Description and Objectives

The main objective of this course is to help you complete your capstone history thesis, your chance to show that you can do what historians do. Reading history shapes how we understand ourselves and our world. Hence, writing history shapes not only our own understanding, but that of others. And that is your primary task for this course, to produce a piece of original history, based on primary sources, that contributes something of your own to the historical record, to help us understand where we’ve come from or how we got here.

The first section of the course, after a very brief remedial on the basic points of research and writing, is a short seminar on environmental history. We hope to accomplish this by reading a couple books and half a dozen articles, all of which will serve as examples of the range of topics open to you, stand as models of how environmental history is done, and will display the kinds sources that have been used in the field. Your thesis must be on an environmental topic, but it can fit into any time or place in history. During this first section of the course, it will be your responsibility to find both primary sources and a topic, and you’ll have to move quickly.

All you write should be aimed at a public audience larger than a single professor, and your goal for this class will be to write a piece that may have the promise of future publication.

Advice for Success in Writing your Capstone Paper

1. Invest the Necessary Time. This course takes a lot of time. You have to become the expert on your topic in just over 3 short months. On average, at the university, you should spend 3 hours in homework for each course credit hour. This means at least 9 hours per week outside of class. During the research period when class does not meet, you should expect to be researching and writing at least 12 hours per week, and ideally more.

2. Get off to a Good Start. A strong finish will probably not compensate for a slow start. Each hour spent working in the first weeks will be far more valuable to you than an hour’s work in the last two weeks. In particular, don’t put off finding a topic and its primary sources.

3. Primary Sources Must be the Main Source of your Evidence. If you cannot find primary sources to answer your historical questions, you need to change your questions. As soon as you run into a block in finding primary sources, come talk to me and I can help.

4. Your Paper Must be Original. You must demonstrate that you have contributed something new to the historical record. You don’t have to change the world or claim any earth-shattering discovery, but you must use and interpret primary sources and assert your own ideas, whether they support, contradict, or add to what we already know about the past. This is not a term paper where you simply report or summarize what other scholars have said. You are the scholar. This is a basic expectation of the course and, in fact, not all that hard to accomplish. There is so much we do not know.

5. Meet with Me. I consider myself a partner in your project, just short of a co-author. Utilize my expertise, challenge my ignorance. During the research period, meet with me at least once a week during class time. And during the first month of class, come talk as often as you need to to get a topic nailed down.

Required Books

Kate Turabian, *Manual for Writers of Term Papers*, Chicago, any edition (latest, 7th ed. ISBN: 0226823377) (An older edition is fine, if you have one.)


*If you have read either of the two books above, let me suggest J.R. McNeill’s *Something New under the Sun*, as an alternative to one of them.

**Late Policy:** Late assignments will be penalized 10% and will not be accepted more than a week late. The draft, however, cannot be late, as a fellow student will critique it. Papers are due at the beginning of class on their due date.

**Plagiarism:** I fail those who blatantly plagiarize the work of others. Plagiarism is to steal someone else’s words or ideas and try to pass them off as your own. Self-plagiarism will also result in a fail. Your paper must be a new creation. You cannot simply expand a paper previously written for another class. Previous work can have a place in the project, but you must consult me first.

**Response Papers, 10%:** Two-page response papers are required for each day in which we discuss the historiography. These will not be given a letter grade but are pass/fail. The point is to make sure you are thinking about the readings, to help you have something to say in discussions. Your participation in class discussion may be factored into the weight of this grade.

In the first book, **Steinberg**, the only questions I want you to consider are: What is environmental history? What topics comprise it? And what ideas does it give you about what you might do for your thesis?

In all the **subsequent readings**, consider the following questions when writing the papers. What is the author’s main question? What is the central thesis or contention? How did the author organize the information? What primary sources did the author use? Does this work give you potential topics and/or types of sources you might use? When we read two articles for a class day, dedicate about half of your writing to each.


1. Provide a title, which of course may later change. 2. Present your thesis question, which should be narrowly focused and well defined. What are you trying to learn or discover? 3. In one paragraph, describe what it is you propose to write on. In another, tell me how you will use sources to find the answer(s) to your thesis question. 4. Provide a bibliography listing your primary sources, each with a short annotation for each primary source telling where it is, what it contains, and why it’s useful. 5. Then list secondary sources by scholars that have worked on the same or similar questions.

No title-page on the proposal. And remember, you do not want a thesis (an answer to you research question) yet, but you need the questions and sources necessary to make one as research proceeds.

Proposals are very important. In real academic research, if you can’t write a good proposal, you will never get the money to fund your research. Put some effort into this.

**Office Visits, 5%:** During the research period I expect a weekly visit, which must be during class time. Failure to do so will bring a 5% reduction in your grade. Weekly visits are the best way to improve your paper and avoid critical pitfalls. I’m providing a sign up sheet for you to schedule these at [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0ArgReDpX5VRVdHdDNGi1wRWRyMlMxc21HMmoNzdU](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0ArgReDpX5VRVdHdDNGi1wRWRyMlMxc21HMmoNzdU)

**Historiographical Review, 5%:** Read and summarize some of the more important secondary books and/or articles on your topic. You must get a sense of what other scholars have said about your topic. Choose at least 5 of them and summarize their relevant arguments and content in a few paragraphs. You don’t necessarily have to read all of them in their entirety. Read introductions and focus on chapters and sections that are relevant to your research. You should see this as the beginning of your research and as a time in which you can refine your topic. In fact, it’s quite common to revise your thesis question based on your readings. If that is the case, give me your new question at the bottom of the review. Here is an example of an historiographical review: [https://dl.dropbox.com/u/26494062/0%20General%20Course%20docs/Sample%20Historiographical%20Review.pdf](https://dl.dropbox.com/u/26494062/0%20General%20Course%20docs/Sample%20Historiographical%20Review.pdf) Bring this assignment to your first individual research meeting with me.
Outline: Bring a copy of your outline by the week noted below in schedule so the two of us can go over it in our weekly meeting. You can do this earlier, of course. It is often best if brief and not too detailed. I’ve outlined whole books in less than a page. But you must think about organization before you write much.

Draft and Research Notes, 30%: 16+ pages, 2 copies, due at beginning of class.

Turn in your research notes (one copy) with the draft. They are worth 20% of the draft’s grade, and will be evaluated on both how much research you’ve done and their organization. As we’ll discuss in class, if you do not systematically collect and organize your research, you will find it difficult to write a coherent thesis. I require you to use a note-taking system.

The draft is a complete double-spaced paper that will be critiqued by myself and a fellow student. Combined with your notes, it is worth more than the final paper. Format as follows: Courier New, 11pt font, (footnotes in same font), 1" margins, double-spaced, numbered pages. We are primarily concerned with your argument, so include necessary tables, footnotes and a bibliography. You must turn in 2 copies, and you must attend this day in order to receive a draft to critique.

In an early footnote quickly discuss the primary sources used. What are they, what limitations do they hold, and what about them was valuable? This should be in the final draft as well.

Critique, 10%: 750 words, double-spaced; 2 copies. Due at beginning of class. Prepare to present your critique orally, 7-12 minutes. Your primary concern is the argument and whether or not you are convinced. Do each of the following in the written critique. 1. Provide an entirely new or revised title. 2. State what you think the thesis question is, and then, in your own words, the thesis itself. 3. Are you persuaded, by argument and evidence, that their thesis is valid? Do they prove their thesis? Should they change their thesis, or change the way they argue it? What are the thesis’ weaknesses, if any? 5. Is the thesis backed by primary evidence, and are these documented in footnotes?

These are to be informal, but honest and constructive. Your primary task is to help the writer improve the final product, and how well you do that determines your grade. Consider these elements of the argument as well: are there sections and paragraphs that should be eliminated as they are irrelevant to the thesis?

Thesis, 25%: 16-18 pages. There are 2 copies to turn in. 1 hard copy and 1 electronic copy attached to miller@byu.edu. Due the last class day of class.

As regards format, I insist on the following: Courier New, 11pt font, 1" margins, title page, numbered pages, double-spaced text, footnotes (no end notes or parenthetical citations) and a bibliography. Turn it in stapled or clipped, no folders or binders, please. A table of contents is optional. I do like to see maps when appropriate to the topic. Don’t insert blank pages anywhere. If it is apparent you have employed margins, fonts, line spacing or excessive quoting to reach a page count, it will count against you.
Course Schedule

HISTORY 200, AGAIN? (The Shorter, Sweeter Version)

September
Tu 04 Dancing the Thesis: Basic Steps
   Description of Assignments
   Finding Primary Sources
   Begin reading Steinberg

Th 06 The thesis question: How to “conceive” history?
   Research Systems
   Thesis Formatting

HISTORIOGRAPHY
Tu 11 Steinberg discussion, parts 1 and 2
   Response paper due

Th 13 Steinberg discussion, part 3
   Response paper due

Tu 18 Cronon discussion, entire
   Response paper due

   Response paper due

   Response paper due

   Response paper due

RESEARCH
October
Tu 02 Proposals due. One copy. Be prepared to present (roughly 5 minutes) your proposal to the class.

Th 04 Primary Source presentation. Share with the class a significant primary source, or a selection from one, that you might use in your paper. This could take 10-15 minutes. Bring copies for all if you think that would be helpful. Tell us what questions it answers, what are the possible interpretations, how might it contribute to your thesis, how would you categorize it in your note-taking system. Does it help you fine tune your question?

Tu 09 Primary Source Presentations continue.

Oct 11 – Nov 13
   Individual meetings in my office at least once per week during class time. Sign up here: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0ArgReDpX5VRVDhdDNG1wRWRyM1Mxc21HMmoyNzdieUE
   There are two assignments due during this period, which must be turned in during individuals visits. To the first meeting, bring your *Historiographical Review*. On subsequent meetings, bring work to date, including research notes, and primary sources. We will discuss your research progress, sources you are using, and developing ideas. On the week of Nov 6 and 8, turn in your paper’s **Outline**.

WRITING
November
Tu 15 How to critique a paper’s argument and assist in its editing.

   Drafts (2 paper copies) due at beginning of class period. **You can’t be late.** If you can’t make class on time, get copies to me beforehand. Bring two copies, one for me, one for your critic.

Tu 27 Critiques due. Bring two copies, one for me, one for author. Also, return the author the paper you critiqued, with markings and marginal comments.

December
Th 06 Last Class day. Class will meet.

   Thesis due. I need by today 1 paper copy in my hands and 1 electronic copy emailed as an attachment to miller@byu.edu.