Hist 375 – Joseph Smith in Mormon History and Historiography
TTH – 1:35-2:50, 368 MARB
Prof. Grant Underwood
2163 JFSB, 422-7522, gru2@byu.edu
Office Hours: TTH 3:00-4:00 / by appt.

Course Readings:


   The scholarly consensus is that Bushman’s 700-page book, while not perfect, is the best biography of Joseph Smith that has ever been written. It has won numerous awards and is a must-read for serious students of the Prophet’s life. We will read it section by section throughout the semester.

2. **Primary Sources** – assorted; *(electronically posted on Blackboard)*

   All history writing is based on a historian’s engagement with primary sources. For most class sessions, you will have a chance to go behind the polished reconstructions of the past presented by historians and play historian yourself by encountering the very building blocks of history firsthand. In this way, you will get “up close and personal” with the Prophet. You will read selections from his journals, letters, histories, revelations, and other writings. Thanks to the diligence of the LDS Church Historian’s office in general and scholar Dean Jessee in particular, a vast number of these sources—what scholars call “the papers” of Joseph Smith—are available to interested students.

3. **Supplementary Readings** – various scholarly articles and book chapters *(electronically posted on Blackboard)*.

   “Historiography” has two principal meanings. Broadly, it refers to the entire body of written history on a given topic. In this sense, the historiography of Joseph Smith is the sum total of all that has been written about him. Within the academic discipline of history, however, historiography tends to refer to a single study that traces interpretive milestones or turning points in that written history. History writing is an ongoing conversation of sorts. At least as often as the discovery of new evidence, what motivates historians to write is that they think they have come up with a better interpretation of existing evidence. An article (or book) that outlines such “twists and turns” in the historical conversation is what historians typically mean by the term “historiography.”

**General Comments about Course Readings:** You will read in two different ways in this course. First, unless otherwise directed, numbers 1 and 2 above—Rough Stone Rolling (RSR) and assigned Primary Sources (PS)—are to be read closely, word-for-word. Second, unless otherwise directed, Supplementary Readings (#3 above) are to be “read” rapidly, looking for main arguments and general ideas. Normally, you can expect to spend approximately three hours doing the reading for each of our twice-weekly class sessions. The RSR and PS portions of each reading assignment typically total less than 50 pages, and most students will complete this close reading in less than two hours. Page counts for Supplementary Readings for each session vary, but because you will “read” them only to gain general familiarity with their arguments/ideas, one hour should be sufficient to accomplish this objective. The specific readings for each session are listed in the Course Schedule.
Essay Examinations (200 points)

In this course, you will write a midterm and a final exam each worth 100 points. They will be take-home and the questions will be given to you early in the course. Why? When historians write scholarly books and articles or give presentations at academic conferences, they do not do so from memory. Rather, through regular recurrence to, and reflection on, their sources, as well by ongoing revision of their prose, over time they craft compelling and well-written scholarship. I have designed these exams to give you the chance to do the same. The questions highlight major themes and issues that should be on your minds as you read and participate in class discussions. The idea is to reflect on course readings (your sources for purposes of the exams) and class discussions in light of particular questions and to compose, revise, and refine your answers as you go.

Writing Assignments (100 points)

“Digging Deeper” Paper (100 points)

 Basically, this is a small research paper. Zero in on something in one of the readings that particularly interests you and learn more about it. It could be a person, a doctrine, a practice, a controversy, an interpretation, or anything that piques your special interest. Then write an eight-page report presenting the additional information and insight you have gained. See Assignment Guidelines (on Blackboard) for details.

----or-----

Biographies Comparison (100 points)

Early in the course, from a list provided by the professor, select another biography of Joseph Smith that you will read along with Rough Stone Rolling. Once you have completed both RSR and your chosen biography, write an extended—8 page—comparative analysis of the two books. See Assignment Guidelines (on Blackboard) for details.

“My Road Trip with the Prophet”: A Reader’s Journey (150 points)

Reading is the core of this course, and this is a reading-related assignment that should be both fun to do and lastingly meaningful. For each day’s readings, write a single page (or more, if you wish) that describes your engagement with the day’s readings. What insight or new information about Joseph Smith did you gain from these readings? What were your “aha!” moments, your intellectual or spiritual epiphanies? What thoughts struck you with regard to one of the course’s essay questions? You may wish to divide each write-up into separate sections—“New Information and Insights” and “Reflections”; or, you may choose to interweave them. The new information/insights portion may be recorded as a series of bullet points or simple notes, or they may be incorporated in a flowing narrative of what you learned. Proceed in whatever way works best for you. By the end of the semester, you will have created a fascinating, personal record of your own intellectual and spiritual “road trip” with Prophet Joseph Smith.

Road Trip pages are to be submitted electronically by 1:30 pm on each day of class. Each page is worth five points, for a potential class total of 150 points. Because the Road Trip write-ups
represent a personal, subjective engagement with the sources, I will NOT be grading them. You will receive the full five points for each page unless they are too brief or so hastily composed that they are incoherent. The guideline is simple: will you be pleased to keep what you wrote as a record of your thoughts and experience after the course is over? Moreover, properly done, Road Trip write-ups will prepare you to have something to contribute to each class discussion. Submit each write-up to course TA Bradley Kime at bradleykime@hotmail.com.

Class-time Engagement (50 points)

A small number of points are awarded merely for being an academically “engaged” student. This means that you: 1) attend class for the full session (no unexcused tardy arrivals or early departures); 2) come to class having read the assigned readings; 3) listen attentively to the class discussion and comment when you feel so inclined; and 4) do not multitask on your laptop, if you bring one (note taking only, NO social media, internet browsing, etc.). You can earn up to 25 points (one point for each session) for doing #2—you will report #2 at the beginning of each class session—and another 25 points for doing #s 1, 3, and 4—which I will be monitoring throughout class.

Summary of Possible Points

200 Exams (Midterm and Final)
150 “Road Trip” Write-ups
100 “Digging Deeper” paper or Biographies Comparison
50 Questions/Reading Log

500 TOTAL

(A) = 93%  (B-) = 80%  (D+) = 67%
(A-) = 90%  (C+) = 77%  (D) = 63%
(B+) = 87%  (C) = 73%  (D-) = 60%
(B) = 83%  (C-) = 70%  (F) = 59% and lower

Concluding Note:

Be advised that this is not a course for the intellectually or spiritually timid. A student taking HIST 375 should be mature, open-minded, and able to invest 10 hours a week in the course. The class will likely be one of the most interesting, stimulating courses you have ever taken, AND it will also be one of the more demanding. You will read a great deal of fascinating material during the course of the semester and your mind and soul will be stretched in ways you had not before imagined possible. This is not “Chicken Soup for the BYU College Student.” Challenging issues will be engaged. A variety of viewpoints will be encountered. The picture of the Prophet that emerges will not be a glossy Madison Avenue “head shot” but a real-life, warts-and-all portrait of a great man striving in all his humanness and with the help of the Almighty to
build the Kingdom of God. Many years ago, when a sensitive matter regarding the actions of Brigham Young came to light, President John Taylor offered this sage advice that captures the spirit of this course: “Some people will say ‘Oh, don't talk about it.’ I think a full, free talk is frequently of great use; we want nothing secret nor underhanded, and for one I want no association with things that cannot be talked about and will not bear investigation. I wanted to hear Brother Farr's statement about this affair, and I wanted you to hear it, because out of such things, unless properly understood, a great many misunderstandings arise . . . We want facts, and when we get them let us appreciate them, and lay aside our nonsense which so frequently arises from our misconception of things” (Journal of Discourses, 20:265-266). As Pres. Gordon B. Hinckley remarked, “I do not fear truth. I welcome it. But I wish all of my facts to be in their proper context.” (“The Continuing Pursuit of Truth,” Ensign [April 1986], 6.) That is what this course seeks to do. If you feel ready and anxious to plumb the depths of the life of Joseph Smith from an academic as well as spiritual standpoint, this is the course for you. Welcome aboard!