

Senior Seminar in History (HIST 4999)

Fall 2026, Truman State University
BH 219, TR 1:30-2:50

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Description

Senior Seminar is the capstone experience for history majors. Combining and building on the knowledge in historiography and skills in research you have acquired so far, it culminates in a major, independent, original research project that is subject to rigorous academic standards. Passing the course proves that you have understood what it means to be a historian and earned your degree in history.

Course structure

The course seeks to accomplish two tasks. The first is to offer guidance and insight into the strictures and standards according to which professional historians work. The second task is to create an environment conducive to executing an independent research project that is consistent with those standards. As such, we begin with a discussion about what exactly it is that historians do. In the remaining months, we pursue the research project. We work collectively and in increments, following each step in the writing process together, from deciding on a topic, choosing sources and developing a bibliography to writing drafts and revising. Throughout, we meet individually and as a group to give progress reports and to give and receive feedback.

A research paper is one that advances a persuasive, clear, and original *argument*. That it is original means that the argument needs to be yours. Though it often builds on a topic that you have begun to explore in another class, the paper must be a new project, not a recycled one. Academic dishonesty or plagiarism (whose definition includes recycled papers) in any aspect or at any stage of your work triggers an automatic F in the course and is grounds for expulsion from the university. More importantly, *it is part of your job as a historian to demonstrate that your work is original*. This is why you always see a real historian contrast his or her work to what has previously been written on the subject.

Completion of *all* assignments is *required* to pass the course. The completion of a portfolio is a graduation requirement. (Even if you are not graduating, you turn in your portfolio in conjunction with the capstone course at <http://portfolio.truman.edu>.)

This is a four-credit course with only three weekly face-to-face meetings with your professor. You will earn the fourth credit because this course incorporates increased content and collateral readings, including primary sources, as well as increased research and paper writing. It also includes higher-level critical thinking exercises that specifically develop analysis, synthesis, and evaluation rather than simple knowledge and comprehension. You are expected to complete 180 hours of work for this 4-credit-hour, writing-enhanced course. This includes class meetings, preparation for discussion, reading, research, and writing. Time management is essential.

This class has been designed to help satisfy the “writing-enhanced” requirement of the Dialogues Curriculum. As such, the various written projects will assist the quest to improve your writing and critical thinking skills as well as help you understand how interconnected are cognition, the writing process, and the final written product. As part of this mission, this class will provide the opportunities for you to work toward meeting the specific objectives of Truman’s “writing-enhanced” requirement, especially writing as product to communicate your ideas to others:

- be able to write clear, coherent, and well-organized prose for a targeted audience
 - demonstrate a command of syntax, style, and tone appropriate to the task
 - exhibit mastery of punctuation, usage, and formatting conventions.
- See the syllabus addendum on Blackboard for additional class policies.

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Points</u>
Participation and attendance	100
Writer profile & strategies	100
Submission of preliminaries (topic and bibliography)	50
5-page draft:	50
15-page draft:	100
Peer review:	100
Presentation:	100
Draft & Final paper:	400

Grades are calculated out of a percentage total possible points for the class: 90-100 percent is an A, 80-89 is a B, 70-79 is a C, and 60-69 is a D. Below 60 percent is an F. Successful completion of all assignments is required to receive credit for this class.

Please note: The *highest* final grade you can receive for the class is that of your final research paper. Completion of the preliminary assignments is a prerequisite to pass the class, and failure to do so in an adequate manner will lower your grade for the class.

Each of these steps must be completed in order and on time in order to receive credit for this class.

- **Participation.** Your participation is an important part of the seminar and is a significant portion in the evaluation of your performance. Participation means contributing to the learning of other students by engaging them with both rigor and respect.
- **Writer Profile.** Type up a two-page statement profile of yourself as a writer, laying out your strengths and weaknesses. Identify areas where you think you will need help and where you think you may be of help to others. Look back at something you wrote as a freshman, and consider how your writing has developed since then. What have you worked on over the years in terms of writing style?
 - assess your own writing to uncover strengths and concerns, and be able to generate strategies for improvement
- **AHA Standards.** Read the American Historical Association’s “Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct” and “Guiding Principles for Artificial Intelligence in History Education” and be prepared to discuss them. Think about what comprises a successful historical research paper. Be prepared to share your ideas.
- **AH rankings.** Read the assigned essays in *The Apprentice Historian*. Rank and grade them. Be prepared to justify your evaluations.

- **Topic Presentation.** Present the topic of your paper to the class.
- **Bibliography.** Turn in a list of all the sources on **Zotero** that you have identified, separating primary sources, listed first, and secondary sources.
- **Methodology.** The methodology refers to the “how” of your research project. How are you using your source base? Do you need to conduct random sampling due to a plethora of primary sources (e.g., newspapers)? Or are you casting a wide net due to a scarcity of primary sources? Where will you find these sources? What historical approaches does your topic emphasize: social, political, economic, cultural, etc.? How does this approach influence your choice of secondary sources?
- **Outline.** Create a plan of each section, stating which issues belong in which section, and showing the overall structure of your paper.
- **Annotated bibliography.** Pare down your sources and write a few sentences describing each and explain why they are useful to your paper.
- **5-page draft.** Develop one 5-page section of your paper focused on the historiography or literature review.
- **15-page draft.** Turn in fifteen pages; this can include your previous 5 pages, but if so, those five pages should be revised according to past feedback. This draft will be graded.
- **Peer Review.**
- **Senior Presentation.** Give a formal, professional ten-minute presentation to the department, describing your paper’s topic and argument, what’s been written about that topic previously, your contribution to the field, and the sources you use to make your argument. I expect everyone to be present for your peers’ presentations.
- **Full draft.** Turn in as polished a draft as you can of the full 25 pages. This will be returned with detailed feedback so that you can make final improvements.
- **Final Paper.** This is it: a 25-page research paper that makes a clear, persuasive, original, and historically significant argument.

Class Schedule

Week 1: Introductions

Writer Profile and previous projects.

The Historical Profession - AHA standards. Read and discuss the American Historical Association, “Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct,”

<http://www.historians.org/pubs/free/ProfessionalStandards.cfm> and “Guiding Principles for Artificial Intelligence in History Education,” <https://www.historians.org/resource/guiding->

principles-for-artificial-intelligence-in-history-education/

Read the assigned essays in *The Apprentice Historian* (on Brightspace). Rank and grade them. Be prepared to justify your evaluations.

Week 2: Present the topic of your paper to the class. Submit paper proposal & preliminary bibliography.

Week 3: Submit outline and discussion of methodology.

Week 4: Submit your annotated bibliography. Identify and annotate each source you plan to use in your paper by (1) explaining who the author is, (2) summarizing the content, and (3) describing its value to your project.

Week 5: 5-page draft historiography due.

Week 6: First introduction

Weeks 7-8: Progress reports

Week 9: 15-page draft due.

Week 10: Progress reports

Weeks 11-14: Peer reviews

Week 15: Presentations.

Final revised paper due: Tuesday Dec. 8 (11:30 a.m.-1:20 p.m.). Turn in a 20-25-page research paper that makes a clear, persuasive, original, and historically significant argument.