Reading and Writing the Middle East: History and Historiography

Fall Semester (Semester Aleph) 2017

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Course Description:

Reading and writing are the basic tools of our trade. While you all know how to read and write, your graduate papers require a specific kind of reading and writing that this course will help you develop. In addition, graduate level research is about learning how to produce new knowledge. In order to contribute new knowledge or analysis about the Middle East, you need to know how to identify what may be new about your subject. To that end, this course will introduce you to reading and writing the historiography of selected topics in Middle Eastern Studies during the modern period. Historiography refers to identifying how historians wrote about their subjects and the methods they used in doing so. Historiography is more than a “literature review,” because it seeks to identify how the history of a particular topic has changed (or remained the same) over time. Put differently, historiography is a narrative about who wrote what when and how a researcher produced his/her work.

Course Requirements

Your primary assignment for this course is a research paper (70%). I grade papers based on 4 basic elements: 1) Did the student demonstrate a command of the secondary source literature on the topic? 2) Did the student demonstrate a command of the facts on his/her topic? 3) Did the student raise an important question regarding the topic or introduce a unique analytical argument about the topic? (4) Did the student use logic and evidence to support his/her analytical arguments?

Paper topics must be submitted for approval before the end of the semester. Papers that are submitted prior to receiving my approval on the topic will not be graded. Students may submit topics via email as an attachment in Microsoft Word (no more than 2 pages). The topic should include a research question(s) and a preliminary secondary source bibliography.

Your attendance and participation are the second component of your final grade (30%). Classes will be interactive. This is a graduate seminar and learning will be based on independent reading outside of class and interactive discussions of the materials during our seminar meetings. You are expected to attend each class, prepare yourself to participate in class discussions, and make a reasonable effort to join class discussions. You are also expected to actively prepare readings before class meetings. At a minimum, this means you are responsible for identifying each reading’s main argument/hypothesis and assessing whether the author has convincingly supported his/her argument/hypothesis based on how he/she has presented and marshalled sources and theoretical concepts. Each class a student will begin class by presenting a short oral summary (2-3 minutes) of the arguments presented in the assigned reading for that class meeting.
Grading:

Attendance and weekly assignments: 30%
Final Paper: 70%

Course Texts:


Course References:


Class Readings (Specific assignments to be announced)

1. **Introduction - What is History? (one of the readings below)**


2. **Historians and an Historical Approach to the Middle East**


3. Context: Subject in Time and Place

Gaddis, Chapter 2: Time and Space, pp. 17-34

4. Doing History

Gaddis, Chapter 3: Structure and Process, pp. 35-52

5. What is Historiography?


6-7. Historiography I


8. What is Narrative?

Gaddis, Chapter 4: The Interdependence of Variables, pp. 53-70.

9-10. Historiography II


Gaddis, Chapter 5: Chaos and Complexity, pp. 71-90.

12-13. Historiography III


14. Change and Continuity

Gaddis, Chapter 6: Causation, Contingency, and Counterfactuals, 91-110.

15-16. Historiography IV


17. **People and History**

Gaddis, Chapters 7&8: “Molecules with Minds of Their Own,” and “Seeing Like a Historian,” pp. 110-151.

18-19. **Historiography V**


20. **How We Read**


21. **Outlining I**


22-23. **Historiography VI**


24. **Counterfactual History**


25-26. **Writing the Middle East**

Albert Hourani, “How Should We Write the History of the Middle East?,” *IJMES* 23:2 (May 1991), 135-146.
