

# **Introduction to the Historical Method: Urban and Suburban America**

**History 300, section 2. George Mason University. Spring 2007**

Tuesday and Thursday, 1:30 – 2:45 pm. Research I, Room 202

Course website: <https://webct41.gmu.edu>

Professor Zachary M. Schrag

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Office Hours: Thursdays, 3-5 pm, and by appointment.

Syllabus revised: 19 January 2007

Students in this course will learn the basics of using primary and secondary sources to create an original work of interpretive history. They will learn to read existing scholarship to define new questions, to find and interpret primary sources to answer those questions, and to report their findings in an engaging narrative. By the end of the course, each student will write an original research paper of 3750-5000 words (roughly 15-20 pages). Students are expected to travel to libraries and archives beyond campus, to complete their work in stages, and to offer helpful criticism to their peers. This section of the course will focus on the sources and methods with which historians study the people and built environment of America's cities and suburbs.

**Please note that we will spend all of Friday, February 23, at the Library of Congress. Clear your schedule now.**

## **Goals**

The skills needed to write a research paper in history will serve you in future courses and in your professional and civic life. By the end of this course, you will learn how to:

- frame questions about how and why Americans have built and occupied cities and suburbs
- find and analyze primary documents that answer your questions
- report your findings in a clear narrative
- offer your peers tough, fair, and encouraging criticism.

## **Readings**

The following books are required and have been ordered at the university bookstore in the Johnson Center.

- Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *The Craft of Research*. 2d ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. ISBN 0226065685
- Harvey, Gordon. *Writing With Sources: A Guide for Students*. Hackett, 1998. ISBN: 0872204340

Readings by Zachary M. Schrag can be found online at

<http://www.schrag.info/teaching/index.html>. Journal articles can be found using the indicated databases.

## **Administrative information**

All assignments are governed by the George Mason University **honor code**, online at <http://www.gmu.edu/departments/unilife/honorcode.html>. You are expected to work independently and to acknowledge all sources, including assigned texts and materials found online.

Gordon Harvey's *Writing with Sources* is required reading and should answer most questions about **citation**, but ask me if you need clarification. In general, any sentence in your work that can be traced to a single sentence in someone else's work should bear a footnote. Any collaboration, such as consultation with the Writing Center, should also be acknowledged. Violations of academic integrity will be reported to the administration and may result in grade penalties, including failure of the course. I reserve the right to submit your drafts and papers to the **turnitin.com** database.

In case of **inclement weather**, please call the main switchboard at 703-993-1000 or consult the main web page at <http://www.gmu.edu/> to see if classes are cancelled. I expect to cancel class only when the university cancels all classes.

If you are a student with a **disability** and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the DRC.

All students are expected to check their **gmu.edu e-mail** regularly and are responsible for information sent to their GMU addresses.

## **Assignments**

Your final grade is based on:

- Final paper: 60 percent
- Attendance and participation: 10 percent
- Article, document, and image analyses: 20 percent
- Peer editing 10 percent

### **Final Paper (60 percent)**

The goal of this course is to teach you to write an original research paper, so the quality of your paper determines the bulk of your grade. You will not receive letter grades on your preliminary work toward your paper: research proposal, bibliography, outline, and drafts. However, the quality of your final paper will depend on your completing these projects on time and responding to the feedback from your peers and instructor.

Your final paper grade will rest on three qualities:

*Argument*

Your paper must pose a question about the past of one or more cities or suburbs, use secondary sources to demonstrate the significance of your question, and answer that question with a precise, surprising, interpretive thesis.

*Evidence*

You must support your thesis with evidence from available primary sources. I expect careful, close analysis of a small set of sources.

*Style*

The paper should be written in clear, formal English. You should state your thesis in your introduction and support it with each topic sentence. Your paper should use *Chicago Manual of Style* citation forms and be free from errors of grammar and spelling.

**Attendance and Participation (10 percent)**

This course is discussion based, which means that each student's learning depends on the other students' being prepared, punctual, and active. The participation grade is designed to encourage you to help other students learn, and to prepare you for a lifetime of meetings.

The participation grade is based on your prompt arrival and active participation in discussions. The highest participation grades will go to students who animate class discussions by asking questions of their peers. The most valuable contributions often begin with the words, "I don't understand." Answering such questions, and questions posed by the instructor, is also helpful.

You should be in your seat, ready to take notes at 1:30 pm; chronic tardiness will lower your grade. To be counted as on time, you must sign in by 1:30. To be counted present, you must sign the late attendance sheet. If you need to leave early, please speak to me before class. If you leave early without notifying me, you will be counted absent for the week.

You are expected to attend class twice a week until Unit III, at which point you will attend one out of every three meetings. Up to two weeks' absence is excused. After that, absence for any reason will sharply lower your grade, until you have missed half the course. At that point, you will receive no credit for participation. Chronic absence or tardiness will also affect the grades on your written work.

Basic classroom rules:

- Bring the assigned text to class on the day it is being discussed.
- Bring materials for taking notes. If you take notes on a computer, bring a pen or pencil anyway to make notes on handouts and classmates' papers.
- Do not eat in the classroom, before, during, or after class.
- Turn off all cell phones, pagers, and other noisemakers.
- Wait until the end of class to begin packing up your belongings.

**Article Analysis (5 percent for each set). Due January 30 and February 6.**

The articles are assigned to give you examples of the kind of analysis of primary sources that your own paper should achieve. Although these articles are longer than your paper will be, they are not much different in substance. A journal article can be thought of as three fifteen-page term papers on a single theme.

For each article we read, write a three-paragraph analysis, answering the following questions:

*What is the question?*

Every good article is the answer to a question. Some historians state their questions explicitly, complete with a question mark at the end. Others may merely imply the question, but the question is still there. What question was the historian trying to answer in this article? Look for a *why* or *how* question. Show how the historian framed the question and showed that it was significant.

*What is the answer?*

What is the thesis of the article? Does it answer the question? What makes it interpretive, precise, and surprising?

*What are the sources?*

What were the historian's most important primary sources? What can this kind of source tell us, and what can't it tell us? What methods did the historian use to get the most out of these sources? Give one example of a source that answers a question well and one example that shows the limits of the source.

**Document Analysis (5 percent). Due February 1.**

This exercise is designed to give you practice in extracting useful information from written primary sources.

Visit the Washington History Matters site: <http://www.washingtonhistorymatters.org>. Choose three documents.

For each document, write a one-paragraph analysis, following the instructions at <http://www.schrag.info/teaching/documentanalysis.html>

**Image Analysis (5 percent). Due February 8.**

This exercise is designed to give you practice in extracting useful information from visual primary sources.

Using the Washington History Matters site or some other source, find three historic images of American cities or suburbs.

For each document, write a one-paragraph analysis, following the examples at <http://www.schrag.info/teaching/imageanalysis.html>

**Peer editing (10 percent)**

Good writing is a group process. Throughout the course, but especially in unit III, you will be asked to critique your peers' work. Your feedback should be tough, encouraging, and fair. You do no favors by keeping silent about work that is confusing, inaccurate, and dull, or by withholding praise when it is due. I will provide more detailed instructions for specific tasks.

## Schedule

### UNIT 1: FORMING QUESTIONS

#### *Week 1. Introduction*

January 23. Introduction

January 25. Using Database and Catalogs

**Meet at Fenwick Instruction Room 214 A**

Read:

- *Craft of Research*, 1-34.
- Schrag, “How to Research a History Paper”

#### *Week 2. Peopling the City and Suburb*

January 30. Writing about people

Read:

- Schrag. “Elements of a Thesis Statement,” “A Thesis-Statement Template,” and “Dialectical Thesis Statements”
- *Craft of Research*, 37-74
- Elizabeth Ewen, “City Lights: Immigrant Women and the Rise of the Movies.” *Signs* 5 (1980): S45-S65 [JSTOR]
- James McGrath Morris, “A Chink in the Armor: The Black-Led Struggle for School Desegregation in Arlington, Virginia, and the End of Massive Resistance.” *Journal of Policy History* 13 (2001): 329-366. [JSTOR]

**Due: Article analyses for the Ewen and Morris articles. Post to WebCT and bring one copy of each to class.**

February 1. Document Analysis

Read:

- Schrag, “How to Read a Primary Source”; “Document Analysis”
- *Craft of Research*, 75-107.
- Harvey, *Writing With Sources* (entire)

**Due: Three document analyses. Post to WebCT and bring one copy of each to class.**

#### *Week 3. Building the City and Suburb*

February 6. Writing about places

Read:

- Mary P. Ryan, “‘A Laudable Pride in the Whole of Us’: City Halls and Civic Materialism,” *American Historical Review* 105 (October 2000): 1131-1170. [JSTOR]
- Matthew W. Roth, “Mulholland Highway and the Engineering Culture of Los Angeles in the 1920s,” *Technology and Culture* 40 (July 1999): 545-575 [Project Muse]
- Michael Quinn Dudley, “Sprawl as Strategy: City Planners Face the Bomb,” *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 21 (2001): 52 - 63. [Sage Journals Online]

**Due: Article analyses for the Ryan, Roth, and Dudley articles. Post to WebCT and bring one copy of each to class.**

February 8. Image Analysis

Read:

- Schrag, "Image Analysis"

**Due: Three image analyses**

## UNIT 2: FINDING PRIMARY SOURCES

### *Week 4. Primary Sources*

February 13. Finding Primary Sources Online

**Meet at Fenwick Instruction Room 214 A**

**Due: research proposal, with one-paragraph statement of research question and annotated bibliography of secondary sources. Post to WebCT and bring two copies to class.**

February 15. Finding Primary Sources in a Library

**Meet at Fenwick Instruction Room 214 A**

**Due: written comments on two research proposals. Post to WebCT and bring one copy of each to class.**

### *Week 5. The Library of Congress*

February 20. NO CLASS

February 22. NO CLASS

February 23. **Meet at Library of Congress**

### *Week 6*

February 27. How to Take Notes

## UNIT III: WRITING

For this unit, students will be divided into three groups. Each group will meet only as indicated; use the remaining time to work on your papers.

March 1. Group 1: Organization

- Schrag, "How to Write an Essay"; "The Anatomy of a 10-Page Paper"
- *Craft of Research*, 111-181.

### *Week 7*

March 6. Group 2: Organization

- Schrag, "How to Write an Essay"; "The Anatomy of a 10-Page Paper"
- *Craft of Research*, 111-181.

March 8. Group 3: Organization

**Due (all groups): annotated bibliography of major primary sources. Post to WebCT and bring two copies to class.**

- Schrag, "How to Write an Essay"; "The Anatomy of a 10-Page Paper"
- *Craft of Research*, 111-181.

### *Week 8*

March 20. Group 1: Progress Reports

- Due (group 1): revised proposal and complete bibliography. Post to Post to WebCT and bring two copies to class.**
- March 22. Group 2: Progress Reports  
**Due (group 2): revised proposal and complete bibliography. Post to Post to WebCT and bring two copies to class.**
- Week 9*
- March 27. Group 3: Progress Reports  
**Due (group 3): revised proposal and complete bibliography. Post to Post to WebCT and bring two copies to class.**
- March 29. Group 1: Outlines  
**Due (all groups): Outline : thesis statement, 30 topic sentences. Post to WebCT and bring two copies to class.**
- Schrag, “Style Guidelines”; “Pre-Submission Checklist”
  - *Craft of Research*, 185-240.
- Week 10*
- April 3. Group 2: Outlines
- Schrag, “Style Guidelines”; “Pre-Submission Checklist”
  - *Craft of Research*, 185-240.
- April 5. Group 3: Outlines
- Schrag, “Style Guidelines”; “Pre-Submission Checklist”
  - *Craft of Research*, 185-240.
- Week 11*
- April 10. Group 1: Partial Drafts  
**Due (all Groups): 1/3 of paper. Post to WebCT and bring two copies to class.**
- April 12. Group 2: Partial Drafts
- Week 12*
- April 17. Group 3: Partial Drafts
- April 19. Group 1: Complete Drafts
- *Craft of Research*, 263-282.
- Due (all groups): complete first draft. Post to WebCT and bring two copies to class.**
- Week 13*
- April 24. Group 2: Complete Drafts
- *Craft of Research*, 263-282.
- April 26. Group 3: Complete Drafts
- *Craft of Research*, 263-282.
- UNIT IV: SHOWING OFF
- Week 14. Presentations*
- May 1. Presentations I  
**Due (all groups): final draft**
- May 3. Presentations II