The senior research seminar is designed to assist students in conceptualizing, researching, and writing an original historical essay that draws on both secondary literature and a significant amount of primary sources. Assignments are designed to guide students through the process of formulating, researching, and writing the paper over the course of the semester.

There are no required books, but I recommend that you buy the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* and Wayne Booth, et al., *The Craft of Research*. Both books are on reserve in McCabe Library and available for purchase from most bookstores.

**Evaluation Criteria**

- Articulation of a clear, strong, significant, and original thesis
- Presentation of evidence that supports the thesis
- Depth of analysis (i.e., the questions posed)
- Creativity and rigor of interpretation (i.e., the answers proposed)
- Organization and structure
- Correct citation form
- Style of writing

In other words, a successful research paper will be one in which you have a strong engagement with the historiography, a solid command of the materials at your disposal, an effective synthesis of the primary sources, and an ambitious argument/analysis. Keep in mind that the quality of your paper depends in no short measure on the selection of a topic that is feasible in terms of availability of sources.

**Course Requirements**

Students must complete all written and oral assignments to pass the course. All written assignments must be posted on Blackboard by the deadline stated in the syllabus. There will be no exceptions, and you risk failing the course if you miss any of the deadlines. The proper functioning of the seminar depends on the timely submission of all assignments.

**Seminar Participation**
Scholarship is not a solitary endeavor, and at various times in the semester students will be responsible for reading and discussing other students’ written work. This process is designed to provide students with critical readers of their writing and to encourage collective learning from each other.

**Group Meetings**

We will meet as a group during the following weeks: one, three, four, six, eight, nine, and thirteen.

**Written Assignments**

Written assignments are due on:

- September 13 (Prospectus and Preliminary Bibliography)
- October 1 (Annotated Bibliography)
- October 6 (Research Proposal)
- October 27 (Historiographical Essay)
- November 3 (Document Analysis)
- November 19 (First Version)
- November 30 (Revised Version and Peer Critique)
- December 17 (Final Version)

**WEEK ONE: INTRODUCTION**

Discussion of Young-sun Hong, “Cigarette Butts and the Building of Socialism in East Germany,” *Central European History*, vol. 35, no. 3 (2002), pp. 327-344. Available on Blackboard. Come to class with a written outline that breaks down the article into constituent parts. I am less interested in your grasp of the author’s argument and more concerned with your ability to recognize the following aspects of the article: statements of problem, premises, thesis; discussion of sources; treatment of historiography; development of narrative and argument’ conclusion’ questions for future research. In other words, we will discuss the structure of the essay and focus on the building blocks of a historical essay. Print and bring the article to class.

In addition, please give some thought to the selection of your project and be prepared to talk with me. Remember that your project should build upon the courses and knowledge that you already possess.

**WEEK TWO: INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES**

You settle on your topic by the end of this week. You must post on Blackboard a description of the topic (prospectus) and a preliminary bibliography by **noon on Monday, September 13** in the “Topic” folder in the Groups section.

**WEEK THREE: LIBRARY RESOURCES AND RESEARCH TOOLS**
We will meet in the Electronic Resource Classroom (Fourth floor of McCabe) with the library staff.

WEEK FOUR: INDEPENDENT RESEARCH

You will use this to assemble your annotated bibliography of secondary works and identify primary source materials available in the library, via Interlibrary Loan, or in Philadelphia-area archives and libraries. Begin reading and taking careful notes on the materials you are assembling.

We will meet as a group during week four for a discussion of note-taking and other related matters. I will also circulate a sample research proposal for discussion.

WEEK FIVE: INDEPENDENT RESEARCH

Continue assembling your annotated bibliography. You must post on Blackboard an annotated bibliography by noon on Friday, October 1 in the “Annotated Bibliography” folder in the Groups section. The bibliography should include the most important books and articles you have identified and as many primary sources as possible. Structure the bibliography in the following manner:

Secondary Sources: Give complete bibliographical information in the correct form. Get in the habit of writing a proper bibliographical entry now since you will save a lot of time down the road. Just imagine needing to look up all your sources once again in mid-December. You will have other, more pressing matters when you are in the throes of finishing the paper. In addition, provide a brief annotation (several sentences) that summarizes the main themes, arguments, and sources used in the work cited.

Primary Sources: Give complete bibliographical information in the correct form. Provide a brief annotation (several sentences) that describes the kind of source it is, where the source is located, and whose perspective(s) the source provides.

WEEK SIX: RESEARCH PROPOSAL

You must post on Blackboard your research proposal by 4 PM on Wednesday, October 6 in the “Proposal” folder in the Groups section. Your proposal must describe the topic you plan to research and the historical questions you will address, explain what other scholars have said about the topic, indicate how you to expect your findings to fit into the existing literature, and describe your source materials. Be sure to supply a tentative title and treat this opportunity to convince your classmates and me that your topic is both important and fascinating. Show us how your work will address an angle that has not been previously examined, or how your project will allow you to answer the questions you have posed.
In addition, please provide a brief outline of the paper as you now envision it. Each student is responsible for reading the proposals of all the students in your section.

**WEEK SEVEN: INDEPENDENT RESEARCH AND INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS**

**WEEK EIGHT: HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY**

You must post on Blackboard your historiographical essay by 4 PM on Wednesday, **October 27** in the “Historiography” folder in the Groups section. This essay should build on the reading you have done to date, and it will form an important section of your final paper. The essay should discuss the major works relevant to your research topic, assess how certain works share theoretical/methodological/interpretive concerns, and evaluate the strengths and deficiencies of the secondary literature. Your essay should also consider how the arguments and approaches in the secondary literature have shaped your own thinking on the topic, and how and why your ideas coincide with or diverge from other scholars.

As I’ve stressed time and time again, historians are engaged in the business of interpreting the past. Not surprisingly, historians do not always agree with the interpretations and analyses of their colleagues. This exercise is designed to have you explore how other historians have examined and interpreted your topic. Every work of historical scholarship is built upon a foundation of footnotes and references to past publications, and each work occupies its own place within a literature on a particular topic.

A successful historiographical essay will explore the strengths and weaknesses of the respective positions in terms of evidence, methodology and argumentation. It is a review of historians’ approaches and interpretations of a particular historical event. Naturally, you will not be able to discuss all the books and approaches you have encountered. So you should select the most important and significant interpretations. One rule of thumb is to select texts that are representative of the historical scholarship on your topic or are central to the examination of your topic (such as a book or article that has influenced everyone else’s work).

Your essay should introduce the reader to the historical significance of the problem under examination and indicate how the materials you have selected help shed light on this issue. You will also need to provide an overview, analysis and critical evaluation of the books and articles you have chosen. I do not want or expect a blow-by-blow description of each chapter and paragraph. Instead, you should strive to integrate your analyses of the books and articles into a cohesive, integrated synthesis that examines the issues raised in common by the work under review and also compares and contrasts their respective arguments, conclusions, methodologies, etc. Finally, you should conclude your essay with your own assessment and judgment of the controversy. In sum, you should offer a critical analysis of the essential works on your topic and comment on their strengths, weaknesses and so on.
One way to help you navigate the various sides of the historical controversy is to consult book reviews written by other historians. Their assessments and evaluations will provide you with an intellectual framework within which you can develop your own point of view regarding the controversy. You can find reviews in numerous historical journals either by browsing the shelves in McCabe or by utilizing the wonders of on-line databases such as JSTOR or First Search.

In class I will not ask each of you to discuss your own essays. Rather we will devote the time to discussing what we have learned from each other’s essays. Come to class prepared to discuss what you thought were the most successful ways to present the historiography of a topic. What constitutes an effective and good historiographical essay? What are the challenges of writing such an essay, and how do you overcome them?

I have placed several examples of historiographical essays in the “Course Documents” folder on Blackboard.

WEEK NINE: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

The purpose of document analysis essays is to allow students to learn, practice, and showcase their skills in original historical interpretation. These essays are designed to resemble brief parts or vignettes of the kind of historical articles that you have read and will write in this course. This two-to-three page document analysis should be an interpretation of a particularly important, fascinating, or difficult document.

There are many different ways to interpret a primary source document, and a multitude of ways to be creative in the process. In some instances, this might involve telling a story; in other cases it might involve a commentary on the language employed in the document; and in other cases that interpretation might emerge from an attempt to assess motivation, intent, or purpose. Never will simply describing what happened be sufficient as an historical interpretation of a document.

In short, historians are always trying to discover both the meaning and the significance of a piece of historical evidence. Since that evidence usually consists of written documents, these document analysis papers should also seek to find a balance between exposing meaning and significance of the evidence. By meaning, we are trying to reconstitute what that document might have meant (or how it might have been understood) by the historical actors in that era. By significance, we attempt to relate how that evidence contributes to a particular interpretation of past. Therefore, a good document analysis paper will focus upon both the text itself (with attention to the specifics and nuances of language used) and the context (the broader picture of the history of that period that informs the document).

But the meaning and significance of a text can be lost on your readers if you forget to tell them the basic information they need to know about that document. So remember to include somewhere in your document analysis essay the following important
information: who wrote the document?, when?, why?, and for whom?, and how is this
document relevant for your research paper?

Bring photocopies of the document (or an excerpt if it is long) for all members of the
class, including the instructors. In class you will be responsible for summarizing your
document and highlighting its significance. You may also want to discuss parts of the
document you may have omitted.

You must post on Blackboard your document analysis by 4 PM on Wednesday,
November 3 “Document Analysis” folder in the Groups section.

WEEK TEN: INDEPENDENT WRITING

WEEK ELEVEN: INDEPENDENT WRITING

Please post on Blackboard the first version of research paper due by noon on Friday,
November 19 in the “First Version” folder in the Groups section. Keep in mind that the
first version of your paper (aka “rough draft”) is a roadmap of only partly known but
completely imagined terrain. That is, it should contain an outline of your entire paper as
you can define it at this time, and it should contain those sections that you have written
by the due date. These sections ought to include some version of your historiographical
essay and some analyses of primary sources. It should also include a clear statement of
your topic and thesis. Remember that like all incomplete maps, this one will be altered as
you learn more about the terrain. But by mid-November you should have a pretty good
idea of where you are going. Otherwise, you will have difficulty finishing by December
17.

Conceptualize the paper as a journal article, not a book. Writing the first version will be
all the more manageable if you think of the research paper as an article.

WEEK TWELVE: INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES WITH INSTRUCTORS

WEEK THIRTEEN: REVISION AND PEER CRITIQUES

Please post on Blackboard the revised version of research paper by 4 PM on Tuesday,
November 30 in the “Peer Critique” folder in the Groups section. You are responsible
for reading your partner’s paper and submitting a written critique before class. Please
post your written critique in the “Peer Critique” folder in the Groups section of
Blackboard. Critiques should discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your partner’s
paper and make constructive suggestions for improvement. Normally, these critiques
will be two or three double-spaced pages in length. You will meet with your partner
during class and discuss your comments and suggestions. Bring a printed copy of your
critique for your partner.

WEEK FOURTEEN: REVISION
FINAL VERSION OF PAPER DUE BY 4 PM ON FRIDAY, DECEMBER 17. PLEASE POST ON BLACKBOARD IN THE “FINAL VERSION” FOLDER IN THE GROUPS SECTION.