

# Introduction to Historical Methods

HSTR 200-01 | Fall 2017  
Class meets Monday, 2:00-2:50PM  
Room: LA 249

**Professor Claire Arcenas | [claire.arcenas@umontana.edu](mailto:claire.arcenas@umontana.edu) | office: LA 261**  
**office hours: Monday 3:00-4:00PM, Wednesday 1:30-2:30PM, and by appointment**

“The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.”  
- L. P. Hartley, *The Go-Between* (1953)

“Life, too, is like that. You live it forward, but understand it backward.”  
-Abraham Verghese, *Cutting for Stone* (2009)

## Course Overview:

This one-credit course will introduce you to the craft of studying and writing history. Students will learn how to devise and pursue a research question related to their own area of interest. Through discussions and readings, students will become familiar with the differences between primary and secondary sources, learn how to construct a bibliography and properly cite their sources, and grapple with how to ask and answer compelling questions about the past in writing. By working with librarians and the professor, students will learn how to conduct research in Mansfield Library and online, using the many digital sources available to the historian today.

## Learning Outcomes:

By successfully completing this class, you will:

- learn the basics of conducting research in Mansfield Library and online;
- gain an understanding of the craft of historical inquiry and argument;
- acquire foundational skills of close reading, diligent research, and historical writing.

## Required Texts:

- 1.) Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015). ISBN-13: 978-0300198935. This is available for purchase at the UM Bookstore. It will also be on reserve at the Mansfield Library.
- 2.) All other readings will be available on MOODLE or through the Mansfield Library.

## Description of Course Requirements, Assignments, and Grading:

### 1. Course Attendance, Participation and In-Class Assignments (20%)

- ❖ Your attendance for this course is required. If you must miss a class due to illness, a family emergency, or for a university sponsored activity, please speak with me to discuss any make-up work you will need to complete so we can assure you won't fall behind. Please note that all unexcused absences will count against your final grade.

### 2. Assignment #1: Secondary Source Exploration (10%) \*\*Due in class 10/2\*\*

- ❖ For this assignment, you should find one published, scholarly book (a secondary source) on your general topic or area of interest using the Mansfield Library online catalogue. In class we will talk about what things to look for when finding a book to use. In your introduction to the library, you will learn how to find books on your topic using the Mansfield Library online catalogue. You should

choose a book that was published in the last c. thirty years (i.e. after 1985). You will bring this book with you to class on 10/2, the day your assignment is due.

- ❖ Once you have decided on a secondary source book that you're interested in examining, complete these tasks and answer the following questions. You should be able to do so in about a typed page. You may leave your responses in list form as they are here.
  1. **Before** you take your book off the library shelf or check it out, write down the title, author, and call number for the books immediately to the left and right of the book you are checking out. What do you notice about these neighboring books?
  - 2a. Once you check out the book, take a look at title page and publication information. Using the *Chicago Manual of Style* citation guidelines available on MOODLE, properly cite your book first as you would for a footnote.
  - 2b. Next, cite your book as you would for a bibliographical entry.
  3. Take a look at the book's table of contents and page through the book to get a sense of its scope. In a couple of sentences, write down what general topic(s) and historical time period(s) the book covers. Please use complete sentences.
  4. Now, read the introduction (or preface or first chapter, if there is no introduction) to your book. In two or three sentences, summarize the main argument the author is making. You can note if the argument was difficult for you to find or if you still are not sure you found what the main argument is, but you should still put into your own words what the author seems to be doing in the book.
  5. Finally, record what types of citations you see the author using. Does s/he use footnotes, endnotes, a bibliographical essay, or a bibliography, for example? Are there many citations? Very few?

Bring these typed responses **together with the book you checked out** to class on 10/2.

3. Assignment #2: Primary Source Exploration: Online Newspapers (10%) \*\*Due in class 10/23\*\*

- ❖ Following the instructions given to you by Susanne Caro in her overview of the online newspaper databases available to you through Mansfield Library, find **two** newspaper articles related to your general topic or area of interest. The two articles should be **at least** fifty years apart (if possible). Using the guidelines on MOODLE, **cite the two articles** and write three to five paragraphs (about two pages) addressing these questions. You do not need to address these in order. Please follow the paper formatting guidelines available on MOODLE. In your three to five paragraphs, please address these questions:
  1. What type of articles are they? (E.g. opinion? news? an obituary?)
  2. What is the **historical context** for each article? What prompted the authors to write each article?
  3. Compare and contrast your two articles. In a couple of sentences, describe what you notice about them. In what ways are they similar? How are they different? Do you notice any differences in language or content or style? How might the **historical context** you noted account for these differences?
  4. As a historian, what things might you need to keep in mind if you were using these as sources for a research paper? Consider, for instance, questions of bias, perspective, and purpose.
  5. What types of research topics or questions would these two articles help you answer? Include at least two in your write-up.

Please remember to bring **two** printed copies of your selected newspaper articles with you to class on 10/23.

4. Assignment #3: Government Documents Research Questions (10%) \*\*Due in class 11/13\*\*
- ❖ Following the instructions given to you by Susanne Caro in her overview of the government documents collection at Mansfield Library, find one government document that you could imagine using for research on your general area or topic of interest. Using the *Chicago Manual of Style* guidelines available on MOODLE, **cite the document** you found at the top of the page and answer these questions. Please type your responses. You may leave them in list form, but please write in complete sentences and proofread your assignment before turning it in.
    1. Who created, authored, or produced the document?
    2. What is the date of the document? What is the historical context for the government document you've found? What events (big, small, international, local) are pertinent to the primary source?
    3. What are **three** historical questions you could imagine answering by using this document? In other words, what are three questions this source would help you answer?
    4. In about a paragraph, reflect on what other type of information you would need to know to be able to use the source you found for a paper or research project. For example, would you need to know more about the background, agenda, or perspective of the institution or author who produced it? What might you need to know about the event(s) surrounding the government document?
5. Assignment #4: Archival Primary Source Museum Description (15%) \*\*Due in class on 12/4\*\*
- ❖ Imagine you are a curator for a museum exhibit on your general topic or area of interest. You are in charge of finding a primary source (for example, a letter, diary entry, photograph, map, recipe, or account book) from the Mansfield Library Archives and writing the exhibit introduction to the source (the overview description that usually accompanies an item in a museum). In about four paragraphs (c. 3 pages), include the necessary information you think someone would need to know about the source to be able to make sense of it. You should also reflect on what makes the source interesting to you. An additional written handout for this assignment will be distributed later in the semester and we will go over it in more detail.
6. Assignment #5 Presentation on your Archival Discovery (10%) \*\*Presentations in class on 12/4\*\*
- ❖ In about three minutes, you will present your archival discovery (what you wrote about for Assignment #4) to the class. Please be prepared to **share an image** of your archival find and speak about what you found and what is interesting about it to you. More specific instructions for this will follow.
7. Assignment #6 Topic Discovery Paper and Research Reflection (25%) \*\*Due in class on 12/11\*\*
- ❖ A description of this assignment will be posted on Moodle in November.

**Rubric:** This course will follow this grading rubric:

A: 93-100  
A-: 90-92  
B+: 87-89  
B: 83-86

B-: 80-82  
C+: 77-79  
C: 73-76  
C-: 70-72

D+: 67-69  
D: 63-66  
D-: 60-62  
F: 59 and below

**Rationale:** For this class, you will notice that there are more frequent, shorter writing assignments rather than one or two longer assignments. Like so many things in life, articulating your ideas and arguments orally and in writing gets easier with practice. The more often you write, the easier it will be. So, don't panic: there may be more assignments than you are used to, but they are short and, in the end, will make you better, more confident historians!

**Policies for Paper and Assignment Deadlines:**

- Please keep a copy of all assignments you turn in for this class until your final grade has been recorded.
- Please note that without a doctor's note, I cannot grant extensions on assignments except in the case of a family emergency. If your assignment is turned in after the deadline, it will be late. Please speak with me if you have any questions or if you will be missing class for an excused absence (such as an athletic event) on the day an assignment is due.

**A Note on Office Hours:** I look forward to getting to know each of you and encourage you to visit me during my office hours. I am in my office Mondays from 3-4PM, Wednesdays from 1:30-2:30 PM, and by appointment. You don't need to have a particular question or reason for stopping by. Feel free to come and say hello to introduce yourself! During the week, I can be reached by email and will do my best to respond within 24 hours. While I understand that email is convenient, I think you will find that many questions are best addressed in person.

**Electronics Policy:** Before coming to class, please silence and put away all electronics, including your cell phone. Please do not have your laptop or tablet out in class unless otherwise specified. This means you should take notes by hand for this class! I am happy to speak with any of you about note taking strategies during office hours.

**Food/Drink:** Please do not bring food or drinks with you to our class meetings that are in the library.

**Academic Honesty:** Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with UM's Student Conduct Code and conducting themselves accordingly. Academic dishonesty, including plagiarism and cheating, will result in appropriate disciplinary action and likely a failing grade. An easy rule to follow is that all work you produce for this class should be yours. Please speak with me if you have any questions.

**Students with Disabilities:** If you are a student with documented disabilities, appropriate accommodations will be made. To ensure that the proper steps can be taken, please speak with me as early in the semester as possible. It is your responsibility to speak with me and to provide the proper documentation from Disability Services for Students (DSS). You can visit [www.umt.edu/dss](http://www.umt.edu/dss) for additional details and information.

**Tentative Schedule of Class Meetings, Readings, and Assignments:**

**Week 1 (9/4):** NO CLASS MEETING—Happy Labor Day!

Please feel free to stop by my office hours Wednesday of this week (LA 261, 1:30-2:30 pm if you have questions about the class you would like addressed sooner rather than later!

**Week 2 (9/11):** Welcome and Introductions

Please be prepared to share a bit about your general areas of interest. What aspects of history interest you the most?

**Week 3 (9/18):** What is it that historians do?

**To do for today** (i.e. before you come to class! Remember to look ahead in your syllabus!):

-Read selections from William Cronon, "Getting Ready to Do History," Carnegie Essays on the Doctorate, Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate, Carnegie Foundation, Palo Alto, 2004, pp. 3-6. This is on MOODLE. Please print this out and bring it to class with you.

-As you read, take notes by writing down **three** things you learned, **two** things you have questions about, and **one** thing that struck you as being particularly interesting or surprising. You can handwrite these, but please use a separate piece of paper **so you can turn them in**.

**Week 4 (9/25):** Introduction to Library Resources with Susanne Caro

\*\*Meet in the Buckhous Room, on Level 2 of the Mansfield Library.\*\*

**Week 5 (10/2):** Why Are Citations Important for Arguments?

**To do for today:**

- **Using JSTOR**, find, print, read, and bring this article to class with you:

Anthony Grafton, "The Death of the Footnote," *The Wilson Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (Winter 1997), 72-77.

-Remember to bring the secondary source book you checked out from the library with you to class.

**Assignment #1 Due In Class**

**Week 6 (10/9):** Introduction to Online Newspaper Databases with Susanne Caro

\*\*Meet in the Student Learning Center on Level 2 of the Mansfield Library\*\*

**Week 7 (10/16):** Pizza & Profs (stay tuned for more information)

N.B. There is no assigned reading for today. Take time this week to work on Assignment #2

**Week 8 (10/23):** Class Discussion of Newspaper Database Assignment: What Makes a Good Research Question?

**To do for today:**

-Bring **two** printed copies of your two newspaper articles to class for discussion.

**Assignment #2 Due In Class**

**Week 9 (10/30):** Introduction to Government Documents with Susanne Caro

\*\*Meet in Government Documents on Level 1 of the Mansfield Library\*\*

N.B. Remember to begin reading Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives* as soon as possible!

**Week 10 (11/6):** What is an archive? Why do historians use them?

**To do for today:**

- Read Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*, pages 1-17; 23-46; 53-113; and 121-124.

-As you read, imagine "stuff" (aka evidence) from your life at UM this semester has been placed in an archive.

Brainstorm a list of things a historian would find (or not find!) in it fifty years from now. Ask yourselves: what would the archive of \_\_\_\_ reveal about you? What would it hide? If you knew this archive was being created, would you destroy anything?

**Week 11 (11/13):** Introduction to the Archives with Donna McRae

\*\*Meet on the 4<sup>th</sup> Floor of the Mansfield Library\*\*

**Assignment #3 Due In Class**

**Week 12 (11/20):** Independent work in archives or government documents

There is no formal class meeting this week.

**To do this week, on your own time:**

-Visit the archives at least once and complete assignments #4 and #5

-If you have chosen to use the archives for assignment # 6, you might spend two (or more!) days in the archives.

-If you have chosen to use the government documents collection for assignment # 6, you still need to visit the archives once and complete assignments #4 and #5, but you may choose to spend your other day(s) working in the government documents. We will talk more about this in class.

**Week 13 (11/27):** Independent work in archives or government documents

There is no formal class meeting this week.

**To do this week, on your own time:**

-Visit the archives at least once and complete assignments #4 and #5.

-If you have chosen to work on a document from the archives for assignment #6, you might spend two days in the archives

-If you have chosen to work on a document from the government documents collection for assignment #6, you still need to visit the archives once and complete assignments #4 and #5, but you may choose to spend your other day working in the government documents. We will talk more about this in class.

**Week 14 (12/4):** In-Class Presentations

**Assignment #4 Due In Class & In-Class Presentations (Assignment #5)**

**Week 15 (12/11):** Conclusions and Reflections

**Assignment #6 Due In Class**