

HIST 460 – Senior Project

Fall 2008

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Office Hours: T, Th 2:10-3:00pm;
W 3:10-5:00pm (and by appointment)

Th 11:10-12:00pm
(Bldg. 10, Room 222)

Welcome to History 460 – *Senior Project*. This course is designed to facilitate the completion of the first half of the senior project for History majors. During this quarter students will complete a significant portion of the conceptualizing, planning, researching and writing of their senior projects. The final project will be handed in at the conclusion of the subsequent course, HIST 461, which is generally taken in the quarter immediately following HIST 460. During this quarter, students will choose a topic, identify sources, research, and formulate an argument for their senior project. In addition, they will outline their projects, review the existing literature on their topic, begin drafting their project, and create a plan of action for the remaining research and writing.

Senior projects in the History Department at Cal Poly are the capstone of the academic curriculum and demonstrate the ability of graduates to conduct advanced research and contribute the historical literature in their fields. These projects remain part of the permanent collection of the Kennedy Library and are accessible to the public. As such, senior projects are matters of great pride for both their authors and the department. Topics are selected in consultation with the faculty advisor, and the work of researching and writing these projects is conducted independently by students under faculty supervision. The senior project is the student's opportunity to make a substantial contribution to the historical literature on a chosen subject and demonstrate the knowledge and skills in research and writing that have been acquired after years of hard work in the program.

Course Objectives:

- Develop ability to contribute to the historical literature in a selected field.
- Build expert knowledge in a specialized subject of particular interest.
- Build confidence in ability to apply historical research methods in writing.
- Develop skills in evaluating and reviewing primary sources and historical literature.
- Develop advanced research and writing skills.

Grading:

This class will consist largely of independent work completed by each student in consultation with the instructor. The independent work of each student will be evaluated over the course of the quarter through five assignments. Grading for the course will be calculated according to the following rubric:

Assignment 1 – Topic Selection	10%
Assignment 2 – Research Proposal & Preliminary Bibliography	20%
Assignment 3 – Primary Source Analysis	20%
Assignment 4 – Literature Review & Bibliography	30%
Assignment 5 – Introduction, Outline & Work Plan	20%

Course Requirements:

• Assignment 1 – Topic Selection:

Each student will select a topic for the senior project in consultation with the instructor by week 3. Students may choose a topic which is already known to them but may not submit work completed for another class. In general, the senior project topic should not simply be something you find interesting, but should be a subject that holds your interest. Do not select a project you can live with, but rather one you can't live without doing. The process of writing a senior project spans two quarters. If your topic does not make you eager to get working week after week, you may be in for a long two quarters. The best topic will be the one that you are passionate about. To help you in the process of finding your topic we will meet as a group during week 2. Attendance is required and will be factored into the grade for topic selection. Please come prepared to this meeting having completed the "interests survey" provided in our first meeting. Please also see chapter 16 of Robert L. Peters, *Getting What You Came For* (in the "Online Reader" section of the course Blackboard site) for some helpful advice on this process. Topics must be discussed with the instructor prior to submission. Please note the office hours on the first page of this syllabus and arrange a time to discuss your topic with me prior to submitting this assignment. The topic should be submitted to the History Office (47-27C) or my office (47-25F) in the form of one typed paragraph indicating the proposed topic, the general aspects of the topic that you intend to explore, and the broader questions you hope to answer. No electronic submissions will be accepted.

Due: Thursday, Oct. 9, 3:00pm

• Assignment 2 – Research Proposal & Preliminary Bibliography

Once a topic is selected and approved by the instructor, students should immediately begin working to find a range of primary and secondary sources to support their research. Assemble a preliminary bibliography consisting of at least one primary source, at least one encyclopedia entry, newspaper articles if applicable, at least 5 journal articles, and at least 5 books. (Note that the books and journal articles may be about a topic that is broader than the specific subject of your project.) Draft a preliminary research proposal outlining the specific problems you plan to explore, your initial impressions of the state of the literature on this subject, the primary sources you expect to use, how you anticipate your research contributing to the literature in this field, and why this research will be relevant to a wider audience. Please see chapter 17 of Robert L. Peters, *Getting What You Came For* (in the "Online Reader" section of the course Blackboard site) for some helpful advice on preparing

a “thesis proposal.” The research proposal should be two pages in length plus the preliminary bibliography.

Due: Thursday, Oct. 23, 3:00pm

• Assignment 3 – Primary Source Analysis

Every senior project must use primary sources. Identify suitable primary sources for your topic in consultation with the instructor and select one primary source to analyze in detail for this assignment. Although you may use multiple sources in your final project, it is important at this stage to consider how a single source can be useful as evidence for your project. In two or three pages, explore the possibilities of one primary source, identify its strengths and weaknesses, and what it means for your topic. Demonstrate how you intend to use this source in your paper by interpreting it and using it as a form of evidence on your topic.

Due: Thursday, Nov. 6, 3:00pm

• Assignment 4 – Literature Review & Bibliography

Compile a thorough bibliography on your topic and identify which of the existing works appear to be most significant. Depending on your topic, the most significant works may be identifiable by the number of times a book is reviewed (and how well), the number of times an article is cited by other authors, etc. Evaluate the existing literature on your topic in order to establish the need for your own study. Do you agree with some authors more than others? Is there an area of the subject that has been neglected? Are there identifiable trends in the existing literature that you can identify? Be as thorough as possible. Your literature review must be a minimum of five pages in length. Attach to this review a copy of your now complete bibliography. Because topics vary, it is impossible to impose a universal expectation of the number of sources which should be included in the bibliography and the literature review. However, I will conduct my own research into the literature of your topic, and will be concerned if major works are not evaluated in your literature review or multiple significant works are missing from your bibliography.

Due. Thursday, Nov. 20, 3:00pm

• Assignment 5 – Introduction, Outline & Work Plan

In a joint meeting of senior projects students everyone will present their final outline and their work plan for the upcoming quarter in HIST 461. In addition, each student will hand in an introduction to their thesis. The introduction should be 3 to 4 pages in length and should provide a clear articulation of your thesis, an explanation of the importance or need for your research given the existing literature on subject, and the questions you will attempt to answer in your project. The outline should consist of a single page and should list the topics and subthemes you will cover in your project. Finally, your work plan should consist of a single page schedule outlining how you plan to proceed during the upcoming quarter including the dates on which you plan to meet particular benchmarks. Be prepared to share this information with your colleagues at a joint meeting held at the time listed below. This will be our final meeting of the quarter and attendance is required.

Due: Thursday, Dec. 4, 11:00am

Recommended Texts:

(There are no required books for this class.)

- Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers* (Chicago, 2007).
- William Strunk, E. B. White, Maira Kalman *The Elements of Style Illustrated* (Penguin, 2007).
- Robert L. Peters, *Getting What You Came For: The Smart Student's Guide To Earning a Master's or a PH.D.* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997).
- Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* (Knopf Publishing, 1995).

Course Policies:

- **Format:** Unless otherwise specified, all assignments must be submitted to the History Office (47-27C) or my office (47-25F) by the time and date specified in double-spaced, type-written format with page numbers. Footnotes and formatting should follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* (Turabian). No electronic submissions will be accepted.

- **Late Work:** The late submission of reading responses is discouraged and will be penalized according to the following policy: 1 day late (includes any assignment submitted after the specified time on the day it is due) = score reduced by 10%; 2-6 days late (assignments submitted more than one day late but less than a week following the submission deadline) = score reduced by 20%; 7 to 14 days late = score reduced by 30%; more than 14 days late = not accepted (zero points).

- **Office Hours:** All students are strongly encouraged to visit me during the office hours posted on the front of this syllabus. The best senior project experiences will involve regular contact with the thesis advisor. If these times do not work for you, please contact me well in advance so we can arrange an alternate meeting time. I will be more than happy to come in to meet with you by appointment. You may also reach me by phone at (805)756-2641.

- **Funding:** All students are strongly encouraged to apply for a Senior Project Research Support Grant for travel to a research site, archive, or library to conduct their senior project research. Request forms are available in the History Office (47-27C).

- **Plagiarism:** No form of plagiarism will be tolerated in this course. Submission of plagiarized work will result in a failing grade in the course as per C.A.M. 684.2. Furthermore, all instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities without exception as per university Executive Order 969 (2006). Students who are in any way unclear about the definition of plagiarism should familiarize themselves with the American Historical Association's statement on plagiarism in its *Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct* [www.historians.org].

- **Incompletes:** An incomplete grade will not be given for this course without a serious and compelling reason.