

Vesalius College

Course description

Course title: History: Methods and Problems

Course code: HIS 271E

Teacher responsible: William L. Chew III, PhD, Full Professor of History at Vesalius College

Course description:

Aims of Course, Syllabus, Explanation of Assignments; ; What Is History? Definition and Nature of the Discipline; the Limits of Historical Knowledge. How Much Can We Know?; ; the Idiographic Vs. Nomothetic Approach; Is History an Art or a Science?; ; Historical Causation – ; Objectivity and Value Judgment; ; Theories of History: Structures, Periodization, Diachronical/synchronical History, Historicism, Historical Materialism; Does History Follow Any Set of Recognizable “Laws?”; ; Finding the Evidence: Libraries (On-line and Off-line; Manuals, Bibliographies–retrospective and Serial, Abstracts, Journals) and Archives; Auxiliary Sciences I. Introduction, Chronology, Datation; Auxiliary Sciences II. Historical Geography, Genealogy, Heraldry; Auxiliary Sciences III. Paleography, Epigraphic, Diplomatic, Sphragistics, Numismatics; ; Writing: Research Notes and Data-bases; ; Traditional Themes: Politics, Biography, Ideas; ; New Themes: Economy, Society, Mentality; Quantitative History, Oral History, Psycho-history; ; the Uses and Abuses of History; Exercise and Discussion: Reading Op-ed Pieces with Historical Argumentation

Course objectives:

The course will explore the theory and practice of history by investigating classical issues of historiography and extending the student's techniques of historical analysis and research. This will include an inquiry into the nature of the discipline, historical theory (e.g. problems of structuring, periodization, positivism/idealism, historical materialism, et al.), the notion of historical truth, the auxiliary sciences, comprehensive research techniques (archives, libraries, research aids, advanced bibliographical research), writing and organization (to include advanced methods of note-taking via data-basing), classical and modern research trends and the so-called “new” histories. It will combine lectures and class discussion. Lectures will introduce and complement readings, highlight aspects of special interest, and provide alternative evaluations. Discussion sessions are designed to better illuminate controversial points of assigned readings in an interactive fashion.

Skills learned include how to maintain a research log of searches conducted in various bibliographical or other off-line or on-line collections; apply advanced internet research skills aimed at a critical evaluation of websites and filtering of information (e.g. greater attention to site sponsorship; advanced search engine skills; use of reliable gateway sites).

Grade weighting scheme:

Bibliographical Critical Papers	Research Log	Annotated Bibliography	Midterm Exam	Final Exam
20%	10%	20%	20%	30%

Used course material (handbooks, readers, readings, newspapers, magazines) and references:

E.H. Carr. *What is History?* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987.

G.E. Elton. *The Practice of History*. Hammersmith: Fontana, 1969.

Tosh, John and Sean Lang. *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*. Fourth ed. London, New York, etc.: Longman, Pearson Education Ltd., 2006.

Reader