HISTORY 490—SENIOR SEMINAR ON AMERICAN SLAVERY
Winter Semester, 2011

General Information:

This senior seminar in historical research and writing is designed as the culmination of your undergraduate history career. It combines a short historiographical seminar on an important historical topic—slavery—with your own research for and writing of a thesis-based paper on some aspect of that topic. Further, you will write a critique of the monographs we read, present your seminar paper orally, and prepare written and oral critiques of the seminar papers of your colleagues in the class.

In researching and writing your senior paper and critiquing those of other students, you will put into practice everything you have learned (and much that you can learn only through experience.) Your paper should be your best effort and reflect the finest thinking and writing of which you are capable. It is vitally important that you attend all class sessions. Please do not schedule events that would necessitate your missing days of class or that would interfere with the time needed for research and writing.

In addition, you are expected to meet with me individually throughout the term during office hours or during our class hours on those days on which we do not meet. Beginning January 14, on each Friday you will also turn in a research log detailing hours spent on reading or research for this class, sources examined, and writing done.

N.B.: Prior to taking History 490, you must have taken History 200 along with several 300-level courses so that you understand historical method and have had experience with critical examination of primary and secondary sources and of historical monographs. Those who have not yet taken History 200 or who are doing so this term must drop the class.

Course Procedure:

Historiographical seminar: During the first weeks of the semester we will read and discuss one synthetic work and two monographs that have approached the same topic—American slavery—from very different perspectives. The following are available for purchase
in the bookstore:


Following our discussion of the books, you will write a five-page critique of Elkins’s and Blassingame’s works comparing the approaches taken and evaluating the relative success of each. This critique will be due on Monday, February 7, at the beginning of class.

Proposal: Also during the beginning weeks of class, you will prepare a proposal for your paper. The proposal, approximately five pages in length, should state your topic and its parameters--i.e., the paper’s specific geographical and chronological foci. Second, it should also summarize the secondary literature on the topic and describe just where your paper will fit within the historiographical discussion. Thus, your paper may not just re-do another historian’s work; your paper must make a significant contribution to historical knowledge by breaking new ground in some fashion.

Third, you should indicate a tentative thesis and the methodology you plan to use--what sources will you consult, and what questions will you ask of your data? Fourth, you should include a preliminary bibliography, divided into primary and secondary sources. This should include all sources that appear to be relevant, even though you may not have had time to read each yet. The proposal is due on Wednesday, January 26, at the beginning of class. I will critique your proposals and return them to you by February 2.

Seminar Paper: During the next few weeks of the term, you will research and write your research paper. Your seminar paper should be a thesis-based paper and make a scholarly contribution to American history. It should be from 18 to 20 pages of text and based largely on primary sources. Any topic having some relation to American slavery is permissible. Be sure that you have ready access to sufficient primary sources to make your study feasible. You should, of course, understand the secondary literature on the topic so that you can place your work within that historical discussion.

The paper should be well-organized **with complete documentation of**
all sources, quotations, and ideas. If you paraphrase, you must put ideas into your own words; if you alter the source only slightly, you are plagiarizing, even if you use a footnote. Further, remember, that to fail to credit others not only for their words but for their ideas is to steal their work. Plagiarism is an honor code violation and will be dealt with as such. You will receive a grade of zero on any work that contains deliberate plagiarism. (For more information on what constitutes plagiarism, please see the relevant section in the current BYU undergraduate catalogue.)

Correct, grammatical English is the minimum acceptable standard for a senior seminar paper; gracefully written prose is the objective. Please use Turabian, seventh edition, for footnotes (or endnotes) and bibliographic form. Please note that I will not accept work with parenthetical references.

A note about research on the internet and in electronic data bases: Primary sources available in electronic form can be very helpful, but the quality of information on the internet and even on CD-ROM varies tremendously—all the way from reliable web sites designed by government or university archivists following strict scholarly standards to sites thrown together by persons with some ax to grind and little regard for accuracy.

Unfortunately, there is far more variability with electronic sources than with printed primary sources, most of which have some kind of editorial control and the best of which have been prepared by experts who adhere to high standards of documentary editing. Further, historians should be able to handle manuscript and print sources as well as electronic data.

Thus, your paper may not rely solely on electronic databases, and you must include a short annotation in your bibliography for any you do use. Please indicate what entity designed and maintains the site and why you believe information contained therein is reliable.

PAPER DUE DATE: The first draft of the paper is due on Monday, March 21, and will constitute 15 percent of your final grade; the final draft is due on Wednesday, April 13, and will compose 50 percent of your total grade.

Oral Report: You will also present an oral summary of your paper for approximately 20 minutes in a forum based on the model of a professional historical meeting. One of your fellow students will then orally critique your paper for approximately five minutes. There will be two presentations and critiques per class hour. Please see the calendar of this syllabus for scheduled dates. We will draw straws to determine the order of oral presentations.

Written Critiques of Colleagues' Work: In addition to writing your paper and presenting it orally, you will write critiques of the
work of two of your colleagues. A good critique is a helpful evaluation of a person’s work. A perceptive commentator not only points out problems but also praises what the writer has done well. Thus, one does not come to a colleague’s work with knives drawn, ready to slash the work to ribbons, but one applies the golden rule: if this were my paper, what would I want to have someone point out so that I could turn it into an article that I would be proud to have my grandchildren read? The commentator evaluates the strength of the thesis, relevance and sufficiency of the evidence, the logical development of the argument, and clarity and power of the prose.

Each critique should be approximately 5 pages and will be due on March 28. (Please bring two copies of each critique—one for the instructor and one for the person whose work you are assessing.) You will also orally critique one of those papers on an assigned date during the period March 30-April 11, or until all oral presentations have been given.

PLEASE NOTE: All work must be finished by the beginning of class on the day of the assigned deadline. Late work will not be accepted, except for cases of serious illness or death in the family. Further, no "incomplete" grades will be given for this class.

Grades will be weighted as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critiques of Monographs</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Draft</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Written critiques of colleagues' work</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral presentation and class discussion</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research logs</td>
<td>5%</td>
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The following books are required for this course and are available for purchase in the bookstore:


Schedule of Class Meetings and Assignments:

January 5--Introduction

January 7--The Historical Process and the Nature of History
READINGS: Begin Kolchin, American Slavery

January 10--Slavery, Part 1
READINGS: Kolchin, American Slavery

January 12--Slavery, Part 2
READINGS: Turabian, A Manual for Writers, pp. 5-23.

January 14--Defining a Subject and Writing the Proposal for the Paper (research/reading logs due)
READINGS: Kolchin, American Slavery; begin defining subject for paper

January 17--Martin Luther King Holiday

January 19--Discussion of Kolchin, Part 1
READINGS: Elkins, Slavery

January 21--Discussion of Kolchin, Part 2
READINGS: Elkins, Slavery (research/reading logs due)

January 24--Discussion of Elkins, Part 1
READINGS: Blassingame, Slave Community

January 26--Discussion of Elkins, Part 2
READINGS: Blassingame, Slave Community
Seminar paper proposals due at the beginning of class.

January 28--Discussion of Blassingame, Part 1 (research/reading logs due)

January 31--Discussion of Blassingame, Part 2
READINGS: Turabian, pp. 24-47, 129-130.

February 2--Fundamentals of Research
READINGS: Turabian, pp. 48-61.

February 4--Fundamentals of Research and Argumentation (research logs due)

February 7--Fundamentals of Writing, Part 1
Critique of Elkins and Blassingame due at beginning of class
READINGS: Turabian, pp. 98-121 and Part III--"Style."
Strunk and White, Elements of Style
February 9--Fundamentals of Writing, Part 2

February 11--Fundamentals of Writing, Part 3 (research logs due)

February 14--Footnote and Bibliographic Form; no class meetings until March 2. REMEMBER, RESEARCH LOGS ARE DUE IN MY OFFICE EACH FRIDAY BY 10:00 A.M.

March 2--meet to discuss progress on papers; no additional class meetings until March 21.

March 21--First draft of paper due at 10:00 a.m. in class. Please bring original plus two xeroxed copies of paper for those critiquing your work. (Be sure to keep a copy for your records.) We will draw straws to determine the order of the oral presentations.

March 23 and 25--no class; work on critiques; research logs due on March 25.

March 28--All critiques due at 10:00 a.m. in class. Short class meeting to exchange critiques.
   READINGS: Turabian, pp. 122-128.

March 30--Begin oral presentations (two per class)
   20-minute presentation by writer
   5-minute comment

April 1--Oral presentations; research logs due

April 4--Oral presentations

April 6--Oral presentations

April 8--Oral presentations; research logs due

April 11--Oral presentations

April 13--Final version of seminar paper due in my office by 10:00 a.m. NO EXCEPTIONS! Please bring the first draft on which I wrote along with your final draft.