HISTORY 490

Microhistory: An Approach to the Early Modern Past
Brigham Young University, Winter 2010
MWF, 9:00-9:50

“There is another world, but it is in this one.”

-W.B. Yeats

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Office Hours: MWF 11:00-12:00 or by appointment

Course Description:

This course represents the culmination of your years spent studying history at Brigham Young University. Over the next two months, you will produce what is probably your first piece of original scholarship – an article-length essay based on primary sources that makes a fresh contribution to our knowledge of early American history.

While most capstone courses deal with a particular historical period and region (say, early modern Europe) or phenomenon (say, slavery or Indian removal), this one is primarily concerned with a particular way of writing about the past: a methodology called microhistory. Microhistory does not mean “little history,” nor does it merely celebrate the obscure. Rather, it takes seemingly minor actors, events, and problems and uses them to illuminate the largest questions scholars ask. It celebrates history that transcends both the dryness of “social science” approaches and the frothiness of literature, striking a balance between engaging prose and thoughtful argumentation.

Students should focus their research on the early modern period in the Atlantic world, broadly defined. This means, roughly, that your essays should deal with the period 1500-1825 in the Americas, the Caribbean, and those parts of Europe and Africa most deeply connected to the western hemisphere. Because methodology is as important as period or region in this course, you have considerable latitude here; if you want to research a topic somewhat outside of these temporal or geographic parameters, make a case to me.

Required Reading:


Articles and Documents on Learning Suite

Classroom Procedures:

Teaching Method: Discussion of readings

Reading: All reading assignments are to be completed before the class period in which the assignment is to be discussed.

Late Work: Work is due on an appointed day and time. If you fail to turn it in then, you will be docked a full letter grade; each subsequent day late will also result in a letter grade loss.

Computer Policy: I strongly discourage the use of laptop computers and tablets in this class. If you choose to use such a device, you may use it only for note-taking. You must turn off instant messaging, games, or anything similar and keep only one window open—your note-taking document. Violations of this policy will result in loss of points on your final grade. This policy is designed to foster a positive learning environment for all students. Research has shown that students who multitask, going back and forth among note-taking, Facebook, shopping, email, solitaire, and first-person shooters have a significantly decreased ability to retain information conveyed in class or to understand concepts beyond a surface level. More importantly, the negative effects of multitasking, which include distraction and loss of retention, extend to students within viewing range of other students’ screens. For more information, see http://news.stanford.edu/news/2009/august24/multitask-research-study-082409.html.

Phone Policy: Ringing phones do upset us. Turn them off before entering the classroom.

University Policies:

Preventing Sexual Discrimination and Harassment: Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits sex discrimination against any participant in an educational program or activity that receives federal funds. The act is intended to eliminate sex discrimination in education. Title IX covers discrimination in programs, admissions, activities, and student-to-student sexual harassment. BYU’s policy against sexual harassment extends not only to employees of the university, but to students as well. If you encounter unlawful sexual harassment or gender-based discrimination, please talk to your professor; contact the Equal Employment Office at 422-5895 or 367-5689 (24-hours); or contact the Honor Code Office at 422-2847.

Students with Disabilities: Brigham Young University is committed to providing a working and learning atmosphere that reasonably accommodates qualified persons with disabilities. If you have any disability which may impair your ability to complete this course successfully, please contact the Services for Students with Disabilities Office (422-2767). Reasonable academic accommodations are reviewed for all students who have qualified, documented disabilities. Services are coordinated with the student and instructor by the SSD Office. If you need assistance or if you feel you have been unlawfully discriminated against on the basis of disability, you may seek resolution through established grievance policy and procedures by contacting the Equal Employment Office at 422-5895, D-285 ASB.
Academic Honesty Policy: The first injunction of the BYU Honor Code is the call to be honest. Students come to the university not only to improve their minds, gain knowledge, and develop skills that will assist them in their life's work, but also to build character. President David O. McKay taught that 'character is the highest aim of education' (The Aims of a BYU Education, p. 6). It is the purpose of the BYU Academic Honesty Policy to assist in fulfilling that aim. BYU students should seek to be totally honest in their dealings with others. They should complete their own work and be evaluated based upon that work. They should avoid academic dishonesty and misconduct in all its forms, including but not limited to plagiarism, fabrication or falsification, cheating, and other academic misconduct.

Plagiarism Policy: Writing submitted for credit at BYU must consist of the student's own ideas presented in sentences and paragraphs of his or her own construction. The work of other writers or speakers may be included when appropriate (as in a research paper or book review), but such material must support the student's own work (not substitute for it) and must be clearly identified by appropriate introduction and punctuation and by footnoting or other standard referencing.

Respectful Environment Policy: "Sadly, from time to time, we do hear reports of those who are at best insensitive and at worst insulting in their comments to and about others... We hear derogatory and sometimes even defamatory comments about those with different political, athletic, or ethnic views or experiences. Such behavior is completely out of place at BYU, and I enlist the aid of all to monitor carefully and, if necessary, correct any such that might occur here, however inadvertent or unintentional."

"I worry particularly about demeaning comments made about the career or major choices of women or men either directly or about members of the BYU community generally. We must remember that personal agency is a fundamental principle and that none of us has the right or option to criticize the lawful choices of another." President Cecil O. Samuelson, Annual University Conference, August 24, 2010

"Occasionally, we ... hear reports that our female faculty feel disrespected, especially by students, for choosing to work at BYU, even though each one has been approved by the BYU Board of Trustees. Brothers and sisters, these things ought not to be. Not here. Not at a university that shares a constitution with the School of the Prophets." Vice President John S. Tanner, Annual University Conference, August 24, 2010

Assignments:

1. Primary Source/Possibilities paper: This brief report, which should be 1 1/2 or 2 pages long, will deal with primary sources you find in the library during and after our class session on September 7. You will briefly describe the sources you’ve located (one in print, the other in one of the library’s online databases) and suggest what a microhistorian might do with them.

2. Primary Source/Topic Paper: This essay outlines a potential topic for your research paper and the primary documents you might use to write it. The essay, which should be about 2 pages long, should tell me what time, place, and people(s) you are interested in studying – and, most importantly, what primary sources you intend to use to do this, and what they seem to reveal to you at the beginning stages of your research. The essay (again, 2 or so pages long) should be followed by a formal bibliography of these primary sources. Due September 19.
3. Historiographical Essay: This essay describes the state of academic research on your research topic. It details what the scholarship looks like, what changes or trends have shaped it, and suggests (even if provisionally) where your final paper will fit and what kind of contribution it will make. This essay should be three or four pages long. Parts of this essay may be used in both the prospectus and the final paper. Due September 28.

The essay should also include a proper bibliography of secondary sources (scholarly books and articles) that you will use to help frame your final paper. Although there are no hard and fast rules in this regard, I would expect to see between 10 and 15 such sources.

4. Prospectus: In 4-6 pages, this document outlines your paper topic, explains how other historians have approached the subject, and details at least some of the primary sources you intend to use in your essay. When this assignment comes due, you won’t know everything about your topic; indeed, much of what you write in the prospectus will blow up in your face as you dig into the real research. Still, the prospectus must suggest a provisional argument for the final paper. It must also include a formal bibliography of important secondary and (especially) primary sources. You will give a 5-minute oral presentation of your prospectus to your classmates. Paper due October 5; presentations October 8-12.

5. Critique of Peer Prospectus: Each student will write a two-page critique of a peer’s essay prospectus. Due October 12.

6. First Draft – This is a full draft of your essay, including endnotes. Your thesis should be well-developed, your evidence convincing, your style compelling, and your conclusion intelligent. This should in no sense be a “rough” draft; the more work you do here to polish your essay, the less you’ll have to do at the end. As with your prospectus, you will present your first draft to your classmates – mercifully, you won’t read it, but rather you’ll speak about how the process of writing has changed your sense of the project. Due November 12.

7. Critique of Peer First Draft – Each student will write a two-page critique of a peer’s first draft. Due November 16.

8. Final Draft – This assignment will be 20-25 pages long, written in 12-point, Times New Roman font or equivalent, with one-inch margins on all sides. We will discuss expectations throughout the term. Due December 5.

Participation: You will work in groups during the semester, with each group (of three students) leading discussions (or parts of discussions) in each class meeting. Prior to each discussion, the group should communicate and compile a list of questions for the class to address.

Grading:

1. Primary Source/Possibilities Paper: 25 points
2. Primary Source/Topic Paper: 50 points
3. Historiography Paper: 50 points
4. Prospectus/Presentation: 100 points
5. Critique of Peer Prospectus: 25 points
6. First Draft/Presentation: 125 points
7. Critique of Peer First Draft: 25 points
8. Final Draft: 600 points
Total: 1000 points

The usual grading scale applies. There is no curve; you get what you earn.
93-100% = A  
92-90% = A-  
89-87% = B+  
86-83% = B  
82-80% = B-  
79-77% = C+  
76-73% = C  
72-70% = C-  
69-67% = D+  
66-63% = D  
62-60% = D-  
60-0% = F

Schedule:

Week I:

August 27: Introduction

Reading: None

August 29: Defining Microhistory


August 31: Microhistory and the Early Modern Atlantic World


Week II:

September 3: Labor Day, No Class

September 5: Finding Sources (Meet in HBLL)

Reading: None

September 7: Interpreting Sources

Reading: None

PRIMARY SOURCE/POSSIBILITIES ESSAY DUE IN CLASS

Week III:

September 10: Creative Interpretations

Reading: Douglas Winiarski, “‘Pale Blewish Lights’ and a Dead Man’s Groan: Tales of the Supernatural from Eighteenth-Century Plymouth, Massachusetts,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 55, no. 4 (Oct. 1998), 497-530; Guido Ruggiero, “The Strange Death of Margarita Marcellini:

September 12: Arguing with Microhistory


September 14: Historiography and Microhistory


Week IV:

September 17: Style and Substance

Reading: Harline, *Miracles at the Jesus Oak*, entire.

September 19: NO CLASS

PRIMARY SOURCE/TOPIC PAPER DUE BY 5 P.M.

September 21: NO CLASS

Week V:

September 24: NO CLASS

September 26: NO CLASS

September 28: NO CLASS

HISTORIOGRAPHY PAPER DUE BY 5 P.M.

Week VI:

NOTE: Each student must meet with Prof. Hodson at least once this week.

October 1: Microhistory and the Author


Discussion: Group 2

October 3: NO CLASS

October 5: NO CLASS

PROSPECTUS DUE BY 5 P.M. SECOND COPY TO PEER REVIEWER.
Week VI:

October 8: Prospectus Presentations
October 10: Prospectus Presentations
October 12: NO CLASS (Peer Group Meetings)

PROSPECTUS CRITIQUES DUE BY 5 P.M. SECOND COPY TO PEER AUTHOR

Week VII:

October 15: NO CLASS
October 17: NO CLASS
October 19: NO CLASS

Week VIII:

NOTE: Each student must meet with Prof. Hodson at least once this week.
October 22: NO CLASS (Individual Consultations)
October 24: NO CLASS (Individual Consultations)
October 26: NO CLASS (Individual Consultations)

Week IX:

October 29: NO CLASS
October 31: NO CLASS

*November 1: Jensen Lecture, Edward Muir, Northwestern University, 11:00 AM, HBLL Auditorium

November 2: NO CLASS

Week X:

November 5: Presentations: From Prospectus to Draft
November 7: Presentations: From Prospectus to Draft
November 9: Presentations: From Prospectus to Draft

Week XI:

November 12: NO CLASS
FIRST DRAFTS DUE BY 5 P.M. SECOND COPY TO PEER REVIEWER.

November 14: NO CLASS

November 16: Peer Group Meetings

FIRST DRAFT CRITIQUES DUE BY 5 P.M. SECOND COPY TO PEER AUTHOR

Week XII:

November 19: Responding to Criticism

Reading: Hodson, “Exile on Spruce Street: An Acadian History,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 67, no 2 (April 2010); referees’ reports from *William and Mary Quarterly*.

Discussion: Group 3 (Hodson, “Exile on Spruce Street”); Group 4 (WMQ referees’ reports).

November 21: NO CLASS

November 23: NO CLASS

Week XIII:

NOTE: Each student must meet with Prof. Hodson at least once this week.

November 26: NO CLASS (Individual Consultations)

November 28: NO CLASS (Individual Consultations)

November 30: NO CLASS (Individual Consultations)

Week XIV:

December 3: NO CLASS

December 5: NO CLASS/JUDGMENT DAY

FINAL PAPERS DUE BY 5 P.M.