

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
Department of History
Semester II, 2006-07

History 829- Research Seminar in Modern 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.

In the three weeks of the course following our introductory session, we will read about recent debates and issues in the historical profession, and comment on documents and research problems provided by the students themselves. In this combination, we will seek both to understand the complexities and challenges of historical research and writing, and to involve ourselves in the analysis of some actual documentary sources. When we do the latter, after a short contextual introduction from the person facilitating the document, we will attempt to discuss the material 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?

Unit II of the course will be independent research, during which people will work on their projects full-time. This will be initiated in Week 5, Feb. 23rd. After that, the course will not meet formally until April 20th, when we will begin the presentations. During those weeks, I will hold special seminar office hours during the hours of the course, 2:30-4:30 on Friday afternoons, so that we can address research problems or questions as they come up.

Unit III of the course will consist of seminars to discuss people's research. We will dedicate three regular class periods--4/20, 4/27, and 5/4--to these discussions and, depending on the final size of the class, we might attempt either to start an hour earlier or 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.

After the presentations, people will have approximately a week--until May 11th--to revise their research papers with the benefit of collective discussion and criticism, before turning them in on Friday, May 11th by 5:00 p.m. This clearly means that the people who make their presentations in the last time slot should be closer to a final draft than the people in the first time slot. Please note that this due date is as late as possible for me to get in grades while giving relatively detailed comments. No extensions will be granted beyond that date except in clear cases of medical or family issues, and no incompletes given except in cases of dire health emergency, family crisis, or natural disaster.

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. 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. 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 every week that we meet as a full group, 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.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS, DISCUSSIONS, AND ASSIGNMENTS

UNIT I- Common Readings

Week 1- Jan. 26: Introduction and Organizational Meeting. Discussion of seminar format and syllabus; discussion of possible research areas and topics; arrangement of special sessions for

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research presentations. Possible organization of research circles or discussion subgroups.

Week 2- Feb. 2: Memory, Meaning, and Oral History

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

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******

Week 3- Feb. 9: Listening in the Cold: The Ambivalences and Tribulations of the Oral Historian

Reading: Daniel James, Doña María's Story: Life, History, and Political Identity (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 119-212, 283-97.

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

Week 4- Feb. 16: Objectivity, Meaning, and Engagement

Reading: Stephen Haber, "Anything Goes: Mexico's 'New' Cultural History," Hispanic American Historical Review, 79:2 (May 1999), pp. 309-30.

Florencia E. Mallon, "Time on the Wheel: Cycles of Revisionism and the 'New Cultural History'," Hispanic American Historical Review, 79:2 (May 1999), pp. 331-51.

Mallon, "Bearing Witness in Hard Times: Ethnography and *Testimonio* in a Postrevolutionary Age," in Gilbert M. Joseph (ed.), Reclaiming the Political in Latin American History: Essays from the North (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 311-54.

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

Unit II- Independent Research

Weeks 5-11, Feb. 23-April 13 : Independent Work. Office Hours held for History 829 every Friday afternoon during class hours, 2:30-4:30 p.m.

SPRING BREAK, 31 MARCH- 8 APRIL

Unit III- Research Presentations

Weeks 12-14, April 20-May 4: Discussions of student research, with additional hours scheduled if necessary. 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!**

Week 15- May 7-11: No Formal Meeting; continue paper revisions.

PAPERS DUE FRIDAY, MAY 11TH, BY 5:00 P.M.

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.