Fall 2013

**HISTORY 607**

**Writing History: The Historian’s Craft**

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**Class Schedule:**

*Meetings:* Wednesdays 2:00-4:50 p.m., 375 McKenzie Hall

**Introduction**

This course is designed to introduce graduate students to the craft of writing history. We will consider history as a form of literary non-fiction, with emphasis on the narrative form. I hope to inspire you to take risks in writing history. I will also exhort you to write vividly and sensibly (that is, to evoke the sensory world of the past); to think about plot, character, and other literary elements; and to write carefully. We will read innovative works written by traditionally trained historians who have told their stories in new ways, not just analyzed and interpreted events from the past, in hopes of engaging audiences beyond their fields of specialization. Toward that end, we will focus on how those histories were written—that is, on the authors’ literary instincts as well as their analytical approaches—more than on the contents of those histories. And yet, content does matter.

For each of the books or book chapters we read, we will consider specific and generic questions, some of which will be familiar, and some of which may be new to the way you think about historiography: What is the author’s theoretical foundation? What is the author’s argument? What sources did the author use and did the author use them creatively? How does the author analyze evidence to support that argument? What is the book’s structure, and why did the author choose it? What is the author’s narrative strategy? How does that strategy serve the author’s argument? What are the rhetorical devices the author uses, and why (to enlighten, capture attention, provoke, persuade, amuse)? What do you admire about the book’s structure, perspective, or style? What are its weaknesses? Why would anyone outside the history profession want to read this book?

Be forewarned. The reading load is heavy, considering the writing load. I will ask you to write in ways that I hope will unleash your creative spirit, but you may also find it challenging. You will produce or polish a chapter of your thesis/dissertation or write an article-length paper for the non-thesis option using some of the literary strategies you’ve learned in the course. However, this is not a research seminar. For this course, I assume that you have already done sufficient research on your topic to produce a chapter or an article.
Required books:
Ann Curthoys and Ann McGrath, *How to Write History that People Want to Read*
Marsha Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country*
Karl Jacoby, *Shadows at Dawn: An Apache Massacre and the Violence of History*
Martha Sandweiss, *Passing Strange: A Gilded Age Tale of Love and Deception across the Color Line*
Laura Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812.*

Chicago Manual of Style, 16th ed. (strongly recommended in hardcopy, but it’s available through Knight Library online)
William Zinsser, *On Writing Well* (optional)

NOTE: I strongly suggest that you purchase the required books, rather than relying on a library copy. We will be reading these books closely and marking passages. (That said, you may want to check out Ulrich’s book through Summit, because we’ll read less than one-third of the book—but it’s extremely cheap on-line.)

Grading
Below are the course requirements and their relative weights in determining your final grade.

- Weekly writing Assignments 40%
- Discussion Participation 20%
- Final paper 40%

Grading rubric:
A – Superior writing. You have written creatively and vividly, and have shown intellectual daring. You have chosen your words with precision. Your piece is polished. Your syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling are excellent.

Final paper: Your thesis is clear and insightful, and your argument is persuasive. You have selected appropriate primary-source evidence and analyzed them well. You support every point with more than one example. You anticipate and successfully defuse counter-arguments. You recognize different points of view in your analysis. You integrate your story within its larger historical context. You have cited all of your evidence correctly, according to the Chicago Manual of Style.

B – Good writing. Your writing is competent, but not particularly creative or vivid. You have not taken particular care in choosing your words, or you are over-wordy or too florid. You have made many errors in syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Final paper: Your thesis is clear, but it may not be particularly insightful or original. Or it may be implicit, not explicit. You have evidence to support your argument, but it’s thin. You do a solid job of synthesizing your evidence, but you do not develop your own insights. You rely too much on quotations and/or do not explicate them well. Your argument usually flows logically and makes sense, but gaps in logic exist. You haven’t placed your story within its larger historical context. Your writing style is clear, but you overuse passive voice or are redundant. Although your paper offers a solid analysis, you haven’t made sufficient effort to write in a narrative form. You have cited all of your evidence, but you’ve been sloppy in adhering to the Chicago Manual of Style.

C—Unacceptable graduate work. You have gone through the motions, but you haven’t made a good-faith effort to create a narrative. Your thesis isn’t clear. You make assertions but offer little evidence. You haven’t analyzed your evidence sufficiently to support your argument. Your argument isn’t logical. Your writing has far too many problems with clarity, syntax, grammar, and spelling that it does not meet the minimum standard for graduate work. You haven’t cited your evidence. Any one of these problems may be grounds for a C.

D-F—Failure. You have not made a good-faith effort to complete the assignment, or your work is plagiarized in part or in whole.
Requirements

❖ Discussion questions: Please bring discussion questions each week, written clearly on a 3x5 index card. (The specifics of the discussion are indicated weekly on the syllabus.)

❖ Writing assignments: You will write pieces that draw on the sources you are using for a thesis/dissertation chapter. The assignment lengths are specified below. Each should be double-spaced, using a 12-point Times New Roman font, with 1 inch margins. All citations should conform to the Chicago Manual of Style. Please send me your piece electronically by 12 noon on the day the assignment is due (unless otherwise specified), through SafeAssign. I will choose 2-3 examples for us to discuss in class, in the spirit of a writing workshop.

❖ Reading preparation: Our purpose is different from many graduate seminars in that we will focus on the strategies that the author deployed to write a compelling, persuasive, yet analytical narrative. Thus, we will focus on the book’s architecture, rhetoric, and prose, as much as on its argument. You must therefore read consciously, so that you really consider how the author wrote, as much as what she or he wrote. As you read the assignments, mark those passages that you find particularly well written (these may include a great opening scene; an especially vivid characterization or description; the effective use of alliteration, metaphor, sensory detail, or other literary devices; an effective signpost; a particularly well-selected quotation; excellent unpacking of a quotation, image, scene, or the like); note in the margin what you thought was effective and why.

❖ Discussion Participation: Your participation is the key to the success of the class. Think of our discussions as lively conversations about issues of mutual interest to all of us. We will focus on the literary qualities of each reading, as much as on its argument, so please focus your discussion on those issues.

I have four ground rules for discussion: (1) Come prepared for each class by critically reading all the assigned materials. Always bring each week’s readings to class. (2) You must participate in our weekly conversations with thoughtful discussion. I value quality over quantity. (3) Don’t try to lead the conversation astray in an effort to cover your lack of preparedness. We all see through that. (4) Show respect for your classmates’ ideas, even (or especially) when they’re different from your own.

❖ Final Paper: You will write a paper, approximately 20-25 pages in length. It may be a chapter from your thesis/dissertation, an article-length paper for the non-thesis option, or an article-length exploration of a potential thesis/dissertation topic. In writing this paper, you should draw on the various literary strategies and examples you’ve learned in this course. I reward intellectual and literary daring, and—above all—careful writing.

Please note that over the course of the term you will explicate a quotation, analyze an unusual source, describe a setting, explicate a visual image and an artifact, describe a character, and describe a scene. You will find this course most meaningful and useful if you can incorporate these pieces of prose into your final paper.
Class Policies

Honor. Absolutely no academic dishonesty will be tolerated in this course. Any student discovered plagiarizing will receive an F for the course, end of story. See http://studentlife.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/StudentConductCode/tabid/69/Default.aspx#Academic_Misconduct. If you are confused about this or do not understand the consequences of academic dishonesty at the UO—or the ethical issues behind these university policies—please read these guidelines: http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/

• Attendance. Attendance is required. Students who arrive late for class, who repeatedly leave early, or who miss more than one class meeting may be dropped from the course at my discretion, without consultation. This applies also to those taking the course with the Pass/No credit option. Please come see me if there is a reason for prolonged or repeated absences that I should know about.

• Make-up. No make-up opportunities will be available, except in the case of documented illness, death in the immediate family, or a family emergency, at my discretion. No extensions will be granted for final papers, except in extreme circumstances, and no make-up opportunities for discussions will be offered. No extra credit opportunities will be offered. One exception: students who are passing the course and who are absent on documented university business (including attending professional conferences) have an automatic right to excused absences and to make up work.

• Incompletes. No incompletes will be given, except in extreme circumstances, at my discretion.

• Withdrawal. It is the student’s responsibility to withdraw him- or herself from the course.

Accommodations: If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please arrange to see me soon. Request a letter from Disability Services that verifies your disability.
WEEKLY DISCUSSION TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Note: Aside from the books, most of the readings can be retrieved through one of the library’s on-line data bases, as indicated below, using the citation information. Those marked with (B) are posted on Blackboard.

October 2  INTRODUCTION
   TOPICS
   Introductions (What’s your project? What sources will you use?)  ●  Why
   narrative history?  ●  Conscious reading  ●  Narrative theory
   ♦ Guest: Aaron Sachs

   READING ASSIGNMENT (203 PP.)
   Why Narrative History? (Appetizers)
   Patricia Nelson Limerick, “Dancing with Professors: The Trouble with
   Academic Prose,” from Something in the Soil: Legacies and Reckonings in the
   New West. (B)
   James Goodman, “For the Love of Stories,” Reviews in American History 26
   Tony Horwitz, “The History Beat: How a Journalist Covers the Past,”
   Aaron Sachs, “Letters to a Tenured Historian: Imagining History as Creative
   (Academic Search Premier.)

   Narrative History and Theory (The Main Course)
   Hayden White, “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality,”
   Critical Inquiry 7 (1980): 5-27. (JStor)
   Andrew P. Norman, “Telling It Like It Was: Historical Narratives on Their
   William Cronon, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and
   David Carr, “Place and Time: On the Interplay of Historical Points of View,”

   Experimental Narrative (Dessert)
   John Demos, The Unredeemed Captive, Beginnings and Ch. 1. (B)

PREPARATION: Please bring three discussion questions to class on a 3x5 index card. Print them neatly.
October 9  NO CLASS—YES ASSIGNMENTS!

READING ASSIGNMENT (169 pp.)
Curthoys and McGrath, How to Write History that People Want to Read, pp. 1-139.

SCAVENGER HUNT: Consider your own research project. (1) Find the following pieces of evidence (primary sources), which you will use during this course. Note: Not all categories will apply to your project; in those instances, simply find a suitable source. Photocopy these items and submit them to me as a packet of material, with each item labeled A-J. Please bind these documents within a cheap, 3-hole punched, cardboard report cover, with your name on the front cover. Due at the beginning of class, Wednesday, October 16. (2) Scan A-I as separate documents and save them on a thumb drive that you bring to class weekly.

- A. A poem or a song that is full of metaphorical meaning
- B. A sonnet by Shakespeare
- C. Biographical and descriptive information about a person who’s important to your story (this may include visual images)
- D. A richly meaningful quotation from a primary source that you’ll explicate in your chapter
- E. A challenging piece of evidence that you intend to interpret in your thesis (e.g., weather data, account books, quantitative data)
- F. Sources that will help you describe the setting of your story (these may include images, maps, travelogues, architectural guides, and other textual documents, or even your own visit)
- G. Source(s) that describes a scene of action that’s important to your story
- H. A richly meaningful photograph, painting, or drawing to explicate in your chapter (please be sure to scan any color images in color)
- I. An artifact or a photograph of an artifact relevant to your thesis
- J. An academic journal article on your research topic or in your field that you think is particularly well written. For help in finding one, look at the professional organizations in your field and check out its list of prizewinning articles. Nearly every organization awards prizes for articles published in its own journal and in other journals. (Don’t scan this one, but record the full citation.)

WRITING ASSIGNMENT: Write a five-page (double-spaced) story of a memorable event in your life. Submit this by Tuesday, October 15, at 12 noon, via SafeAssign.
October 16  DESIGN AND PLOT

TOPICS
Rules of engagement ● Design ● Plot ● Using the OED

READING ASSIGNMENT (285 pp.):
Curthoys and McGrath, How to Write History that People Want to Read, pp. 140-57.
Classical plot summary (B)
Marsha Weisiger, Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country (entire)
Jared Farmer, On Zion’s Mount (excerpts) (B)

PREPARATION: Reading Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country, consider the book’s frame, the plot, and the discussion of technical information. What is the author’s argument, and do you find it persuasive? Why or why not? Who are the protagonists and the antagonists, and how does the author treat them? Identify three writing strategies that you think were particularly effective, ineffective, or risky, and be prepared to discuss why. (Please note the specific passages.) What strategies does the author use to present technical information? Are they effective? Why or why not?

Compare Weisiger’s book with the excerpt from On Zion’s Mount. Notice the difference in expository strategy that Farmer and Weisiger use. How and where does Farmer lay out his argument? How does the body of his chapter relate to the exposition of his argument?

Note that this week we will spend approximately one hour discussing last week’s readings and everything assigned so far in Curthoys and McGrath and the rest of the time discussing the book and the excerpt by Farmer. Please bring all these readings with you.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT: (1) For your thesis or dissertation project, develop an outline of your chapters, as it would appear in a table of contents. Under each chapter title, briefly state (in one or two sentences) the proposed argument for that chapter. (2) In one or two paragraphs, narrate the story arc of your thesis or dissertation. Consider how this narrative arc accords with your outline. (If you’ve not designed your project in narrative form, re-imagine it in a narrative form.) (3) For the chapter you are working on for this class, narrate the chapter’s story arc in one or two paragraphs. This assignment is due by 12 noon on Tuesday, October 22, submitted as a single Word document through SafeAssign.
October 23  NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

Topics
Narrative structure  ●  Explicating metaphorical writing
  ♦ Guest: Karl Jacoby

Reading Assignment (311 pp.):
Karl Jacoby, Shadows at Dawn (entire)
Linda Gordon, The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction (excerpts) (B)

Additionally, please leaf through The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction, placed on reserve in Knight Library, so that you have a stronger grasp of Gordon’s narrative strategy.

Preparation: Reading Shadows at Dawn, focus on the narrative structure. What does the author hope to achieve by using this unorthodox structure? What are its strengths and weaknesses? What is the author’s argument, and do you find it persuasive? Why or why not? Who are the protagonists and the antagonists, and how does the author treat them? Identify three writing strategies that you think were particularly effective, ineffective, or risky, and be prepared to discuss why. Also pay attention to the evidence and how it is documented. Be prepared to compare Shadows at Dawn and Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country. Both treat Native American topics. How do their writing strategies respond (or not) to the sensitivities of their subjects? (To facilitate the discussion of both books, please bring both to class.)

Compare Jacoby’s narrative strategy to that of Linda Gordon.

Writing Assignment: Explicate the poem/song and the Shakespeare sonnet that you chose in the Scavenger Hunt, items A and B. For the poem/song, (1) underline all of the nouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives; (2) look them (and appropriate homonyms) up in the Oxford English Dictionary so that you consider all of the potential metaphorical meanings; then (3) write one or two paragraphs that explicate the meaning of the poem. (4) For the sonnet, follow the same steps, but restrict your consideration of the meaning of words to the time when the sonnet was written. (To do this, you need to know when Shakespeare wrote it.) Do not use any reference works other than the OED. This assignment is due by 12 noon on Tuesday, October 29, through SafeAssign (saved as separate Word documents). Be prepared to explicate both of these poems/songs in class.

nature, n.
Pronunciation: Brit. /ˈneɪtə(ɹ)/, U.S. /ˈnetər/ Forms: ME natre, ME natour, ME nature, ME (18–Eng. regional) nater, ME–16 (18–...)
Etymology: < Anglo-Norman and Old French, Middle French, French nature...I. Senses relating to physical or bodily power, strength, or substance.1. a. The vital or physical powers of a person; a person's physical strength or constitution. Obs. α1275 Kentish Serm. in J. Hall Select. Early Middle Eng. (1920) I. 222 (MED), the nature of Man is of greater strengþe and of greater hete ine þo age.
α1425 tr. Guy de Chauliac Grande Chirurgie (N.Y. Acad. Med.) f. 176' (MED), colde is more enmy to nature þan hote.
α485 (†1450) G. Hay Bk. Law of Arms (2005) 265 Medicinaris and philosophouris gevis the gold...in medicyne to folk yat are debilite þyn þair natur.
α1500 Leg.aidory in MS Bodl. 558 26 (MED), Crysolite is goode to be don on a man for fethilnesse of nature.
1592 W. Wet. Symbolangr.: 1st Pt. §102 b, Any such corrasie, sharpe or eager medicine...as the said H. shal think his nature is vnable to suffer.
October 30  WRITING CHARACTER

TOPICS
Developing character

READING ASSIGNMENT (374 pp.):
Curthoys and McGrath, How to Write History that People Want to Read, pp. 178-97.

Martha Sandweiss, Passing Strange (entire)
William Eamon, The Professor of Secrets: Mystery, Medicine, and Alchemy in Renaissance Italy (excerpts) (B)

PREPARATION: Reading Passing Strange, focus on how she paints a picture of the major characters and how she reveals her research process to the reader. Why does she do this? What is Sandweiss’ argument? How does she analyze her evidence? Do you find her argument persuasive? Why or why not? What are the special challenges one faces in developing a picture of a character such as Ada Copeland when there is little documentation? How does she fill in the gaps? Identify three writing strategies that you think were particularly effective, ineffective, or risky, and be prepared to discuss why. Also pay attention to the evidence and how it is documented.

Compare Sandweiss’ approach to character to that of William Eamon and his portrait of Leonardo Fioravanti.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT: Using the information you developed for item C of your Scavenger Hunt, vividly describe a historical actor who figures prominently in your final paper in one or two paragraphs. This assignment is due by 12 noon on Tuesday, November 5, through SafeAssign. Be prepared to discuss your description of your character in class.

November 6  ANALYSIS

TOPICS
Analyzing documents ● Explicating text ● Careful writing

READING ASSIGNMENT (III pp. +):
Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier, From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methodology (pp. 60-68) (B)

Laura Thatcher Ulrich, A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812, pp. 3-71.
Jon Coleman, Vicious: Wolves and Men in America (Excerpt) (B)

Chicago Manual of Style, 16th ed., Chapters 5 (“Grammar and Usage”) and 6 (“Punctuation”)

Note: Please be sure to bring your copy of Chicago Manual of Style, 16th Ed. to class. If you’re using an on-line version, please bring your electronic device.

Continued on next page
**PREPARATION:** (1) Bring one discussion question for each of the readings (except CMOS) on a 3x5 index card. (2) List 10 grammar or punctuation rules in *Chicago Manual of Style* that you were unaware of or misinformed about to discuss in class.

**WRITING ASSIGNMENT:** (1) Explicate the quotation you selected in the Scavenger Hunt, item D. This will also require sufficient research to understand the author and his/her historical context. (2) Examine the challenging source you picked for item E of your Scavenger Hunt, in conjunction with what you learn from the readings and what you know about source criticism. (For a longer list to consider regarding source criticism, see the file on Blackboard.) Within the context of what you know (or think you know) about your research subject, consider the following: What is the meaning of the document, in relationship to your argument/story? Now write one or more paragraphs analyzing and interpreting your document. **These assignments are due by 12 noon on Tuesday, November 12, through SafeAssign.** Please save and upload them as separate documents. Be prepared to present your documents in class and discuss your explication and analysis.

Work on your final paper!

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**November 13 SENSORY WRITING**

**Topics:**
- Voice/Style
- Setting
- Writing sensibly

**Reading Assignment (112 pp.):**
- Curthoys and McGrath, *How to Write History That People Want to Read*, pp. 158-77.
- Jill Lepore, *The Name of War* (excerpt) (B)
- Aaron Sachs, *The Humboldt Current: Nineteenth-Century Exploration and the Roots of American Environmentalism* (excerpt) (B)
- Mark Mazower, *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews, 1430-1950* (excerpt) (B)

**Preparation:** Select three particularly vivid passages from each of the excerpts by Lepore, Sachs, and Mazower and be prepared to discuss what makes them so evocative in class.

**Writing Assignment:** (1) Using the documents, photographs, and other materials you assembled in your Scavenger Hunt, item F, vividly describe the setting for the story in your chapter in one or two paragraphs. (2) Drawing on the documents in item G of your Scavenger Hunt, vividly describe and explicate a scene in which important action takes place. **This assignment is due by noon, November 19, through SafeAssign.** Please submit them as separate documents. Be prepared to discuss your description of the setting and the scene in class.

Work on your final paper!
November 20  SENSORY WRITING, PT. 2

Topics
Explicating images ● Explicating artifacts

Reading Assignment: (188 pp.)
Richard Howells & Robert W. Matson, eds., Using Visual Evidence, Chapters 1-4; browse the rest. (On reserve at Knight Library.)

Jennifer Price, “A Brief Natural History of the Plastic Pink Flamingo,” from Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America (B)
Margaret Malamud, “The Pleasures of Empire,” Ancient Rome and Modern America (Excerpt) (B)
Paul Gilje, “Pope Day,” The Road to Mobocracy: Popular Disorder in New York City: 1763-1834 (Excerpt) (B)
Amy Butler Greenfield, A Perfect Red: Empire, Espionage, and the Quest for the Color of Desire (Excerpt) (B)
Jeffrey Ostler, Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee (Excerpt) (B)
Finis Dunaway, Natural Visions: The Power of Images in American Environmental Reform (Excerpts) (B)

Preparation: Select three particularly vivid passages from the readings (each from a different reading) and be prepared to discuss what makes them so evocative in class.

Writing Assignment: (1) Vividly explicate the visual image and the artifact that you picked as items H and I in the Scavenger Hunt, in one or two paragraphs each, within the context of your final project. This assignment is due by 12 noon on Tuesday, November 26, through SafeAssign. Please save them as separate documents. Be prepared to discuss your explications in class. (2) Work frantically on your final paper.
November 27 (?)  THICK DESCRIPTION

Topics
Historical imagination
♦ Potential guest: Louise Pubols

Reading Assignment (132 pp.):
Curthoys and McGrath, How to Write History That People Want to Read, pp. 198-231.

Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” from Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays (B)

Robert Darnton, “Workers Revolt: The Great Cat Massacre of the Rue Saint-Séverin,” from The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History (B)

Louise Pubols, The Father of Us All: The de la Guerra Family, Power, and Patriarchy in Mexican California, Chapter 3 (B)

Preparation: Select three particularly vivid passages from each of the two excerpts by Darnton and Pubols, and be prepared to discuss what makes them so evocative in class.

Look Ahead to Next Week’s Assignment for the Penultimate Writing Assignment
Work on your papers!

December 4  Academic Articles

Topic
Structuring academic articles

Reading Assignment (23 pp. +):

Writing Assignment: (1) Outline the structure of Mumford’s “The Trouble with Gay Rights,” considering the following elements: hook, thesis statement, literature review, supporting evidence, narrative arc, signposting paragraphs, and conclusion. (2) Then write a one-paragraph analysis and evaluation of that structure. How well does the structure serve the writer in creating a persuasive essay? Does it tell a story? Is it analytical? (3) Now read your own choice of articles (see “Scavenger Hunt,” Item J) and compare its structure to this one, in the form of an outline. Submit these as a single document by Tuesday, December 3, at 12 noon, via SafeAssign.

December 11  Wrapping Up

We will have a final discussion at a venue to be announced.

Final papers due by December 13, at 5 P.M. No extensions. Please submit a hard copy.