HIST 499: Senior Seminar in History

Sample Syllabus

Instructor:
Office location:
Office hours:
Mailbox:
Phone:
E-mail:

Course Description and Core Objectives

HIST 499: Senior Seminar in History is the culmination of your work as a history major at UNR. The class is divided into three main parts:

• researching and writing your senior thesis, with guidance from a faculty member in the history department who will act as your advisor
• attending and participating in a seminar that meets five times on Tuesday nights
• giving an oral presentation of your research to history faculty, students, friends, and family at the end of the semester

The seminar is designed to help you through the process of writing the senior thesis. It operates, on one level, as a kind of “support group” where you can discuss your progress and challenges during the semester with your peers. The seminar also provides a structure for producing the senior thesis with a series of tasks and deadlines to help you complete your project.

HIST 300: Historical Research and Writing and six credits in 300 or 400 level courses are a prerequisite for HIST 499

HIST 499 satisfies Core Objective 14 (Application) of the Silver Core Curriculum: “Students will be able to demonstrate their knowledge and skills developed in previous Core and major classes by completing a project or structured experience of practical significance.”

By researching and writing a senior thesis and sharing the results of their work with classmates (in the seminar) and the community (in the oral presentations), students will demonstrate and integrate knowledge and skills gained in previous courses, particularly those addressing the following Core Objectives: Effective Composition and Communication (CO1), Critical Analysis and Use of Information (CO3), History and Culture (CO5), and Cultures, Societies, and Individuals (CO6).
Student Learning Outcomes and Correlation to Core Objectives

After successfully completing this course, students will be able to:
1. articulate an original research question to investigate through historical research (CO3, CO5, CO6, CO14)
2. find, analyze, and draw reasoned conclusions from primary and secondary sources (CO3, CO5, CO14)
3. express ideas clearly and persuasively, both orally and in writing (CO1)
4. share ideas and critique historical works as part of a collegial community of scholars (CO1, CO3, CO5)
5. synthesize their research findings and present them in a manner appropriate to a general audience (CO1, CO3, CO14)

Assessment

It is mandatory to attend ALL seminar meetings and complete ALL the assigned deadlines and requirements. PLEASE NOTE: You may be dropped from the course for any unexcused absence (only a documented medical emergency or death in the family qualifies as an excused absence) or failure to complete an assigned work by the deadlines listed below.

To graduate with a major in history you must complete HIST 499 with a grade of C or better. Final grades are based on the following:

- 70 points to be awarded by your thesis advisor on the quality of the thesis
- 20 points to be awarded by the undergraduate advisor based on your participation in seminar
- 10 points awarded by your thesis advisor on the quality of your final oral presentation

Everybody is different, but in order to complete a project of this magnitude count on devoting 10-15 hours a week to work on your thesis during the course of the semester. It is essential to remain in regular contact with your thesis advisor, especially around the times when work is due so you can get feedback at each stage of your project. You are responsible for keeping your advisor informed of your progress and for seeking help when needed.

Copies of the thesis proposal and bibliography, outline, first draft and final version must be submitted to both the undergraduate advisor and your thesis advisor by the dates listed below. Please send copies of your assignments to the undergraduate advisor by e-mail.

Grading Scale

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<thead>
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<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94–100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A−</td>
<td>90–93%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87–89%</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>83–86%</td>
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<td>B−</td>
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<td>C+</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
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<td>C−</td>
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<tr>
<td>D+</td>
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<td>D</td>
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**General Expectations**

HIST 499 gives you an opportunity to demonstrate that you have mastered the analytical and research tools of the historian. We expect you to take it seriously and to do the best work you can in this class. If you cannot demonstrate that you have a mastered the minimum skill level that we expect from our majors, you will not pass the class.

We expect that your thesis should be 30-40 pages in length and demonstrate advanced research, writing, and analytical skills. It is important to meet with your thesis advisor regularly and follow the advice you receive regarding approaches to your topic, sources to examine, and suggestions for improving your work. The following are some things your advisor will pay particular attention to when evaluating your senior thesis.

- the significance and originality of your thesis
- your awareness and use of textual sources for research (e.g. books, journal articles, newspapers, magazines, digital databases, websites, interlibrary loan services, manuscript collections, etc.)
- your ability to analyze sources and reach appropriate conclusions based on the historical evidence
- the persuasiveness of your argument
- your use of evidence drawn from a wide range of primary and secondary sources
- how clearly you express your ideas
- your ability to organize evidence into a logical, coherent essay
- careful attention to spelling and grammar
- correct and consistent citations of sources via footnotes and bibliographical information (as set out in the *Chicago Manual of Style*, which is available on the Knowledge Center home page under Style Guides for Research Papers).

Also useful and recommended is Kate L. Turabian *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 3rd ed., 2007).

In the seminar, we expect you to provide detailed reports on your progress and any problems you may encounter as you refine your research topic, locate sources, analyze materials, develop your thesis, and write your paper. Your seminar grade will depend on the quality of your progress reports and your contributions to group discussions. One purpose of the seminar is to create a community of scholars who can share ideas and offer advice and feedback to each other. Pay careful attention to the observations and contributions of your classmates. Ask questions to find out more about their research and to help them articulate their arguments. If you come across primary and secondary sources in your own research that could help another student, let the student know. By the end of the semester, you should have a good grasp of the range of topics being examined in HIST 499 and feel completely comfortable talking about your own research with others in the class.
In the oral presentation you will have the opportunity to teach a mini class. It’s an opportunity to provide a clear and concise overview of your project and answer questions posed by the audience confidently, professionally, and knowledgeably. The best way to prepare for this is to make sure your essay meets the criteria listed above. If you have thoroughly researched your topic and explained your thesis in a persuasive and logical manner in your paper, you should have no problem demonstrating these same skills in the oral presentation. The oral presentation will give you an opportunity to take a step back from what you’ve done and explain it terms understandable to those who are interested but might not know much about your topic. It’s really about communication.

**Deadlines and Policies Regarding Missed Work**

All written work is due in class on the dates indicated in the schedule below. Late assignments will be penalized (3 points deducted from your grade for the late work) unless you have contacted me and your thesis advisor before or on the due date to arrange an extension.

**Academic Dishonesty**

I expect all students to do their own work in this course unless I have specifically assigned a group activity or project. Copying someone else's work, or allowing your own work to be copied, is dishonest and unfair to other students who are striving to complete assignments and essays on their own.

The university’s Academic Standards policy states:

Academic dishonesty is against university as well as the system community standards. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following:

Plagiarism: defined as submitting the language, ideas, thoughts or work of another as one's own; or assisting in the act of plagiarism by allowing one's work to be used in this fashion.

Cheating: defined as (1) obtaining or providing unauthorized information during an examination through verbal, visual or unauthorized use of books, notes, text and other materials; (2) obtaining or providing information concerning all or part of an examination prior to that examination; (3) taking an examination for another student, or arranging for another person to take an exam in one's place; (4) altering or changing test answers after submittal for grading, grades after grades have been awarded, or other academic records once these are official. . . .

Sanctions for violations of university academic standards may include the following:
(1) filing a final grade of “F”; (2) reducing the student’s final course grade one or two full grade points; (3) awarding a failing mark on the test or paper in question; (4) requiring the student to retake the test or resubmit the paper.

Copying someone else’s entire paper or article is a clear example of academic dishonesty, but note that plagiarism can take other, less obvious forms as well. “Language, ideas, thoughts or work of another” includes any material used in your assignments and essays that was written or produced by others. Using brief phrases or sentences from books, articles, internet sites, documents, or other sources without letting your reader know where they came from is a form of plagiarism. You must properly acknowledge your use of other people’s words by placing them in quotation marks and citing all sources used in your paper. Even if you paraphrase someone else’s ideas and do not quote them directly, you must still indicate where those ideas came from. Citations should also be given for little-known facts and statistics.

Any student found violating academic standards in this course will receive an F in the course. In addition, all cases of academic dishonesty are reported to the Office of Student Conduct and become part of the student’s academic record. Potential employers as well as the directors of graduate and professional programs to which students may apply can request copies of these records, in which case the academic dishonesty charge will be disclosed.

**Academic Success Services**

Your student fees cover use of the Tutoring Center, the University Writing Center, and the Math Center. Students are encouraged to take advantage of these services as needed. Tutoring Center: ph. 784-6801 or visit www.unr.edu/tutoring University Writing Center: ph. 784-6030 or visit www.unr.edu/writing_center Math Center: ph. 784-4433 or visit www.unr.edu/mathcenter

**Students with Disabilities**

The University of Nevada, Reno is committed to equal opportunity in education for all students, including those with documented physical disabilities or documented learning disabilities. If you have a documented disability and will be requiring assistance, please contact the instructor or the Disability Resource Center (Thompson Building Suite 101) as soon as possible to arrange for appropriate accommodations.

**Audio and Video Recording**

Surreptitious or covert video-taping of class or unauthorized audio recording of class is prohibited by law and by Board of Regents policy. This class may be videotaped or audio recorded only with the written permission of the instructor. In order to accommodate students with disabilities, some students may be given permission to record class lectures and discussions. Therefore, students should understand that their comments during class may be recorded.
Schedule of Meetings and Work Due

JANUARY 20: INTRODUCTION

JANUARY 27: MEET in KNOWLEDGE CENTER, ROOM 114
*We will be meeting in the Knowledge Center (Rm. 114) with Pat Ragains, who will be discussing resources in the KC that may be relevant to your project and how the Internet can be used as a resource for your thesis project.

FEBRUARY 10: PROPOSAL AND PRELIMINARY BIBLIOGRAPHY
**Proposal and Preliminary Bibliography Due: One hard copy to your thesis advisor; one copy (email) to me. Prepare a one-page description of your research project that outlines the major historical question or questions you will attempt to answer and how you plan to approach the subject. Attach a bibliography divided into primary and secondary sources that relate to your topic. Locate as many sources of both types as you can. You do not need to have read them all by this date, of course. But you need to be aware of what sources are available in the Knowledge Center and elsewhere. Preparing a good bibliography now will enable you to request sources through interlibrary loan in time for you to use them in your research. Come to class prepared to discuss your topic, the sources you have located so far, and any problems you are having with your project.

Note: if you are building on an essay begun in HIST 300 or another history course, it's essential that you submit a copy of it to your thesis advisor. In your proposal for HIST 499 explain how you intend to expand on the project and what new questions, approaches, and sources you will incorporate into the senior thesis. In other words, explain to your advisor how your senior thesis will be different from the older essay.

MARCH 10: PROGRESS REPORT AND OUTLINE

By this time you should have completed most of the research for your project, that is, you should have read and taken notes on most of the sources listed in your preliminary bibliography as well as any new sources you have found since then. You should have some idea of what your thesis will be and how it can be supported by the evidence you have accumulated. You may find that there are still gaps in your knowledge that will need to be addressed through further research and reading. Prepare an outline of your paper that shows how you plan to organize the evidence you have found and any further work you need to do before you begin to write. Pay close attention to connections between different parts of your essay and how you can arrange them so that your ideas flow logically from start to finish. The more detailed your outline is (complete sentences and citations are not necessary at this time) the more helpful it will be when you are writing your thesis. Submit copies of the outline to your thesis advisor and the undergraduate
advisor and come to class prepared to give an oral report on your progress. You will be assigned a peer review partner in this meeting and work out the logistics of swapping draft papers with your partner in preparation for the next class meeting.

APRIL 7: DRAFT OF THESIS DUE FOR PEER REVIEW AND ADVISOR’S ASSESSMENT (NO CLASS MEETING)

Although we will not meet, a first draft of your thesis is due on this date. Distribute THREE (3) copies of your draft: one to your thesis advisor (paper copy and email), one to your peer review partner (paper or email) and one to the undergraduate advisor (email). Each student will have been assigned a peer review partner. You will receive another student’s paper to critique. Prepare a written commentary on your assigned draft and bring it to the next seminar meeting. (See the description of the April 15 meeting for guidance on what to look for when assessing drafts and how to prepare your critique).

Important: Your thesis advisor will decide whether you are ready to advance to the oral presentation based on your draft. To advance to this stage, your draft paper must meet the standard for a C grade or higher. This means that, at a minimum, your draft is 20–25 pages long, you have completed all of the research for your project, most of the evidence you plan to include in your final paper is in the draft, you have made some attempt to develop a thesis, and everything is fully documented (i.e. your draft includes footnotes and a bibliography). If your draft does not meet this standard, we will not allow you to proceed to the oral presentation. You will receive a grade of C- or lower for the class and you will be required to repeat and pass HIST 499 next semester if you want to graduate as a History major.

If you have written an excellent draft paper, your thesis advisor may decide to nominate you for the Richard and Sharon Davies Senior Thesis Prize, awarded each semester for the best paper written by a student in HIST 499. The deadline for revised versions of nominated papers to be submitted to the undergraduate advisor is Wednesday, April 29. You may continue to make changes to your paper before the final version is due on May 6, but the thesis prize committee will make its decision based on the papers received on April 29.

APRIL 14: WRITING WORKSHOP AND CRITIQUES OF DRAFTS

Students will discuss the achievements and problems of their drafts in this meeting. Some things to consider when assessing the quality of an essay are: the significance and originality of the thesis, the thoroughness of the research, use of primary and secondary sources, appropriate and convincing links between the thesis and the evidence presented, the clarity of the writing, the overall “flow” of the essay (logical exposition and smooth transitions between paragraphs) and the accuracy and consistency of the citations. We are not asking you to edit your partner’s paper or rewrite the thesis, but any spelling or typing mistakes and unclear sentences you find should be highlighted on the draft so that the author can correct them. Make sure your written critique (at least 3 pages) refers to specific pages and phrases in the essay so that the problem areas are easy to locate. Avoid
vague criticisms such as “the essay is unclear” – explain exactly which parts are unclear or which elements of the argument require further explanation. It is a good idea to begin your critique with a paragraph or longer describing the strengths of the paper before offering suggestions for improvement. Bring two copies of your critique to class – one for me and one for the student whose draft thesis you assessed. In class, each peer reviewer will outline the strengths and problems of the paper he or she was assigned, followed by a response from the author. Your oral report should provide the class with a brief summary of the paper you were assigned, identify its main thesis, assess the supporting evidence, outline any problems, and make suggestions for improvement.

APRIL 28: PRACTICE OF ORAL PRESENTATIONS

In this meeting students will practice for the last part of HIST 499: the oral presentation of research projects to an audience of students, faculty, and friends in the history department, scheduled for **Wednesday, May 9**. Prepare a brief overview of your research project that explains what your thesis is, how you approached the research for the topic, the key sources of evidence for your thesis, and the final conclusions you drew from your research. It’s important that oral presentations be brief, clear, and to the point. Each student will have about 10 minutes to present their research.

MAY 5: FINAL PAPER DUE

The final version of your thesis is due on this date. Submit a paper copy and email attachment to your thesis advisor and an e-mail copy to me.

MAY 6: ORAL PRESENTATIONS

The oral presentations will take place in the Knowledge Center. Each student will have approximately 10 minutes to talk about his/her research topic followed by questions from the audience. It is traditional for both students and faculty to wear formal attire for this event, so please come dressed as you would for a job interview (no, not with Tony Soprano) or other situation where you want to look like you know what you are talking about. The presentations will be followed by lunch in the Faculty/Graduate Reading Room with the opportunity to interact informally with the entire history community. Please stay for the socializing, if you can. We ask that you take the presentations seriously, but we are really not at all threatening, and it is always nice to be able to congratulate our poised, competent, soon-to-be graduating HIST 499 students after the presentations.

**Checklist for written work due and distribution**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>February 10</th>
<th>Research proposal and Bibliography</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Copies to</td>
<td>Thesis advisor ( )</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Undergraduate advisor (by email)  ( )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
March 10
Copies to
Progress report on research/Outline
Thesis advisor ( )
Undergraduate advisor (by email) ( )

April 7
Copies to
Draft of thesis
Thesis advisor ( )
Undergraduate advisor (by email) ( )
Peer review partner (in class) ( )

April 14
Copies to
Critique of assigned draft
Thesis advisor ( )
Peer review partner (in class) ( )

May 5
Copies to
Final paper is due
Thesis advisor ( )
Undergraduate advisor (by email) ( )