuentes et al. , pp. 183-215, 284-333

Oct. 2- Lindo-Fuentes et al. , pp. 217-61, 333-58

Oct. 9- Alessandro Portelli, The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Oter Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), pp. 1-58.

******And Documents Provided by the Students******

Oct. 16- Portelli, The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), pp. 3-39.

******And Documents Provided by the Students******

UNIT II-Independent Research, Selected Research Discussions, and Student Presentations

Oct. 23-Office Hours, 2:30-4:30, 5125 Humanities

Oct. 30- Class Meets for a Discussion of Research Problems and Situations

Nov. 6- Office Hours, 2:30-4:30, 5125 Humanities

Nov. 13- Class Meets for a Discussion of Research Problems and Situations

Nov. 20-27- Time Off for Independent Work

Dec. 4-11- Presentations of written work by seminar participants in panel format with comments by colleagues and general discussion. See course requirements, above, for the general format. Specifics to be worked out during the semester. **The purpose of these sessions is not to grill people, but to provide a space to raise research problems and discuss them with a sympathetic and supportive audience. Remember that all research projects--indeed, all published works--are works in progress. All questions of interpretation, organization, narrative strategy, personal doubts or intuitions, are relevant. FEEL FREE TO BRING ANY OR ALL DOUBTS TO THE ATTENTION OF THE GROUP!**

PAPERS DUE FRIDAY, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 18TH, BY 5:00 P.M. AT THE LATEST

HISTORY 829- LIBRARY PRACTICUM

- 1) Pick a Latin American region or country and a "long" century of personal interest. This should ultimately include your research topic.

- 2) Identify the following:
 - a) a list of 20-30 published primary sources for the region and time period chosen (ca. 2 typed pages);

 - b) the three or four most important such sources for your purposes, given the kinds of topics and problems you find interesting. Your practicum report should include a page of remarks on these sources.

 - c) the key library tools and works available to search out the secondary literature relevant to the region and time period (published bibliographies, dissertation abstracts, computer-assisted searches or data bases, etc.). A list of about 1/2 typewritten page should be appended to your practicum report.

 - d) the leading journals of interest published in the country or region under study (ca. 1/2 page).

- 3) The written results of your practicum should be ready for discussion with me and/or your discussion or research subgroup about three weeks into Unit II. One of the purposes of this exercise is to help you identify a research topic. I would appreciate feedback on how the practicum helped or did not help in identifying it.

If you have any questions, please see me.