

HIST 4030: INTENSIVE RESEARCH SEMINAR IN HISTORICAL BIOGRAPHY

Fall Semester 2026
Department of History



CALENDAR DESCRIPTION

This advanced research seminar asks students to consider the role of the individual in history by reading theoretical works and examples drawn from the major schools of thought on this issue. Students will undertake to write a biography that will utilize primary sources and will include a detailed historiographical discussion of the works available on their chosen subject.

Prerequisite(s): 10.00 credits including 1.00 credits in History at the 3000-level.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The famous nineteenth century British historian Thomas Carlyle championed the “great man” theory of history; he once observed that all history can be reduced to the biography of great persons. In contrast, Karl Marx believed that deep structural economic change was the actual motor force of history; in his view, the lives of individual people do not matter much.

This course will examine the changing attitude of historians to the biographical project itself and will consider the reasons why biography as a genre has come in and out of favour over the generations. Students will learn to identify historiographical schools of thought related to biography as a genre and will gain more practice identifying ideological biases in their sources.

This course is also intended to showcase the senior student’s abilities as a historian. Students will select a subject for your biography, compile an extensive bibliography of primary and secondary sources, write a persuasive essay, and then present the work to student-colleagues at the end of the semester.

COURSE OUTCOMES

- 1) To improve your practical skills of research, persuasive writing, critical analysis and oral communication.
- 2) To gain further insight into the discipline of History and its methodology.
- 3) To gain exposure to the complex issues involved in writing a historical biography.
- 4) To learn more about the specific experiences and significance of a person's life

COURSE READINGS:

- H Lee *Biography: A Very Short Introduction* ISBN 978-0199533541 [\$13.50]
- J Anderson "The Methodology of Psychological Biography." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 11, no. 3 (Winter 1981): 455-475.
- G Daws "The High Chief Boki: A biographical study in early nineteenth century Hawaiian history." *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 75, no. 1 (1966): 65-83.
- H Havnevik "Traces of Female Voices and Women's Lives in Tibetan Male Sacred Biography." *Life Writing* 17, no. 32 (2020): 259-276.
- H Payne "Biography and Psychoanalytic Psychology: A Brief Guide for the Perplexed" *The History Teacher* 14, no. 4 (August 1981): 479-488.
- C R Phillips "Christopher Columbus in United States Biography: Biography as Projection." *The History Teacher* 25, no. 2 (February 1992): 119-135.
- Two articles of your own choice from peer-reviewed, academic journals, for example:
 Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly or
 The Journal of Historical Biography or
 Auto/Biography or
 Life Writing
 [access via OMNI; type in journal name as a journal title search; open each volume and issue until you see one that catches your interest]
- [various] Drafts of your student-colleagues' papers

ALLOCATION OF GRADES:

Assessment Item	Weight
Annotated bibliography	10%
<i>Journal</i> article worksheet responses	5%
Working Draft of 8 pages	10%
Peer Edit #1 and #2	10%
In-class presentation; participation and preparedness; engagement	10%
Final Research Paper	55%
Total	100%

COURSE SCHEDULE

Sept 10	Introduction to the Course and Requirements
Sept 15	Cultural and Historical Context of Biography and Biographical Writing
Sept 17	Research strategies session [online via zoom to show you resources]
Sept 22	<u>Discussion</u> : What is biography? What do biographers do? READ: Lee, <i>Biography</i> , pp.1-121
Sept 24	<u>Discussion</u> : Methodology READ: Daws, Havnevik articles; Lee, <i>Biography</i> , 122-140 Two articles of your choice from journals; <u>complete worksheet for each</u>
Sept 29	No class. I am available for consultations in my office from 10-2:30 Work on <u>Annotated Bibliography due in Dropbox - 9:00 pm</u>
Oct 1	<u>Discussion</u> : Psychobiography; Nationalism and Biography READ: Anderson, Payne, Phillips articles
Oct 6	Annotated bibliography returned; meet with peer groups

Oct 8	Individual consultations with me
Oct 13	NO CLASS: Thanksgiving break
Oct 15	Individual consultations with me
Oct 20	Individual consultations with me
Oct 22	Available for individual consultations
Oct 27	Available for individual consultations
Oct 29	Available for individual consultations
Nov 3	Available for individual consultations
Nov 5	<u>Initial 8-10 page draft due</u> Exchange copies with your peer review group & me Explanation of peer review process; discuss progress and any issues to date
Nov 10	Meet and discuss drafts with your peer group; I will return comments today too
Nov 12	Individual consultations with me
Nov 17	Individual consultations with me
Nov 19	Presentations
Nov 24	Presentations
Nov 26	Presentations
Dec 1	Presentations
Dec 3	Presentations
Dec 13	<u>Final essay due in Dropbox at 9:00 pm</u>

ASSIGNMENT DETAILS

The annotated bibliography should contain: a 3-page double-spaced general description of the life events of your proposed topic and a discussion of some of the sources you have already identified as relevant to your work. You should be able to point to the primary sources that you

will be able to use and name the major scholars who have written about this person and any potential themes or controversies. The annotated bibliography should be 4-6 pages in length.

The final product will be a major research paper of 25 pages in length (which is roughly 6250 words in Times New Roman font. This number does include the footnotes but does not include bibliography at the end). The essay must be typed, double-spaced, using 12-point font and 1-inch margins. Do not double-space between paragraphs. Make sure that you number your pages and include a bibliography that lists all sources consulted in alphabetical order. The paper must use Turabian/ Chicago footnotes or endnotes (not in-text citations like MLA or APA style) and must be based on at least 18 sources. Of these 18 sources, you must use at least 3 different primary sources, and a combination of scholarly books, journal articles and serial or multi-authored publications (ex: chapters in edited collections). Internet sources (general websites, blogs etc) are not to be used unless they are primary source sites. If you have any questions about the legitimacy of an internet source, ask me.

When the final essay is turned in, you are required to give me your final polished draft, plus the peer-reviewed mid-term drafts so that I can give your colleagues' credit for the work that they did for you.

MY COURSE POLICIES

Essays should be written using Turabian/ Chicago citation style. There is an excellent online resource to all the major academic citation styles available online at the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL).

For this course, you may not use ChatGPT or any form of "generative AI" or technology that will write, organize or generate ideas and/or outlines for you. This is a completely AI-free course. Our collective goal is to improve and grow and write and think. I want to engage with your ideas, not those of a machine!

If you are struggling with time management or writing trouble, don't worry. There are no late penalties this semester. Talk to me! I want to help and support you. The only exception is the peer review draft which must be brought to class and exchanged with your working group – deadline is set and firm for that assignment because others depend on you.

Turnitin: I do not use Turnitin for this course or any others. I assume you are here to learn and are working on your own assignments in good faith. I do not want you to feel any undue pressure from software accusations; you are just learning how things work and honest mistakes are part of the learning process. I also object to your intellectual property being gobbled up by that company and made part of their database without your consent or compensation. So, no Turnitin for us!

Reweighting of Course Component Grades: The value of the various components for this course will **not** be re-weighted, except in very exceptional cases . Each component of the course is designed to contribute to and assess different aspects of the course's learning objectives, and you are expected to complete all of them.

MANDATORY UNIVERSITY STATEMENTS

Academic Integrity

The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and it is the responsibility of all members of the University community – faculty, staff, and students – to be aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and to do as much as possible to prevent academic offences from occurring. University of Guelph students have the responsibility of abiding by the University's policy on academic misconduct regardless of their location of study; faculty, staff and students have the responsibility of supporting an environment that discourages misconduct. Students need to remain aware that instructors have access to and the right to use electronic and other means of detection.

Please note: Whether or not a student intended to commit academic misconduct is not relevant for a finding of guilt. Hurried or careless submission of assignments does not excuse students from responsibility for verifying the academic integrity of their work before submitting it. Students who are in any doubt as to whether an action on their part could be construed as an academic offence should consult with a faculty member or faculty advisor.

The [Academic Misconduct Policy](#) is outlined in the Undergraduate Calendar.

Accessibility

The University promotes the full participation of students who experience disabilities in their academic programs. To that end, the provision of academic accommodation is a shared responsibility between the University and the student.

When accommodations are needed, the student is required to first register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS). Documentation to substantiate the existence of a disability is required; however, interim accommodations may be possible while that process is underway.

Accommodations are available for both permanent and temporary disabilities. It should be noted that common illnesses such as a cold or the flu do not constitute a disability. Use of the SAS Exam Centre requires students to make a booking at least 10 days in advance, and no later than the first business day in November, March or July as appropriate for the semester. For students at the Guelph campus, information can be found on the [SAS website](#).

Accommodation of Religious Obligations

If you are unable to meet an in-course requirement due to religious obligations, please email the course instructor within two weeks of the start of the semester to make alternate arrangements.

See the Academic calendar for information on regulations and procedures for [Academic Accommodations of Religious Obligations](#).

Copies of Out-of-class Assignments

Keep paper and/or other reliable back-up copies of all out-of-class assignments: you may be asked to resubmit work at any time.

Drop Date

Students will have until the last day of classes to drop courses without academic penalty. The deadline to drop two-semester courses will be the last day of classes in the second semester. This applies to all undergraduate students except for Doctor of Veterinary Medicine and Associate Diploma in Veterinary Technology (conventional and alternative delivery) students. The regulations and procedures for course registration are available in the [Undergraduate Calendar - Dropping Courses](#).

Email Communication

As per university regulations, all students are required to check their <uoguelph.ca> e-mail account regularly: e-mail is the official route of communication between the University and its students.

Health and Wellbeing

The University of Guelph provides a wide range of health and wellbeing services at the [Vaccarino Centre for Student Wellness](#). If you are concerned about your mental health and not sure where to start, connect with a [Student Wellness Navigator](#) who can help develop a plan to manage and support your mental health or check out our [mental wellbeing resources](#). The Student Wellness team are here to help and welcome the opportunity to connect with you.

Illness

Medical notes will not normally be required for singular instances of academic consideration, although students may be required to provide supporting documentation for multiple missed assessments or when involving a large part of a course (e.g., final exam or major assignment).

Recording of Materials

Presentations that are made in relation to course work—including lectures—cannot be recorded or copied without the permission of the presenter, whether the instructor, a student, or guest lecturer. Material recorded with permission is restricted to use for that course unless further permission is granted.

Resources

The [Academic Calendars](#) are the source of information about the University of Guelph's procedures, policies and regulations which apply to undergraduate, graduate and diploma programs.

When You Cannot Meet a Course Requirement

When you find yourself unable to meet an in-course requirement because of illness or compassionate reasons please advise the course instructor (or designated person, such as a teaching assistant) in writing, with your name, id#, and e-mail contact. See the Undergraduate Calendar for information on regulations and procedures for [Academic Consideration](#).