

Dr. Jon Cowans  
Class meets: TTh 6-7:20, Conklin 424

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Office hours: TTh 3:30-4, 5:30-6pm

**Topics in History: DOING RESEARCH IN HISTORY**  
**21:510:227 (Spring 2016) index 17988**

Students will learn the basics of doing research in history, putting those skills to work in a small-scale research project of their own design that results in a paper of ten to fifteen pages. The course develops skills in research, reading comprehension, critical thinking, and writing.

**GRADING**

Students are bound by the university's academic integrity policy, which appears here: <http://www.ncas.rutgers.edu/office-dean-student-affairs/academic-integrity-policy>. If you are unsure whether something is permitted, ask the professor, as the penalties are very strict.

**ATTENDANCE:** In this course attendance is crucial, and it is impossible to make up missed sessions. It is the student's responsibility to present written documentation for any absence to be excused, and no excuses will be accepted after Tue. May 3. Penalties for unexcused absences are as follows:

For one unexcused absence, the overall course grade falls by 1 point.

For two, it falls by 2 points.

For three, it falls by 3 points.

For four, it falls by 10 points.

Five unexcused absences result in an F in the class.

Time missed for arriving late or leaving early is added up. Each 80 minutes equals one absence. Any student who misses eight or more sessions for any combination of excused and unexcused absences will not earn credit and should withdraw from the class to avoid getting an F.

**CLASS PARTICIPATION:** Everyone is required to participate regularly in class discussions. The score reflects both the frequency of participation and the quality of comments and questions. Use of all electronic devices (including phones and laptops) is prohibited and will lower this score.

**IN-CLASS WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:** Brief in-class writing assignments will primarily serve to indicate your writing abilities and areas needing improvement.

**WRITING QUIZZES:** A series of quizzes will test knowledge of the rules of written English. Studying the Writing Tips is crucial to passing these quizzes.

Turn in the following assignments via email, attaching files in Word. Late penalties: five points per day.

**SOURCES LIST:** You will compile a primary-source list and an annotated bibliography of at least three books and three journal articles. In your bibliography, describe each book or article in one sentence. Try to be as informative and specific as you can. Instead of stating obvious information one could guess from the title, sum up what it *argues* or what key information it contains. You will need to read at least part of each work to be able to summarize it informatively. Due Tue. Mar. 8 (5:45pm) via email.

**PAPER PROPOSAL:** The proposal (700 to 1000 words) will state what problem or question you are researching and will explain why that issue is significant. It will also describe the primary sources you are using, quoting briefly from them to show their usefulness. Due by Mon. Mar. 14 (6pm) via email.

**OUTLINE:** An outline (maximum two double-spaced pages) will indicate the paper's overall structure and will place abbreviated versions of key findings, arguments, and quotations in the proper sequence.

FINAL PAPER: The final paper will be at least ten full pages and no more than fifteen full pages. It must be in 12-point font with margins of one inch all around and with pages numbered.

You must cite all sources using endnotes (**not** MLA style – see Writing Tips for format). The page count only includes the text, not the endnotes, primary-source list, and annotated bibliography.

The grade will assess the topic, research, writing, endnotes, and bibliography.

GRADE BREAKDOWN:

Class participation:	10%
Writing assignments and quizzes:	15%
Sources list:	15%
Paper proposal:	5%
Outline:	5%
Final paper:	<u>50%</u>
Total:	100%

You must complete the sources list, proposal, outline, and paper in that order. No assignment will be accepted until the previous one has been completed and approved.

**Tue 1-19: INTRODUCTION: Why history?**

Why should we study and teach history? What kinds of questions do historians ask, and what different approaches do they take? How does history differ from other disciplines in the university? How has the writing of history changed in recent years?

**PART ONE: UNDERSTANDING SOURCES**

**Thu. 1-21: Primary and Secondary Sources**

What are primary and secondary sources? How do we tell them apart? How do they differ? What do historians do with them? We will read some brief sources and discuss what to make of them.

**Tue. 1-26: Understanding Primary Sources**

We will delve further into the analysis of primary sources and discuss strategies for reading sources analytically and understanding them.

Writing assignment #1 (in class): students will be given a short source and will analyze it.

A take-home writing quiz will be distributed in class.

**Thu. 1-28: Surveying the Universe of Primary Sources**

In class, we will collectively compile a list of as many *kinds* of primary sources as possible. We will also analyze some of the newer kinds of sources historians now use.

Take-home writing quiz #1 due in class at 6pm.

**Tue. Feb. 2: Understanding Secondary Sources**

We will consider how many of the questions we asked about primary sources also apply to secondary sources. We will also discuss the process by which journal articles get published, including the processes of peer review and editing, and we will look online at some of the many different journals that exist.

Writing assignment #2 (done outside class, due via email by 5:45pm): In an essay of no more than 500 words, compare and contrast two short secondary sources (distributed beforehand by email).

## **PART TWO: FINDING SOURCES -- PRELIMINARY RESEARCH**

Rather than choosing a specific topic and then seeking sources for it, we will invert the process. So you will first find a few sources in a general area of interest and then consider what you could do with them.

### **Thu. Feb. 4: Choosing a research topic**

In class, we will discuss how one chooses a general area for research; we will discuss trends in historical research and the nature and merits of “hot topics.” We will look at titles of conference papers and magazine and journal articles, exploring the concept of “asking big questions in small places.”

In class, I will ask each student about his or her areas of interest, inside and outside of school.

### **Tue. Feb. 9: Finding primary sources**

In class, we will do some searches of databases on the Rutgers library website.

Due via email by 5:45pm: three possible topics of interest to you, with a paragraph on each.

### **Thu. Feb. 11: Finding primary sources**

In class, we will look at a wide variety of document collections found online.

Take-home writing quiz #2 distributed in class.

### **Tue. Feb. 16: Finding secondary sources**

We will go over how to search for secondary-source articles in databases on the Rutgers Libraries website and how to obtain them. We will also discuss other libraries and research facilities in the area.

Take-home writing quiz #2 due in class.

### **Thu. Feb. 18: Doing research in Dana Library**

We will meet in Dana Library and explore its resources. We will look at books, bound periodicals, and microfilm and learn how to scan, copy, and email them.

### **Tue. Feb. 23: No class meeting**

On your own time, work on locating primary sources. From 5:30 to 7:00, you may drop by my office if you would like to discuss your topic ideas or get help searching for sources online.

## **PART THREE: DESIGNING THE RESEARCH PROJECT**

### **Thu. Feb. 25: Choosing a specific topic**

We will discuss your three topic ideas.

By 5:30pm, you must email me your three specific topic ideas (with a short paragraph describing each) *and* one primary source from each topic. In class and over the next week, we will discuss which of your three ideas seems most interesting and practical to research.

### **Tue. Mar. 1: Analyzing your sources**

In class, we will discuss and interpret the primary sources you submitted. We will also discuss the historical context, i.e., what relevant things were going on at the time the source was produced.

In-class writing quiz.

### **Thu. Mar. 3: Writing a research proposal**

We will discuss the writing of a research proposal, including the situations in which people write such things. We will consider what makes for a successful proposal.

Keep working on your bibliography and primary-source list.

**Tue. Mar. 8: Preliminary Presentations**

Students will give a brief (two to three minute) informal description of their project; others in class will ask questions and offer suggestions.

Due via email by 5:45pm: your annotated bibliography and primary-source list, along with a brief statement of your research question.

**Thu. Mar. 10: Preliminary Presentations, continued**

Please email me your two-page proposal by Monday Mar. 14 at 6pm. (If you are leaving town for spring break, get it to me before you leave.)

SPRING BREAK

**PART FOUR: FINDING SOURCES: RESEARCH**

In this phase, you will finish your research.

**Tue. Mar. 22: Individual meetings**

I will meet with each of you by appointment to go over what remaining research you need to do.

**Thu. Mar. 24: Individual meetings, continued**

**Tue. Mar. 29: Presentations**

Each student will give an informal presentation of his or her project, followed by Q&A.

**Thu. Mar. 31: Presentations, continued**

**Tue. Apr. 5: Presentations, continued (if necessary)**

**PART FIVE: WRITING THE PAPER**

**Thu. Apr. 7: Outlines**

We will go over how to do an effective outline and how to “plug” the research into it.

**Tue. Apr. 12: Outlines due**

Submit your outline by 6pm, via email. No class meeting.

**Thu. Apr. 14: No class meeting: work on papers (office hours by appointment)**

**Tue. Apr. 19: No class meeting: work on papers (office hours by appointment)**

**Thu. Apr. 21: Editing workshop**

In class, we will edit some passages together, rewording for clarity and economy of expression.

In class: Writing quiz #3.

**Tue. Apr. 26: Rough draft due**

Rough draft, annotated bibliography, and primary-source list due via email (6pm). I will email you feedback indicating areas that need improvement.

**Thu. Apr. 28: No class meeting**

**Tue. May 3: Final Papers due via email by 6pm**