

HIS 611: Seminar in American History

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If you have signed up for HIS 611, by the time you read this you should have arranged with a faculty member to be your “seminar mentor” to work with you one-on-one in the process of researching, writing, and revising a formal research paper based on primary sources. Typically, your overall mentor in the graduate program will also be your “seminar mentor” for this paper but if agreeable to your overall mentor, you can choose to work with another professor as “seminar mentor” for your 611 (or 612) seminar paper. If you have not yet chosen a professor to work with, please do so immediately. I can help with suggestions if you need them.

The seminar proper – i.e. where students and I will get together – will be devoted to progress reports, discussion of common areas of interest, and the like. All substantive matters relating to your seminar paper are to be determined by you and your seminar mentor. At our first meeting, we will settle upon a schedule of occasional classes, probably on Wednesday evenings. Seminar mentors will be welcome to attend any of our scheduled classes.

Our work will consist of the following:

1. First, we will concentrate on strategies for locating and working with primary sources relevant to your selected topic.

2. By the third or fourth week you will produce a one-page typed prospectus and a one-page bibliography of the most important primary and secondary sources. You will be asked to present your topic, briefly, to the class. We will then have a group discussion of problems and issues that have presented themselves. Here we will have an opportunity to help each other with feedback and suggestions.

3. Shortly after the middle of the semester you will deliver a brief oral progress report based on a one-page typed version of your preliminary thesis statement and the evidence you have to support it. Reports will be followed by a roundtable discussion.

4. By the second week before the end of classes you will distribute copies of the paper to two or three other students and to me. Since there are fifteen students signed up for the class, we will break up into groups of two to four to read and comment on the papers. Each student will provide written comments (scribbles in the margins are ok too) for the other students in her/his group. The final paper is due to your seminar mentor at whatever date you have agreed upon.

You should provide copies of everything you have prepared for our 611 group to your seminar mentor as well. At the end of the semester, I will submit to your seminar mentor, a brief assessment of your participation. Since I will not be assigning you any grade, it will be wholly up to your mentor whether or not such assessment will play a role in your seminar grade. This is a matter for you to clarify with your mentor. There should be no confusion, however, over the fact that it is ultimately the quality of the paper you produce that is most important.