

# HIST 6694

## Graduate Writing

### Spring 2016

**Instructor:** Dr. Elaine MacKinnon

**Class Location and Time:** TLC 3205; Mondays, 5:30-8pm

**Office Hours in TLC 3222:** Monday and Wednesdays 12 to 1:30 pm and 3:30 to 4:15 pm

**Online Office Hours:** Tuesdays and Thursdays, online office hours through email or google groups 11:00 am to 1:00 pm (hours may vary from week to week and I will post these changes in Course Den if they occur)

**Note:** Additional office hours available by appointment

**Email:** emcclarn@westga.edu

**Phone:** 678-839-6048

**\*\*\*PLEASE NOTE:** MY PREFERRED EMAIL ADDRESS IS [emcclarn@westga.edu](mailto:emcclarn@westga.edu);

PLEASE DO NOT USE COURSE DEN EMAIL TO CONTACT ME. EMAIL ME AT MY WESTGA.EDU ADDRESS

#### **Description:**

HIST 6694 has one principal goal: to equip you to write graduate-level research papers and / or an M.A. thesis (or thesis essay). All of the class sessions and assignments are designed to help you improve your historical research and writing skills, enhance your ability to present research publicly, and provide opportunity for collaborating with peers in the evaluation of historical research and writing.

#### **Assigned Reading:**

Because this class is focused on the completion of an independent research project, there is less assigned reading in this class than in most other graduate courses at this university. However, you should purchase a copy (or have access to through a library) of the following book for this course, because you will have assigned readings from it and we will discuss it in class.

William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style*, Fourth Edition (Boston: Pearson, 2000)

Additionally, you should purchase a copy (or have access to through a library) of the following book, because it will be an important reference work throughout the semester:

*The Chicago Manual of Style*, 16<sup>th</sup> edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). ISBN: 978-0226104201.

For the latter, you may purchase online; go to <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>

#### **Learning Outcomes:**

All students who receive the MA in History from the University of West Georgia will be able to:

- 1) Conduct original historical research**
- 2) Formulate and defend a historical argument in Standard English**

Students in this course will demonstrate the ability to conduct original historical research, critically engage with primary and secondary sources, and formulate and defend an historical argument in an original work of historical writing at the graduate level. Each student will demonstrate mastery of these learning outcomes by producing an original work of graduate historical writing that is of sufficient quality to serve as the student's final portfolio research paper, thesis essay, or section of an M.A. thesis.

**Assessment:**

Students' final grades will be determined as follows:

Class participation 10%  
Prospectus and bibliography 5%  
Conference paper abstracts (300 and 500 word) 3%  
Citation quiz 2%  
Primary source presentation 5%  
Introduction and historiography section 10%  
Research presentation 10%  
First draft of research paper  
or two thesis chapter drafts 10%  
Final version of Research paper, thesis essay, or thesis chapters 45%

There will be no opportunity for extra-credit assignments in this course.

**Note:** Students writing thesis chapters this semester will have an altered grading scheme due to the fact that they will not turn in an Introduction and historiography section for their chapters. Instead, I will alter the percentages as follows:

Prospectus and bibliography will be worth 10% instead of 5%  
Final versions of thesis chapters will be worth 50% instead of 45%

**Grading Methodology:** This university does not use a plus / minus grading system, but during the course of the semester, I will use plus / minus grades, as well as split-letter grades (e.g., an A- / B+), in order to evaluate students' written work with precision.

In computing final course grades, a grade average of 89.5 or higher converts to a course grade of A, a grade average between 79.5 and 89.49 converts to a course grade of B, and a grade average between 69.5 and 79.49 converts to a course grade of C.

A-range grades, including the grade of A-/B+, are reserved for work that is of exceptional quality. In order to receive an A-range grade, a student's essay must show evidence of original thinking and the ability to synthesize information from a wide variety of sources, as well as an accurate understanding of the material and good writing technique. The paper must also engage with the relevant historiography on the topic. Papers that receive a grade of 90 or above must be cogent and persuasive in their argumentation, and they must be well written and tightly organized around a strong thesis. In short, a paper that receives an A-range grade not only meets the basic requirements for the assignment, but also demonstrates that a student has mastered the interpretative, analytical, and writing skills expected for a course at this level.

B-range grades are given to essays that demonstrate a student's accurate understanding of the material, adequate use of relevant sources, and competence in writing. They rarely contain the sophisticated analysis required for an A-range essay, but they meet the requirements and expectations for the assignment.

C-range grades are given to essays that contain errors in interpretation, inadequate use of existing sources, or poor writing technique, even though they usually meet most of the basic requirements for the assignment.

**Research Paper Assignment (or Thesis Chapters):** The primary assignment for all students in this class is a piece of original graduate historical writing that can fulfill the research paper requirement for M.A. students on the non-thesis track or the thesis project essay requirement for students completing thesis projects, or that can serve as a prospectus, and up to two chapters of an M.A. thesis for students writing theses. Each student in this class will therefore need to complete ONE of the following options: 1) A 25-35 page research paper (which can serve as the exit portfolio paper for students on the non-thesis track); 2) A thesis project essay (for public history students completing a thesis project) that is approximately 30 pages in length; or 3) A thesis prospectus (if not yet completed) and up to two thesis chapters, collectively totaling at least 35 pages (for students writing M.A. theses). Any student is allowed to choose option 1 (a 25-35 page research paper), but students who have begun work on a thesis or thesis project are encouraged to choose either option 2 (for public history students writing thesis project essays) or option 3 (for students writing M.A. theses).

**Other Assignments in This Course:**

**Class participation:** Because this is a seminar-style class, participation in class discussions throughout the semester is important. Your class participation grade will be based not only on your record of class attendance, but also on your level of engagement with the assignments and with the work of your colleagues throughout the semester. It is especially important for you to participate actively in the sessions devoted to critiquing other students' papers. Giving thoughtful, helpful feedback on the work of your fellow students and asking perceptive questions during their class presentations will have a positive effect on your class participation grade. Students who accumulate more than two unexcused absences during the semester or who contribute little or nothing to class discussions of other students' work will receive a class participation grade of C or F.

**Question and bibliography:** On January 25, you will be asked to submit a research question and comprehensive bibliography for your research paper/thesis essay or thesis topic. The question should state the precise focus of your research paper or thesis/thesis chapters. For example, if your research paper topic were "John Wilkes Booth and the assassination of Abraham Lincoln," your research question might be, "What did John Wilkes Booth hope to accomplish by killing President Abraham Lincoln?" Or, if your research paper topic were the Scopes Trial, your stated research question might be, "What effect did the Scopes Trial have on the teaching of evolution in public schools in Tennessee after 1925?" A research question, in other words, should be narrow and precise, and it should give you a clear framework for writing a thesis statement after you complete your research.

Your comprehensive bibliography is to be divided among (1) primary sources (sub-divided among appropriate categories for printed: official/government published sources, newspapers, journals, diaries etc.), visual sources (film, photo), oral interviews (place, date and names); and (2) secondary sources to be sub-divided appropriately among books (monographs and edited collections), journals (if a print edition exists even if accessed online) and exclusively online. The bibliography should list all major secondary sources on your topic (that is, all relevant monographs [books] and, if applicable, any important academic journal articles on the subject), and should designate which of these sources you intend to read this semester. Your list of primary sources may not be as comprehensive, but your bibliography should list the major primary sources that you think you will be able to access.

After completing your bibliography and turning it into me on January 25, you should show it to the faculty member in the department whose own research specialty most closely aligns with your paper topic, or if you have begun work on your thesis or thesis essay, the faculty member who is supervising your thesis or thesis essay. That faculty member must approve the bibliography before you will receive credit for this assignment. You should get the final version of your bibliography, along with your prospectus, signed by the appropriate faculty member by February 15.

**Prospectus:** Your prospectus for your research project should be modeled on the guidelines for thesis prospectuses listed on p. 28 of the UWG history department's graduate student handbook ([http://www.westga.edu/~histgrad/Graduate\\_Student\\_Handbook\\_Fall%202011.pdf](http://www.westga.edu/~histgrad/Graduate_Student_Handbook_Fall%202011.pdf)). For all students (regardless of whether they are writing research papers, thesis project essays, or thesis chapters for this class), the prospectus should present a clear description of the research question and should situate the research project in relation to the existing scholarship on the topic. It should discuss the main sources (especially the primary sources) that will be used for the paper. For students who are writing research papers, the prospectus should be approximately 2 pages long. For students who are writing thesis chapters or thesis essays, the prospectus will be longer, because students who are planning to write thesis chapters or a thesis essay for this class should submit a full thesis prospectus for this assignment. For those students, the thesis prospectus will likely be 4-6 pages long, but exact lengths may vary. If you have already completed a prospectus for your thesis or thesis essay, and it has been approved by your committee, then in lieu of this assignment, you will prepare a detailed outline of the two thesis chapters you will be writing this semester. The draft of your prospectus is due February 1, and the final version, signed either by your thesis supervisor or the faculty member directing your research paper, is due February 15.

**Journal article presentation:** In preparation for the class on February 1, you will need to select a journal article of your choice and then, during the class session, you will be asked to give a 5-10 minute class presentation on the structure of that journal article. The primary goal of this assignment is to encourage you to think about how journal articles are written so that you can use a well written journal article as a model for your own historical writing in this class. For that reason, your presentation should focus primarily on the journal article's structure. Your presentation should briefly summarize the article's content, but should focus primarily on the following questions: How does the article begin? What are its central arguments? How are those arguments introduced and developed? What type of evidence does the author use to support those arguments? How does the author situate his or her own work in relation to the existing historiography on the topic? How does the article conclude? What can you learn from this article's structure that might be relevant to your own historical writing?

Your journal article presentation will not receive an individual grade, but it will count toward your class participation grade.

**Primary source presentation:** On February 8, you will do an oral presentation for the class analyzing a primary source. Your presentation should be approximately 5-10 minutes in length, and must focus on one of the primary sources that you plan to use in your research paper or thesis essay/chapter. If your primary source is a document, you should bring enough copies of the primary source (or an excerpt from the primary source) to share with the class, or else project an image of the document to the class as part of a PowerPoint presentation. If your primary source is a visual image, film excerpt, audio clip, or material object, you should share the primary source with the class using the appropriate media. Your presentation should briefly summarize the content of the primary source; discuss its author, date of origin, point of view, and historical significance; and it should also explain

how you plan to use the primary source to advance your main argument in your paper. You will also be expected to answer questions from other class members as part of your presentation.

**Conference paper abstract:** This assignment will require you to submit two conference paper abstracts for your research project – one that is approximately 300 words long and the other that is 500 words long. The conference paper abstract should be based on the research project that you have selected for this class. We will discuss the expectations for this assignment in class on February 15. This assignment will require you to state clearly and concisely what your argument is, and how your paper or thesis will develop and prove it. The 300-word abstract is due on February 22, and the 500-word abstract is due on March 21.

**Citation quiz:** In class on February 15, you will take a citation quiz. It will require you to write Chicago style footnotes for the following works:

- 1) A monograph with a single author (book).
- 2) A subsequent reference to the same monograph.
- 3) A monograph with two authors.
- 4) An essay in an edited volume.
- 5) A journal article.
- 6) An article from the *New York Times*.
- 7) A website.

The quiz will be based on information presented in the 16<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style*, so you are strongly encouraged to read the relevant sections of the *Chicago Manual* carefully in preparation for the quiz.

**Workshop discussions of students' work:** At several points during the semester, you will receive electronic copies of your colleagues' paper drafts six days prior to a scheduled class workshop, and you will be expected to read and evaluate your colleagues' paper drafts according to a set of assessment questions that you will receive. Your workshop evaluations of your colleagues' work will have a substantial effect on your class participation grade.

**Introduction and historiography section (for students who are not writing thesis chapters):**

Your research paper should begin with an introductory section outlining your main argument, followed by a historiography section that situates your work in the context of previous scholarship in the field. The introductory and historiography section of your paper should be approximately three pages long. It should be a polished piece of work, not a rough draft. (Remember, it will be graded for writing style and content). Please submit your introductory and historiography sections via Dropbox in CourseDen.

**First draft of the research paper or thesis chapters:** The first draft of your research paper or thesis chapters will count for 10 percent of your total course grade, and your draft will also be critiqued, both by me and by the other members of the class. Your first draft should be as complete as you are able to make it, since the feedback that you receive from me and from your fellow classmates will be more valuable if it based on a complete (or nearly complete) draft of your paper or chapter rather than on a version that is only partially finished. The first draft of the research paper must be at least 10 pages long to be accepted, but longer drafts are encouraged. The first draft of a thesis chapter should be a substantially complete chapter, however long that may be. To receive a grade of A, a first

draft must be well written, well organized, and well researched, and it must show promise of being able to become an exceptionally strong paper with some minor revision. However, nearly all first drafts – including those that receive a grade of A – will require additional revision; the receipt of a particular grade for a first draft (whether A, B, C, etc.) is no guarantee of receiving an equivalent grade for the final version of the paper. Please submit your first draft via Dropbox in CourseDen.

**Complete draft of research paper / thesis project essay or second drafts of thesis chapters:** The complete draft of your research paper or thesis project essay (or the second drafts of your thesis chapters) will not be graded, but they will be critiqued. The purpose of this assignment is to give you an opportunity to receive a final round of feedback on your writing before you turn in the final version of your papers for a letter grade.

**Research presentation:** The research presentation should be a formal, academic presentation that is similar in nature to a paper presentation at an academic conference, and should be 15 minutes long. You should prepare a conference presentation script that presents the main argument and highlights of your research paper or thesis in a clear and engaging manner. You will also be expected to answer questions from your classmates at the conclusion of your presentation.

**Plagiarism Policy:**

Plagiarism, which is the presentation of someone else’s words or ideas as your own, is a serious offense that will not be tolerated. It should go without saying that all papers that you write in this course must be your own work. Any students who are caught copying words or ideas from another source and presenting those words or ideas as their own work without proper attribution will be charged with plagiarism. Students who engage in academic dishonesty will automatically fail this course and will be reported to the university administration for possible further disciplinary action. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or how to properly cite sources, please ask, because I will be happy to provide explanations. Ignorance is not an excuse for plagiarism; it is your responsibility to read the materials on plagiarism that are posted on the websites listed in this syllabus and presented in other materials assigned in this course, and to take all necessary steps to avoid plagiarizing someone else’s work.

The UWG history department’s policy on plagiarism can be found here:

[http://www.westga.edu/~histgrad/academic\\_honesty.html](http://www.westga.edu/~histgrad/academic_honesty.html). As this document states, “Any use of the ideas, information, or words of anyone else, including paraphrasing of the words and ideas, without crediting them is plagiarism and is a crime. A direct quote of the words (even only a few words) of someone else must be in quotation marks as well as have a note indicating its source.”

More information about the university’s honor code and the consequences for violating it can be found here:

[http://www.westga.edu/assetsDept/vpaa/Common\\_Language\\_for\\_Course\\_Syllabi.pdf](http://www.westga.edu/assetsDept/vpaa/Common_Language_for_Course_Syllabi.pdf).

All of your written work for this class must be original; you are not allowed to submit essays that you have written for other courses or that you have completed prior to this semester. While I expect that your research project may be a continuation of research that you began prior to this semester, your final paper or thesis chapters should not merely be a revised version of earlier work. If you plan to incorporate sections of earlier papers in the work that you produce for this class, you must discuss this with me in advance.

**Late Penalties:**

Work submitted after the deadline will incur a late grade penalty of 1/3 of a letter grade for each day that the assignment is overdue.

**Faculty Advisors:**

To successfully complete your research project, you will need to consult with your faculty advisor throughout the semester, beginning with a meeting with your advisor during the first two weeks of class to discuss your comprehensive bibliography and research project prospectus. On the first day of class, you should select a history department faculty member who can serve as your advisor on your project throughout the semester. The faculty advisor should have expertise in your selected subject area. If you are planning to complete thesis chapters for this course instead of writing a research paper, your faculty advisor should be your thesis advisor, although it would be a good idea to consult with other members of your thesis committee throughout the semester as well. When possible, I will be sharing your work with your faculty advisor, and any assessments they provide will be factored into your grade.

**Class Schedule:**

1/11 Course introduction and discussion of research topics/faculty advisors

**1/18 MLK Holiday: NO CLASS**

1/25 Discussion of research questions and bibliographies/Writing workshop

**Due: Research question and comprehensive bibliography due at 12pm (submit to Course Den Dropbox by Noon)**

**Reading Assignment: in Strunk and White, Introduction and Chapter I: “Elementary Rules of Usage,” Chapter II: “Elementary Principles of Composition,” Chapter III: “A Few Matters of Form” and Chapter IV: “Misused Words and Expressions”**

2/1 Discussion of Prospectuses and Presentation of Journal articles: What makes for a good journal article?

**\*\*\* Due: Prospectus draft and revised version of bibliography due at 12pm (submit via CourseDen Dropbox by 12 noon)**

You should also provide a copy of your draft to your faculty supervisor, and respond to suggested revisions, in addition to revisions suggested by me.

**Class Assignment: Presentation on a journal article of your choice**

2/8 Primary source presentations

**Class Assignment: 5-10 minute presentation on a primary source of your choice**

You will receive marked copy of your prospectus draft and bibliography, revise and get your advisor to sign copy to be turned in February 15

2/15 How to write a conference paper abstract; how to write a compelling historical narrative

**Citation quiz (in class)**

**\*\*\* Due: Final, signed copy of prospectus and bibliography due February 15 in class  
**Read in Strunk and White, Chapter V: “An Approach to Style”****

2/22 Continued Discussion of Conference Paper Abstracts/Historiography discussion

**Due: 300-word abstract due on Course Den at 12 pm**

**Class Assignment:** Come prepared to discuss historiography of your topic, and specifically present on at least three books related to the topic of your research paper/thesis essay/thesis.

Find a review article on books related to your topic and bring a copy of the article to class for discussion.

2/29 Historiography continued/ Progress reports and troubleshooting

**Due: Introduction and historiography sections due for students writing research papers or thesis essays (submit via Course Den Dropbox by 11:30 pm)**

**Due: First draft of thesis chapter for thesis writers (Submit via Course Den by 11:30 pm)**

3/7 Class Workshop discussion of introduction sections and chapter drafts

**Assignment: Read intro sections and draft thesis chapters prior to class and come to class prepared to discuss them**

**Reading Assignment: Review chapters in Strunk and White I-V**

**MARCH 14-18: SPRING BREAK!!!**

3/21 Class workshop/Discussion of revised chapter drafts

**Due: For thesis chapter writers: Complete Draft of thesis chapter due at 12 pm (submit via Course Den by 12 noon)**

**Due: 500-word conference abstract for your project: bring copy to class**

3/28 Research presentations

**Class Assignment: 15-minute research presentation.** (There will probably be enough time for everyone to present on March 28, but if we run out of time, then the remaining students will give their presentations on April 4).

**Due: For all students except thesis chapter writers: First draft (10-25 pages) of research paper or thesis essay due by 11:30 pm (Submit via Course Den by 11:30 pm)**

4/4 Class workshop discussion of first drafts of research paper or thesis essay

**Class Assignment: Read in advance first drafts of research paper and come to class prepared to discuss them**

**Due: For thesis chapter writers: First draft of second thesis chapter due by 11:30 pm (submit via Course Den by 11:30 pm)**

4/11 Class workshop/ discussion of Second Thesis chapter drafts

**Assignment: Read thesis chapter drafts prior to class and come to class prepared to discuss them**

**Due: For all students except thesis chapter writers: Complete draft of research paper or thesis essay due by 11:30 pm (submit via Course Den by 11:30 pm)**

**Review Strunk and White: Chapters II and V**

4/18 Class workshop/ discussion of precision in writing and the process of revision

**Assignment: Read assigned chapter drafts prior to class and come to class prepared to discuss them**

**Due: For thesis chapter writers: Complete draft of second thesis chapter due by 11:30 pm (submit via Course Den by 11:30 pm)**

4/25 No class meeting

**Due For Everyone: Final version of research paper, thesis essay, or two thesis chapters due by 11:30 pm (submit via Course Den by 11:30 pm)**