

Research Seminar: Policy and Technology

HIST 797, section 1. George Mason University. Spring 2023
Thursdays 7:20–10:00 p.m. Peterson Hall 2408.

Professor Zachary M. Schrag

Syllabus revised February 2, 2023. See revision to April schedule.

Course Blackboard site: <http://mymason.gmu.edu>.

General advice: <http://historyprofessor.org>

Chicago-Style Citation Quick Guide: <https://bit.ly/3jLsl6R>

University and course policies and resources: <https://historyprofessor.org/miscellaneous/boilerplate/>

E-mail: zschrag@gmu.edu (please include “797” in subject header).

Tel. 703-594-1844.

Office Hours: Mondays, 10:00 am - noon and by appointment. For an in-person or Zoom meeting, please sign up for a slot at https://to.gmu.edu/Schrag_appt. For weeks when we have individual consultations for this course, please choose a time other than regular office hours.

Course description

This research seminar focuses on histories of the development of technology, policy, or both. We will tell stories of how people identified problems, debated possible solutions, and effected change for the better or worse. The seminar is designed to give students a great deal of leeway to choose topics about which they care, provided they can locate appropriate primary sources. Students are encouraged to contact the professor to discuss possible topics.

Goals

The chief goal of this class is simple: to give students experience writing original scholarly history using primary sources. While not the only task of the historian, this is the basic task, practiced since the time of Thucydides. The final product of the course is a paper of the length typically published by a scholarly journal. Thus, by the end of the course, students should understand what it takes to produce a scholarly article, and some may even wish to revise theirs for publication.

Other goals are reading secondary scholarship critically, supporting peers in their work, and learning about the history of policy and technology.

Materials

Readings

- Zachary M. Schrag, *Princeton Guide to Historical Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021). Available in print through the university bookstore or electronically through the library. To offset any royalties I will earn from assigning this book to my own students, I have made a donation to Mason's Student Food and Housing Insecurity Fund.
- *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th ed. (online). <http://goo.gl/sNWiKW> . All assignments should use Chicago notes-and-bibliography format.
- Other readings, listed on the schedule, are available through university-owned databases and can be accessed through a search at library.gmu.edu.

Software (recommended)

- Zotero. Available for Mac, Windows, and Linux. Free. <https://www.zotero.org/>. Tutorials online at <https://library.gmu.edu/tutorials/zotero>. Online workshops at <https://library.gmu.edu/workshops> Please note that while Zotero can help you craft Chicago-style footnotes, it often generates notes with extraneous or erroneous information. Cleaning this up is your responsibility.
- Scrivener. Available for MacOS, Windows, and iOS. Approximately \$51 for educational license. <https://www.literatureandlatte.com/scrivener/overview> . Please note that Scrivener can compile files to the required .docx format. You may want to post .scriv files as well, but if so, please post the .docx files too.
- Backup software. I expect you to plan your work so that the sudden loss of a file, device, or computer will not set you back more than a day, ideally less than that. The best way to achieve this is to use an online backup system so that the malfunction or loss of the computer you usually use will not take your work with it. Mason students have access to 1TB cloud storage via OneDrive: <https://its.gmu.edu/service/office-365-onedrive/>

Podcast (recommended)

- Kate Carpenter, *Drafting the Past*, <https://draftingthepast.com>

Organization

Online Components

You may be asked to bring some paper copies of assignments for class discussions, but all assignments should be posted on Blackboard, <http://mymason.gmu.edu>. You will also receive comments on Blackboard. Please check Blackboard at least once per week to see if you have received comments.

Format

Please save your assignments as .docx files and post them as attachments to Bb.

Do not use the Blackboard comments field, since I do not see the contents of this field if I batch-download student assignments.

I don't care about margins and fonts, but all submissions should have your last name in the file name, your name and the date on the submission, and page numbers. Using Word's heading styles (Heading 1, Heading 2, etc.) often helps with organization.

The final draft should conform to *The Chicago Manual of Style* notes-and-bibliography system, and preliminary assignments and drafts should do so as much as practicable. All quotations should be clearly distinguished from your own words. Footnote individual sentences, rather than combining all citations in a paragraph.

Small Groups

In early March or so, I will assign you to groups of 3-5 students based on your chosen topics for individual papers. You will spend two class sessions discussing the work of your group, and you will act as a panel for the presentations. Two or three small groups will constitute Group A and the remainder Group B for purposes of deadlines (see the schedule).

Individual meetings

Class will not meet every week. On weeks the class does not convene, either half the class or every student is expected to meet with me by Zoom, either during the regular seminar time or during another convenient time. Please use the time saved from seminar meetings to work on your papers.

I am happy to meet individually during other weeks of the class as well. Please sign up for a slot at https://to.gmu.edu/Schrag_appt. If you cannot meet on the dates listed, please let me know which dates would work.

Assignments

The success of this seminar depends on students' critical reading of assigned texts and each other's work. Students are expected to come to class ready to talk about these materials and to seek peer comments on their own work.

Throughout the semester, you are asked to submit short portions of your work on Blackboard. These will not be graded individually, but I will check to make sure they are submitted promptly and thoroughly. In the final two weeks of class, you will write a critique of one of your classmate's drafts and present the paper and your critique to the class.

The purpose of this research seminar is to give students experience in writing article-length works of original scholarship, informed by secondary sources but based on primary sources. Most of your footnotes, especially in the body of the paper, should reference primary sources. The articles in the assigned readings offer good models for these papers.

The final paper should be an original work of scholarship, based on analysis of primary sources, running between 7,500 and 10,000 words, exclusive of notes and bibliography. The paper must present:

- A clear research question informed by secondary scholarship
- An interpretive thesis that answers the question
- Analysis of primary sources that supports the thesis

The paper must be organized into well-defined thematic or chronological sections, with appropriate headings for each section. The paper itself should have a title that reflects its content and argument, in the style of an academic journal article. The paper should conform to the notes-and-bibliography system of *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

All papers should include a bibliography. When appropriate, this should be divided into sections on primary and secondary sources, though this division does not make sense for all topics.

Evaluation

Assuming good citizenship, regular attendance, and prompt completion of preliminary assignments, the grade for the course will be based entirely on your final paper. While the preliminary assignments are required, they will not be graded unless they are seriously late or deficient. In this case, they will count for up to 30 percent of your course grade. I may issue grades for some preliminary assignments, but these will be advisory only and will not count toward your final grade.

A: Original findings about a topic of significance, based on primarily on research in primary sources, presented in a form comparable to a scholarly journal article. Demonstrated correction, complication, or addition to existing scholarship on the general subject.

A-. An original research question, an explanation of how that question engages with previous scholarship, an interpretive thesis, and solid primary research to support the thesis. Clear organization and writing. Citation conforms to *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

B+. Excellent research without a clear thesis, or a clear argument insufficiently supported by research, or good research and argument insufficiently connected to previous scholarship. Goes beyond existing scholarship. May have some defects of style or citation.

B. Significant research effort and accuracy, but no interpretive argument. Or a clear interpretation based on secondary sources but lacking engagement with and critical reading of primary sources. Or engages previous scholarship only to confirm it; does not advance our understanding.

B- or below: Lacks deep primary research, or does not meet the standards expected of graduate work.

Schedule

The final draft is due on Thursday, May 11. 10:15 p.m. For weeks when we do not meet as a class, please post your assignment 24 hours before our individual meeting. All other assignments are due on Blackboard at 10 a.m. on the Thursday listed.

This class will meet seven times in our classroom and twice on Zoom. For the remaining five weeks (Weeks 4 and 9-12), we will not all meet on Thursday evening. Instead, on those weeks some or all students will meet with me individually in person or by Zoom.

Introduction. Due by 10 a.m., January 19. Earlier is better.

- Read Princeton Guide, Part I: Introduction and Part II: Questions
- Read American Historical Association, "Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct," <https://bit.ly/34Zzihq>
- Identify the scholarly history journal that most frequently publishes articles about your interests, and start reading some. Look for the kinds of questions scholars ask, and the sources they use to answer those questions.
- Complete the research résumé at <https://forms.gle/SQpzHCe8wqeEJ7ox5>

Combine the following in a single document and post to Bb as an attachment.

- A description of your general research interests and how you came to them, whether through coursework, life experience, or other origins.
- Ideas for one or more research topics for this semester. Explain how much you know about each.
- A preliminary bibliography of secondary sources.
- The title of one or more historical journals that might publish your work.

To identify journals and specific articles, the best databases are America: History and Life (for North American topics) or Historical Abstracts (for other regions), both via library.gmu.edu. JSTOR advanced search can also help. Be sure to limit your search to history journals.

Spend some time entering keyword and subject queries on topics that interest you, and see which journal titles show up most often, or which publish the articles that most appeal to you.

Also take a look at scholarly books and articles that you've read for previous seminars or in other contexts. Read the footnotes, and see which journals they most frequently cite. If you have favorite historians, you could also use America: History and Life and Historical Abstracts to see where they have published articles.

One method—though not the only one—to find historical journals is consult the list of affiliates of the American Historical Association (<https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/affiliated-societies>). Not all top journals are published by these societies, not all societies publish journals, and some society names differ quite a bit from the name and scope of the journals they publish. (Most notably, the Forest History Society publishes *Environmental History*, which is not limited to forest history.) However, a great many of these societies do publish journals related to their areas of interest. The key point is to identify journals that cover scholarly history, not literary studies, political science, or other fields in the humanities and social sciences.

1. January 26. Asking questions. Classroom.

Read

- Brandan P. Buck, “‘The Mortar Between the Bricks’: Willis Conover and Global Jazz,” *Jazz Perspectives* 10, no. 2–3 (September 2017): 185–206, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17494060.2017.1408479>.
- Stephen Macekura, “‘For Fear of Persecution’: Displaced Salvadorans and U.S. Refugee Policy in the 1980s,” *Journal of Policy History* 23, no. 3 (2011): 357–80.
- Bethany Nyborg, “What’s Worn in Camp Stays in Camp: Women Campers Navigating Fashion and Function 1869-1915,” May 2021, <https://mars.gmu.edu/handle/1920/12209>.
- One recent, scholarly journal article of your choosing that will help you in your research. This should be a recent work of history, not a primary source or an article from another discipline. And it should be a work of original scholarship, based on primary sources, not a historiographical essay.

Write: an analysis of each article (including the one you select) in the following format. For most tasks, bullet points may work better than complete paragraphs.

For each article,

- Identify the actors in the story. Whose story does the historian tell? How are they defined: as individuals, as members in a demographic or occupational group, by their beliefs? List three to four individuals or groups at most; we are looking for the main actors. Who isn’t in the story, or gets only a minor role?
- Identify the geographical and chronological scope of the essay. When is the main action? How much prologue and epilogue does the scholar include?
- Write out the thesis in the thesis-statement-template format: Why did [person/persons] [do /say/write something surprising]? [Plausible explanation], but in fact [better or more complete explanation]. Hints: if you can’t find an explicit why question, you might look for claims of causality, such as the word “because.” And if you can’t identify the thesis in the introduction, look in the conclusion as well.
- Identify a dialectic, as described in Princeton Guide, 56-64.

Combine these into a single document and post to Bb as an attachment.

2. February 2. Finding sources. Classroom.

Read

- Princeton Guide, Part III. Sources
- Lindsey Bestebreurtje, “Beyond the Plantation: Freedmen, Social Experimentation, and African American Community Development in Freedman’s Village, 1863–1900,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 126, no. 3 (2018): 334–65.
- Arwen Palmer Mohun, “Laundrymen Construct Their World: Gender and the Transformation of a Domestic Task to an Industrial Process,” *Technology and Culture* 38, no. 1 (1997): 97–120, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3106785>.
- Evan Faulkenbury, “‘An Uncommon Meeting of Minds’: The Council for United Civil Rights Leadership in the Black Freedom Struggle, 1963–1967,” *Journal of African*

American History 104, no. 3 (2019): 392–414, <https://doi.org/10.1086/704118>.

- A second recent, scholarly journal article of your choosing that will help you in your research. This should be a recent work of history, not a primary source or an article from another discipline. And it should be a work of original scholarship, based on primary sources, not a historiographical essay.

For each article (including the one you select),

- Identify the actors in the story.
- Identify the main sets of sources used. Which sources tell the story of each set of actors?
- Identify the thesis and write it in the thesis-statement-template format: Why did [person/ persons] [do /say/write something surprising]? [Plausible explanation], but in fact [better or more complete explanation]. If you can't find a thesis or some of these elements in the introduction, look in the conclusion as well.
- Identify a dialectic, as described in Princeton Guide, 56-64.

Combine these into a single document and post to Bb as an attachment.

3. February 9. *Stating claims. Classroom.*

Read

- Princeton Guide, Part IV. Projects
- A third recent, scholarly journal article of your choosing that will help you in your research. This should be a recent work of history, not a primary source or an article from another discipline. And it should be a work of original scholarship, based on primary sources, not a historiographical essay.

Read the following lightly, focusing on matters of format, not substance.

- Christopher W. Wells, "The Road to the Model T," *Technology & Culture* 48, no. 3 (July 2007): 497–523.
- James Keith Colgrove, "Between Persuasion and Compulsion: Smallpox Control in Brooklyn and New York, 1894-1902," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 78, no. 2 (2004): 349–78, doi:10.1353/bhm.2004.0062.
- Ann K. Ziker, "Segregationists Confront American Empire: The Conservative White South and the Question of Hawaiian Statehood, 1947-1959." *Pacific Historical Review* 76, no. 3 (August 2007): 439–65.
- Brief for Amici Curiae: Scholars of the Founding Era in Support of Respondents , Moore v. Harper, 2022, https://go.gmu.edu/Moore_v_Harper

Write

Reverse-outline the article of your choosing, the Colgrove, and the Ziker. Follow the model in Princeton Guide, 306-307. Each outline should run one or two pages. Be sure to include the thesis statement and to state the claims, not merely the topics, of each section. . If the thesis shows up more clearly in the conclusion, label it as such there.

Combine these three outlines into a single document and post to Bb as an attachment.

4. Week of February 13. *Individual consultations. Class does not meet as a group.*

- Schedule a Zoom appointment.

- Prior to the appointment, complete as much of next week's research proposal assignment as you can and post to Blackboard.

5. February 23. Proposing research. Classroom.

Post a research proposal. This will include:

- A working title.
- One-paragraph description of the event you will study.
- The chronological scope of your story, and a discussion of whether you will present it as a narrative or a thematic description.
- A cast of characters, whether individuals, groups, or institutions. This needs to be fairly specific. "Women," "Americans," or "the general public" won't work.
- One, two, or three tentative research questions asking why those characters made the choices they made.
- One or more sets or source pools of primary sources. For example, an official report with eyewitness testimony could be a set, or an archival collection, or coverage in one or more periodicals. Explain how the primary sources will present the views of the people you are studying and help answer your research question.
- At least five secondary sources about your topic.

6. March 2. Tracing debates. Classroom.

Begin primary research

If you have not done so already, begin intensive collection and note-taking of the primary sources you identified in your research proposal.

Post: Historiographical essay

Write a 500-1000 word discussion of the major questions debated by scholars and the contribution your study can make. See Princeton Guide 90-97 and 289-90 for instructions, and Buck, "The Mortar Between the Bricks," 186-190 as a model. Post to Bb as an attachment. You may use the secondary sources you identified in previous weeks, but you may also want to add to them.

Prepare: oral presentations

Please prepare to speak for 5-7 minutes about your topic. Slides are optional. Plan to address the existing scholarship, your research question, your main characters, and the primary sources you will use. See AHA Guide to Lightning Rounds <https://www.historians.org/annual-meeting/resources-and-guides/aha-guide-to-lightning-rounds>

*7. March 9. Primary source workshop. **We will meet on Zoom.***

- Read: Princeton Guide, Part V: Stories
- Read: One or more installments from Organization of American Historians, "Teaching the JAH," <https://jah.oah.org/teaching-the-jah/>.
- Read: "How to Share a Primary Source," <https://historyprofessor.org/research/how-to-share-a-primary-source/>.
- Select three primary sources from your research that puzzle you. Format them in 1-2 page handouts, post these to Blackboard as a single document, both to the Assignments

page and to your small group's discussion board. The primary sources in the "Teaching the JAH" installments can serve as models.

- In a separate document, write 1-2 paragraphs on each source, explaining whose story it tells; flag the surprises, questions, and puzzles it raises; and how it answers or alters the research questions in your proposal. Princeton Guide, chapter 10 may be helpful. Post this on Bb as well.

March 16. Spring Break. No class.

*8. March 23. Thesis and outline. **We will meet on Zoom.***

Post comments on each of your small group member's primary sources on the discussion board. Please post about a paragraph per source, commenting on both your classmate's interpretation and the source itself.

Prepare a working outline of your paper.

The outline should feature:

- Thesis in template form. Why did [person/persons] [do /say/write something surprising]? [Plausible explanation], but in fact [better or more complete explanation]. If you have two alternative explanations but don't yet know which one you find better or more complete, that's fine at this stage.
- 3-5 main sections, with thesis for each. Each section will represent about 12-15 paragraphs. If you can't yet form claims for your sections, then pose questions you hope each section will answer.
- The outline should run about 1.5 to 2 pages total.

See Princeton Guide pp. 306-307 for a model.

Prepare a working timeline of the events you will cover.

Write a timeline featuring the key dates you have so far identified, totaling one-half to two pages.

Post the outline and the timeline both to the Assignments page and to your small group's discussion board.

*9. Week of March 27. **Individual consultations.** Class does not meet as a group*

Post comments on each of your small group member's outlines on the discussion board. Please post about a paragraph on each of the following three topics:

1. Thesis statement. Has the author identified each element of the thesis statement template? Do both alternative explanations seem plausible at first glance, so that showing one to be superior to the other is a worthy project?
2. Overall organization. Has the author divided the project into logical sections by time or theme? Is the amount of space for each topic appropriate, or do some topics need more attention, and some less?
3. One or more individual sections that may require special care.

Individual meetings, Group A students.

All students should post a body section of your paper, based on primary sources, at least 12 paragraphs. Provide a revised outline and timeline, if necessary.

10. *Week of April 3. Individual consultations. Class does not meet as a group*

Individual meetings, Group B students.

All students should post a second body section of your paper, based on primary sources, at least 12 paragraphs. Provide a revised outline and timeline, if necessary.

11. *April 13. Progress Reports. Classroom*

No written work due. All students should prepare to speak for about 5-10 minutes about a challenge they are facing. It could be a primary source needing interpretation, a question about how to locate their work in relation to existing scholarship, or a problem of organization or storytelling.

12. *Week of April 17. Individual consultations. Class does not meet as a group*

Individual meetings, Group A students.

All students should post a third body section of your paper, based on primary sources, at least 12 paragraphs. Provide a revised outline and timeline, if necessary.

13. *Week of April 24. Individual consultations. Class does not meet as a group*

Individual meetings, Group B students.

By April 27 at 10:00 a.m., all students should post a complete first draft of their papers on Blackboard both to the Assignments page and to your small group's discussion board. Review Princeton Guide, chapter 13, on Organization.

14. *May 4. Presentations. Classroom.*

Critiques due. Write and post critiques of the drafts assigned to you, both to the Assignments page and to your small group's discussion board. Review Princeton Guide, chapter 13, on Organization.

May 11. 10:15 p.m.

Final papers due on Bb. Include a revision memo explaining the major changes since your previous draft. See my response on "Interviewing Everyman" (on Blackboard) as a model.

Students are encouraged but not required to deposit electronic copies of their final papers with the library. The form for submitting an electronic copy is online at https://library.gmu.edu/mars_submission. Please request that it be included in the collection, History 797: MA Graduate Student Research Seminar