Senior Seminar
(History Capstone)

Кто старое помянет — тому глаз вон, а кто забудет — тому оба вон

Dwell on the past and you’ll lose an eye; forget the past and you’ll lose both eyes.
A Russian proverb

The purpose of the senior History seminar—or “Capstone”—is to offer to the History major the time and space necessary to develop further and then demonstrate mastery of the “tools of the trade.” It is in this seminar that you will be required to show that you know how to produce a primary source-based piece of historical writing of substantial length, asking questions and using sources in a way that is consistent with the conventions of the discipline. In this course, students will be free to choose the topic on which they wish to write; there is no prescribed research topic. In addition to producing a substantial piece of writing, students will build upon the foundations established in previous history courses—doing lots of library research tasks, examining closely the style and structure of good historical writing, and reading (as they did in junior seminar) more examples of good scholarship. It is the objective of this course that you leave it with more than a “big paper” under your belt, but also with better reading, writing, and critical-thinking skills, because, unless you happen to discover a previously unknown draft of the Declaration of Independence buried somewhere in the shelves of McGill, these are the skills that will serve you and excite you far longer than anything you may put on paper this semester.

Goals and Outcomes

On the most basic, stratospheric level, the goals of this course are:

1. To describe the interconnectedness and relevance of all knowledge;
2. To identify the nature and limits of historical claims;
3. To describe how historians make claims about the past;
4. To define what a primary source is for a historian;
5. To describe how historical knowledge evolves, changes, and is revised;
6. To demonstrate effective written and oral communication skills and to support these skills through the appropriate use of technology tools.
7. To demonstrate problem solving, critical thinking and, cooperative-learning skills.

and, on an affective level,

8. To instill a love of learning and respect for past and unfamiliar cultures.
These important and lofty goals will be achieved through reading primary and secondary sources, discussing with your peers and with the instructor the meaning and significance of these readings, and by writing about what you have discovered in this research.

The more specific goals of this reading, discussing, and writing are to:
1. Demonstrate mastery of citation conventions used by historians in your writing;
2. Demonstrate mastery of the analysis of primary sources in your writing and oral participation;
3. Demonstrate mastery of critical thinking in the formation of historical, source-based arguments in your writing and oral participation;
4. Demonstrate master of your argument (the thesis of your research) in your writing and oral participation;

and, on an affective level,

5. Enrich your lives forever!

**Texts**

This course requires students to have and handle *The Chicago Manual of Style (CMS)*, 17th edition, which is available for purchase at the College bookstore and elsewhere. Many may already have it; those who do not will find it necessary in all their written work and therefore essential to purchase and possess. Some time in class will be devoted to this vital manual, but most of our energies will be focused on producing your seminar paper.

In addition, students will read Harry Frankfurt’s *On Bullshit*, also available in the bookstore. There will be a short essay on it at the very beginning of the semester.

Finally, I will be distributing other short readings over the course of the semester.

**Assignments and Policies**

1. **Prospectus.** The generation of this prospectus is the primary objective of the course. This paper will be no less than 3500 words in length (not counting notes) and involve no fewer than 25 sources—both primary and secondary. This paper constitutes the bulk of your final grade.

2. **Bibliography.** This is a useful and essential tool for your continuing research, which will continue over summer and into next fall, to generate a senior capstone research paper.

3. **Oral Presentation.** You will formally present your research *Problematik* to the class and receive feedback from both the students and professor.

4. **Participation.** Participation constitutes a sizeable portion of your final grade for the simple reason that this is a seminar course, and thus, by format is discussion-oriented. Students are expected to attend seminar and to have prepared for class by having read the assigned
readings and/or produced the assigned writing. Unexcused or excessive absences will be penalized in the participation component of the grade.

5. **Portfolio.** All students will begin to compile a portfolio of their written work over the course of their careers as History majors. Detailed instructions for assembling the portfolio will be distributed in the first week of classes. Students will submit their portfolios, and the entire History faculty will review them as a way to help us assess the outcomes and strengths of our History program. The portfolio will be submitted for a preliminary assessment at the end of this semester, but will be due in final form only at the end of the fall semester (in His602).

All written assignments submitted in this class must observe the following conventions on paper format:

A. Type your papers.
B. Double space your main text.
C. Single space footnotes, but double space between them. Double-space endnotes.
D. Do not put extra spaces between paragraphs or subheadings.
E. Use reasonable margins and headers/footers: 1.25” all around.
F. Do not use a title page, but always have a title.
G. Begin page 1 at the top of the first page (not mid page). Place your title at the very top of page 1, with the main body of the text beginning 3 lines below it.
H. After your title, your first paragraph should NOT be indented. All others, of course, should be. If you use subheadings in the main body of the text (e.g., “Introduction”, “Section 1”, “Conclusion”—these are rare in student papers but do sometimes appear), then the paragraph beginning immediately after a subheading is NOT indented.
I. Always paginate (you may omit for page 1).
J. Use only black ink for all your text, including hyperlinks that might appear in your main text, foot- or endnotes, or bibliographies (hyperlinks often print out in blue ink; it is advisable to deactivate all hyperlinks in your papers as a matter of course).
K. Pay scrupulous attention to spelling, grammar and punctuation, which do “count.”
L. Use footnotes or endnotes (footnotes are friendlier to the reader), following strictly the *Chicago Manual of Style* (17th edition) rules.
M. Include a bibliography, starting at the top of a new page and listing not only all sources cited but all sources consulted.
N. The bibliography page should follow CMS style; the heading “Bibliography” (no quotation marks) should appear at the top of a new page, centered.
O. Always staple your pages together.
P. Always be mindful of the appearance of your submitted work. A bad printer or low ink cartridge (and therefore poor-quality print) is not acceptable.
Q. All written assignments must be submitted in hardcopy by the announced due date and simultaneously sent to the professor as an email attachment (martinre@westminster.edu). When doing so, please name your file with your last name followed by the number of the assignment (without a space), e.g.: Martin1, Martin2, etc. (If there are two students with the same last name, add initials of first and middle names, again without spaces: REMartin1, REMartin2, etc.)
R. Be advised that late papers are penalized in ruthless Soviet fashion: a one-third reduction in the grade of the paper for each day late (including weekends), beginning at the conclusion of the class during which the assignment was due. An “A” paper turned in one day late will receive an “A-,” two days late, a “B+,” three, a “B,” and so on.

All students will be strongly encouraged to participate in the Westminster Undergraduate Research Symposium on campus in the spring, presenting their original research to the College’s broader academic community.

**Grading**

1. The final grade will be determined according to the following breakdown:

   - Prospectus: 40%
   - Bibliography: 20%
   - Oral Presentation: 10%
   - Participation: 20%
   - Other small assignments: 10%
   - Portfolio: 0%, but required

2. Grades will be assigned according to the follow numerical equivalencies:

   - 93-100: A
   - 90-92: A-
   - 87-89: B+
   - 83-86: B
   - 80-82: B-, .....Etc.

**On Citation Styles**

All source citations for all assignments in this seminar must be in painstakingly accurate CMS style.

**Academic Integrity**

The 2018–2019 Undergraduate Catalog provides the following definition of “academic integrity”:

> Central to the purpose and pursuit of any academic community is academic integrity. All members of the Westminster community, including students, faculty, staff, and administrators, are expected to maintain the highest standards of honesty and integrity, in keeping with the philosophy and mission of the College…. Academic dishonesty is a profound violation of this code of behavior (p. 60, but see also the extensive discussion of the topic on pp. 60–64).

For a course like this one, the major concern is plagiarism, partly because it remains, alas, fairly commonplace on college campuses, partly because what constitutes plagiarism is often unclear in the minds of students. For the sake of clarity, plagiarism can be defined as generally leading
your reader (or in the case of oral presentations, listeners) to believe that what you have written or said is your own work when, in fact, it is not. Plagiarism runs the range from the rather mild to the totally flagrant. It can be the word-for-word reproduction of another person’s text without quotation marks and appropriate citation. It can be a paraphrase that is far too close to the source text to constitute “being in your own words.” And it can be even the unattributed borrowing of apt phrases or terminology. All of these degrees of plagiarism are equally unethical and may be penalized with failure for the assignment, or, in extreme cases, failure for the course.

If you are ever in doubt as to whether your written work is plagiaristic in form, do not hesitate to consult with the professor. And please be informed that the take-home exam written in this course may be submitted to turnitin.com, a licensed service to which the College has a subscription to help faculty identify papers that contain plagiaristic material.

**Statement on the Use of Communications Technology in the Classroom**
The use of all cell phones, smart phones, pagers, iPods, iPads, or any other internet-accessible technology is **expressly prohibited** during class unless part of an in-class assignment or activity. All students are required to turn off or silence their phones and to stow them out of reach and out of sight for the duration of the class and during in-class examinations. Violation of this policy may be considered a breach of the academic integrity policy of the College.

Moreover, the use of laptops is permitted only for the purpose of taking notes. Surfing the internet or other non-class-related activities can be disruptive to those sitting beside or behind you. Ideally, leave your laptop in your dorm room, but if you bring it, use it only for class purposes. Violation of this request for courtesy will result in your being prohibited from using a laptop in class.

Students may use a laptop if a learning disability requires it (a disability that has been documented with Student Affairs). All policies and restrictions on their use nonetheless applies in this case.

**On Notifications**
If you are going to miss a scheduled exam or quiz, please notify the professor in advance to obtain permission to reschedule (in the case of exams) or to be excused (in the case of quizzes). Failure to do so will mean that the exam may not be permitted to be rescheduled and that the grade for the missed quiz will be a zero. Permissions are not automatically granted, even when advanced notice is given. All absences at times of exams and quizzes must be documented with a legal excuse and for reasons permitted by College policy (as stated in the Undergraduate Catalog).

**Accessibility Statement**
Westminster College actively strives for the full inclusion of all our students. Students with disabilities who require access solutions for environmental or curricular barriers should contact Faith Craig, Director of Disability Resources, at 414 Thompson-Clark Hall; 724-946-7192; craigfa@westminster.edu. See the 2018–2019 Undergraduate Catalog, pp. 38–39 for details. See also here:
https://my.westminster.edu/ics/Campus_Life/Campus_Groups/Disability_Resources/.
I am very eager to meet the instructional needs of any and all of my students. Please see me privately if you have any special needs, concerns, or questions that pertain to your performance in this class.

**Statement on a Safe Learning Environment**
Westminster College operates under a zero-tolerance policy for sexual harassment and assault. If you or someone you know has experienced discrimination, harassment, or sexual assault, including domestic or dating violence or stalking, I encourage you to tell someone promptly. Feel free always to report the incident to me, though know that I am obligated to report all incidences to the College. The College’s EEO and Title IX coordinator is Kimberlee Christofferson, who can be reached at 724-946-7247 or at christkk@westminster.edu. *I am determined to make sure that this class and this classroom setting are safe learning spaces for you.* See also the *Handbook for Students, 2018–2019*, pp. 34–37, here: http://www.westminster.edu/academics/pdf/undergraduate-catalog/2018_2019.pdf.

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**Course Schedule**

(This schedule is subject to change in response to students’ needs and interests.)

Week I.
January 15: Debrief: What have we been learning for the past 3.5 years?

Week II.
January 22: *On Bullshit;* The Three Stages of Writing about Readings
Read: Frankfurt, *On Bullshit.*

Week III.
January 29: Topics of Research: Picking one that works
Video: Karapinka on Frankfurt.
DUE: Write diagnostic paper:
In a brief paper of no more than 900 words, consider the following:

Frankfurt’s last line of this book is “sincerity itself is bullshit.” Explain how he arrives at this rather stark conclusion by explaining the argument in the book.

Be sure also to observe all the conventions for papers listed above.

Week IV.
February 5: Reviewing the Mechanics of Scholarly Writing
Read:

Week V.
February 12: Narrowing the Topic and the formulation of a *Problematik*

Week VI.
February 19: Sources: Primary, Secondary, Tertiary

Week VII.
February 26: Research: Problems and Solutions

Week VIII.
March 5: Your Topics: Discussion
DUE: Prospectus.

Week IX.
March 9 and 17: Spring Break: No Class

Week X.
March 19: Bibliographies and other scholarly apparatuses

Week XI.
March 26: Scholarly Approaches: Case Studies
Week XII.
   April 2: Scholarly Approaches: Case Studies

Week XIII.
   April 9: Oral Presentations

Week XIV.
   April 16: Oral Presentations

Week XV.
   April 23: Oral Presentations

Week XVI.
   April 30: Summary

**Finals Period:** Bibliography Due