

*The University of Southern Mississippi*  
*Department of History*

History 711

Spring 2007

6:30—9:15PM Mondays

## Research Seminar in American History



**Dr. Kyle F. Zelner**

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**Web Site:** <http://ocean.otr.usm.edu/~w535683/Index.html>

**Office Hours:** Mondays, 2-4PM; Tuesdays, 4-5PM; & by appointment

### Statement of Purpose:

This course, a continuation of HIS 710, will focus on historical research and writing—with particular emphasis on improving each student's writing style. The ultimate goal of the course is for students to produce a masterful work of original historical prose, based chiefly on primary sources. The paper can become either a chapter of the student's Master's thesis or an article ready for submission to a journal for possible publication.

During the semester, students will read and discuss several books and articles pertaining to researching and writing history. Most importantly, students will WRITE almost every week of the semester. In addition to writing, all students will have their written work critiqued by the class as a whole, by an assigned in-class critics, and by the instructor. Students will respond to criticism both formally (in response letters to critics) and by re-drafting their written work to make appropriate changes.



### Required Books to Purchase (available at the Barnes & Noble on campus):

Booth, Wayne; Gregory G. Colomb; and Joseph M. Williams. *The Craft of Research*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

*The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15<sup>th</sup> ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Peters, Robert L. *Getting What You Came For: The Smart Student's Guide to Earning a Master's or Ph.D.* rev. ed. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1997.  
Strunk, William and E.B. White. *The Elements of Style*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Longman, 1999.

### **Assignments, Attendance, & Grading:**

The first assignment is the careful reading of this syllabus. An informed understanding of all class readings is necessary for the satisfactory completion of the course.

Attendance at ALL classes is mandatory. Unexcused absences (i.e. more than one) will result in the loss of a letter grade or even failure for the course. Absences are excused in the event of a true emergency only (feeling “under the weather” does NOT qualify) or with the prior approval of the instructor. In all cases, I require written documentation from the appropriate authorities (dean’s office, athletic coaches, doctors, etc.).

The omission of any class requirement will result in automatic failure for the course—in other words; you must turn in every major assignment to pass the course.

The first assignments are a précis and critical book review of a monograph (different works) from your HIS 710 research design (or another instructor-approved book if needed). These assignments will be distributed to the entire class and serve as writing examples during the first few weeks of the course—thus they must be emailed to the instructor as well as turned in via paper copy. Précis will be no more than 900 words, while the critical book review can be up to 1400 words. Précis and reviews should begin with the standard bibliographical heading and end with your name and scholarly affiliation. A précis is a detailed **description** of the book’s major points of argument and any unique content. A critical book review should briefly describe what the book is about, but **concentrate on identifying and commenting upon the author’s thesis**: What is the author trying to get across, how does she/he argue the case and upon what evidence, where does it fit into the historiography, and where and to what extent do you agree and disagree? If you are unsure how to write a critical book review, take a look at reviews in such publications as the *William and Mary Quarterly* or *Reviews in American History*.

Students will also write a conference paper (and proposal letter), based on their larger research paper, and then “give” the paper to the class in the mode of a conference presentation. The presentation will be 10 minutes long and the paper of an appropriate length for such a presentation. More details on this assignment will follow.

The chief assignment of this course is the writing of a major research paper (a thesis chapter or journal article) based principally on original, primary research—stemming from the research design submitted in HIS 710 (or, for other topics, see the instructor). Students will prepare a formal paper outline in close consultation with the instructor. The research paper itself will be 25-35 pages and will be rewritten once. Students will also give a short presentation (5-10 minutes) of their major findings and respond to a written/oral critique of their paper.

### Assigned In-Class Critics:

Major assignments will be critiqued, not only by the instructor (and at times the entire class), but also by an assigned, in-class critic. On the first day of class, each student will be assigned as a critic for one of their peers for the duration of the semester. For each assignment turned in to the instructor, students will also supply a copy for their critic—via email or paper copy. Critics will prepare formal reports on each major writing assignment, which will be used by the recipient when preparing rewrites of assignments (in addition to the comments of the instructor). Critical reports will be respectful, yet detailed and constructive critiques of the work in question. Readers are also responsible for evaluation of how well and how accurately sources and quotations are used! Critiques are factored into course grades and must be taken *very* seriously--critical reports and formal responses to them, when assigned, will account for 10% of your final grade.

### Grading Breakdown:

Book Précis & Critical Book Review	5%
Book Précis Rewrite & Critical Book Review Rewrite	5%
Formal Outline of Research Paper	5%
Critical Reports & Responses to Critics	10%
Conference Paper & Presentation	10%
Research Paper (1)	25%
<u>Research Paper (2) &amp; Presentation</u>	<u>40%</u>
Total	100%

### A Note about Papers and Grading

Clear, readable writing and careful proofreading are minimal requirements; **I will not read careless, unproofed writing.** Papers must be well written (i.e. technically sound, logically organized, and gracefully composed). Passive voice; passive construction; imprecise or unattached modifiers; improper use of relative pronouns; dull, limpid, or florid prose; and simple narrative are all frowned upon, as are many more sins of omission and commission.

### A Note about Office Hours:

I will hold office hours (see page 1) for interested students at posted times and will be happy to arrange a different time for you to come in and see me if those times do not fit into your schedule. If for some reason I can not attend my office hours, I will try to announce it in class and I will post it on my office door. This is time I have set aside for you to come in and talk about the class, history, writing, the university, or whatever (including "Battlestar Galactica"). It is a great time to come in and discuss paper topics or

questions. It is unfortunate that more students don't take advantage of faculty office hours--we're not just available in the classroom.

### **Course Policies:**

**1. Class Climate:** This course is an advanced graduate seminar, designed to give you a chance to explore an academic area of interest through intensive reading, writing, and discussion. Accordingly, most class periods will be filled by discussion of the assigned reading or sessions critiquing written work. In order for discussions to be productive, all students need to feel comfortable participating. We will create and maintain an atmosphere of mutual respect in which everyone's ideas can be heard.

**2. USM Email:** All students should check their USM email regularly—students who do not set up their accounts or respond to USM email will lose participation points and suffer a lower grade. I will use this online resource to keep you up-to-date on class activities and distribute papers and other readings.

**3. Pagers and Cell Phones:** All pagers and cell phones must be turned to silent mode (vibrate) or turned off when in class! If you must take or make an **EMERGENCY** call, leave the classroom (and re-enter) quietly so you will not disturb others.

**4. Support and Documentation:** Support your paper arguments with specific textual references. You must use footnotes for all papers except book reviews--where parenthetical references to the book reviewed will suffice. Research papers will also have a formal bibliography. Follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* religiously for format and documentation; failure to do so will cause extreme damage to your course grade.

**5. Manuscript Preparation:** All papers should be computer-generated (12pt font, Times New Roman) and should be double-spaced with one-inch margins. Papers should always be handed in with the pages numbered and stapled together. Proofread carefully. Clearly place your name, the course and instructor, a description of the paper, and date of each assignment in the upper right hand corner of the first page.\*

\*Sample heading for papers:

Student Name  
History 711—Dr. Zelner  
Critical Book Review  
March 3, 2007

**6. Copies of Papers:** It is your responsibility to keep a copy of each paper that you submit. In the unlikely event that I misplace the paper, you should be able to produce your copy that same day.

**7. Delivery of Papers:** Students are required to hand in TWO COPIES of each paper: one hard printed copy, which must be handed in at class time and one electronic copy (in .doc or .rtf format), which must be emailed at the time indicated on the class schedule, or, if no indication, before class starts.

**8. Late Papers:** In graduate school, there should be no late papers. Extensions of a paper due date will be granted only in the event of a documented medical, athletic, academic, or personal emergency and only in advance of the paper due date. Decisions on the validity of the documentation and the penalty for any late paper are within the sole purview of the instructor (it will be severe).

**9. Academic Dishonesty:** Scholastic dishonesty will not be condoned under any circumstance. See the current *Graduate Bulletin* for a good definition of such behavior. Demonstrated plagiarism will automatically lead to a grade of “F” for the course and will usually result in dismissal from the university. The instructor reserves the right to use electronic resources, such as turnitin.com, to detect plagiarism. If you have questions or concerns about this policy—please see the instructor during office hours.

**10. Students with Disabilities:** If you have any disabilities that might affect your performance in this class, please let me know. If a student has a disability that qualifies under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and requires accommodations, he/she should contact the Office for Disability Accommodations (ODA) for information on appropriate policies and procedures. Disabilities Covered by ADA may include learning, psychiatric, physical disabilities, or chronic health disorders. Students can contact ODA if they are not certain whether a medical condition/disability qualifies. Mailing address: 118 College Drive # 8586, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001; Telephone: (601) 266-5024; TTY: (601) 266-6837; Fax: (601) 266-6035 or at: <http://www.ids.usm.edu/ODA/default.asp>

**11. Syllabus:** This syllabus is a mutual contract between the professor and student and the student and professor. It will not be altered lightly, however if circumstances make it necessary, the changes will be made as far in advance as is possible and in writing.

## Class Schedule

**Monday, Jan. 22**—Class Introduction

**Monday, Jan. 30**—The Journey to a Master's Degree and Beyond  
Reading: Peters, pgs. 28-47, 111-247, 266-285.

**Monday, Feb. 5**—Researching to Write  
Reading: Booth, pgs. 3-16, 37-181.  
Due (9 AM via email, class time for paper copy): Précis of a monograph from your research prospectus.

**Monday, Feb. 12**— History Writing I (Drafting)  
Reading: Booth, pgs. 17-33, 185-240.  
Due (9AM via email, class time for paper copy): Critical Book Review of a (different) monograph from your research prospectus.

**Monday, Feb. 19**— **No Class—Mardi Gras!**  
Due (Wed. by 3PM via email): Critical Report (3 pgs.) on Précis and Critical Book Review (to writer and instructor).

**Monday, Feb. 26**— History Writing III (Grammar, Usage, Punctuation)  
Reading: Strunk & White, Chap. I-IV; *Chicago Manual*, pgs. 147-196, heavily skim pgs. 196-308.  
Due: Rewrites of Précis and Critical Book Review (to instructor and critic).

**Monday, March 5**— History Writing IV (Style)  
Reading: Strunk & White, Chap. V; Booth, pgs. 263-282.  
Due: Formal Outline of Research Paper (to instructor and critic).

**Monday, March 12**— **No Class—Spring Break!**

**Monday, March 19**— Documentation I

Reading: *Chicago Manual*, pgs. 443-471, 593-754 (skim examples).

Due: Critical Report (2 pgs.) of Research Outline (to writer and instructor).

**Monday, March 26**—Writing a Conference Paper

Reading: Peters, 146-148; Claremont Graduate School Writing Center,

<http://www.cgu.edu/pages/867.asp>, <http://www.cgu.edu/pages/865.asp>,

<http://www.cgu.edu/pages/864.asp>; Marie des Jardins “How to Be a Good Graduate Student-- [Becoming Part of the Research Community.](#)”

Due: Research Paper (to instructor and critic).

**Monday, April 2**— Conference Paper Presentations

Reading: Peters, 248-265; Claremont Graduate School Writing Center,

<http://www.cgu.edu/pages/862.asp>.

Due (Sunday at 6PM –via email): Conference Paper Proposal Letter and Conference Paper (to instructor and critic).

**Monday, April 9**—No Class

Due: Critical Report (4-5 pgs.) of Research Paper Draft—via email (to writer and instructor)

**Monday, April 16**—No Class

Due: Response (4-5 pgs.) to Critical Report of Research Outlines-via email (to instructor and critic).

**Monday, April 23**—No Class

Due: Re-Draft of Research Paper (paper/email to instructor and email to critic).

**Monday, April 30**— Oral Presentations of Research Findings, Final Oral Critiques, and Oral Responses.

Due (6PM Sunday): Critical Report (3-4 pgs.) of Research Paper (to writer and instructor)