

History 6394 – revised September 6, 2017
(Research) Seminar in History

Professor Brian Domitrovic
bfd015@gmail.com
(936) 294-1474

This is a course in how to do near-professional-level history from scratch. It is a “capstone” course in that sense. The point is to equip advanced graduate students in the methods of producing not history (what happened—which every person contemporaneously produces) but an example of well constructed historiography (what historians say about the past).

The course is a practicum, in that we shall learn by doing. The ultimate product of the course from each student is a professionally compiled research paper that would be suitable for a submission to a historical journal or as a component of a book proposal. Topics treated include the nature of historiography, the nature of a topic; primary, secondary, and tertiary sources; “heuristics” and archival research; assembling evidence; and making and presenting arguments and writing narrative.

The course is also a seminar, defined early in the nineteenth century in the German university as a common scholarly inquiry across the term by all members around the “table”—which in our case is virtual. To that end, we shall all be researching in one topic area for our research projects. Throughout the term, we can have informed conversation with each other about each other’s projects. Each project can be considerably strengthened by the running discussions of everyone’s research in the same topic area.

That topic area is the presidency of John F. Kennedy (1961-63). This is the topic area not only for its native significance for modern American history, but for an imperative practical reason. The John F. Kennedy Presidential Library (in Boston) is almost fully online, in terms of its archives. We can do primary-resource research in this topic area at the most intensive level.

The Units of the course will follow the path of putting together a successful research project. After an overture about the nature of historiography, we shall follow practicums in doing research. In December, we shall all produce substantial research papers that have been honed in the making for three months.

Reading:

Your own research in the Nancy MacLean/Democracy in Chains controversy
John Lukacs, “Putting Man Before Descartes,” <https://theamericanscholar.org/putting-man-before-descartes/>
Selections from David Hackett Fisher, *Historians’ Fallacies*

Extensive use of the JFK Library research site, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Research.aspx>

Grading:

Mid-September: *Historians’ Fallacies* essay (10%)

Late September: Primary source sample (10%)
Early October: Topic and problem sheet (10%)
Mid-October: Secondary source sample (10%)
Late October: *Precis* (10%)
Early December: Final paper (40%)
Participation (10%)

Fine print: <http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/>