Thinking Visually about American History

HIS 446. American Cultural History       Spring 2020
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by appointment
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*Note that this syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor. Any necessary changes in the syllabus or course schedule will prioritize effectiveness for student learning.

Course Overview and Learning Outcomes

This course is cultural history because it explores ideas, social practices, lifestyles, and identities. Unlike other history courses you may have taken, this course is not organized according to a chronological framework. Instead, our focus will be on practicing some of the methodologies used by cultural historians to analyze non-narrative primary sources.

In particular we will investigate three different types of primary source texts from a material culture perspective. Our interpretive approach will go beyond analyzing words on the page to consider the text itself as physical and visual evidence. In additional to digital resources you will be using original primary sources from our University Archives. Our focus for the first case study will be probate inventories—lists of the property a person owned when they died. What can these inventories tell us about how people lived in eighteenth-century Virginia? In case study two we will explore the meaning and experience of scrapbooking for interpreting student identities in the early twentieth century. Finally, case study three focuses on the ways that cookbooks document community, domesticity, class, and identity. The interpretive approaches you practice this semester will improve your ability to analyze primary sources as historical evidence.
Student Learning Outcomes:
Upon successful completion of this course students will be able to demonstrate the following knowledge, skills, and habits of mind:

- Evaluate methods of interpretation applied by scholars of assigned readings.
- Apply various historical methods to interpret non-narrative primary sources as historical evidence.
- Develop effective research questions for contextualizing primary sources and locate appropriate resources for addressing those questions.
- Use effective visual rhetoric to present interpretation of primary sources.
- Apply historical writing benchmarks effectively (see rubric posted to Canvas). These include:
  - Factual and interpretive accuracy
  - Persuasiveness of evidence
  - Sourcing of evidence
  - Corroboration of evidence
  - Contextualization of evidence

Assignments

| Case Study 1. Probate Inventory Analysis | 25% |
| Case Study 2. Scrapbook Analysis        | 35% |
| Case Study 3. Cookbook Project          | 40% |

All of these projects will involve using assigned readings, and sometimes additional research, to analyze primary sources. Though none of these assignments will be traditional research papers, you will improve your ability to apply methods of historical analysis to interpret primary source evidence. Discussion Board assignments will offer important opportunities for feedback on work that will eventually be submitted for a grade. As work in progress, Discussion Board postings will be graded simply as complete or incomplete. Your postings must be complete and must fully address the question for credit. Late Discussion Board postings will not be accepted for credit, but you can earn credit for posting a discussion board assignment by the deadline even if you miss class. Failure to submit Discussion Board postings by the deadline will result in 2 points subtracted from the appropriate unit assignment average for each skipped Discussion Board assignment.

Course Policies

Participation and Attendance Policy

1. Consistent attendance—Attendance is mandatory. This is a seminar, not a traditional lecture course. We will be critically evaluating the content of the readings and practicing the application of analytical skills during each class period. You will not be able to make up for your absences by copying someone else’s notes. For this reason, consistent attendance is essential to your learning in this course. I will take
attendance at the beginning of every class. You must attend at least one hour of the class period to be counted for full attendance for the class. If the University is closed for inclement weather you will not, of course, be counted absent. If it snows and the University is open, class will be held as scheduled and attendance counts. If I am unable to attend class due to unforeseen circumstances, I will distribute an email message and post an announcement to Canvas at least two hours (if possible) before class is scheduled to begin. Documentation for absences will not be collected except in cases where an extended absence may be necessary (for example, hospitalization). There will be a 3% reduction of the student's final grade for each absence after the first 3. Beyond even this penalty, a student who seriously neglects attendance and class preparation risks failing the course. If you are experiencing a personal crisis that requires you to miss more than 2 classes, please let me know at that time (not afterwards). Practice the kind of responsible communication and professional behavior you will be expected to demonstrate as a teacher.

2. Thorough preparation for class—readings must be completed before class and assignments must be turned in on time, including Discussion Board postings. Postings must be complete and must fully address the question for credit. Discussion Board assignments are typically due before class because they will form the basis for class discussion and peer review. For this reason, late Discussion Board assignments cannot be accepted for credit.

3. Regular contributions to class discussions—participation is not formally graded as a specific percentage of the final grade but the success of this course for your learning depends on active intellectual engagement with your peers. Peer review will be integral to development of your archive project.

**Academic Integrity**

UNCG considers academic dishonesty to be a serious offense. Dishonest behavior in any form, including cheating, plagiarism, deception of effort, and unauthorized assistance, may result in such sanctions as a failing grade on an assignment or failure in the course depending on the nature of the offense. Students must follow the guidelines of the University Policy on Academic Integrity:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0rFGGhJvbDHUExSZmFFaWFmb00/view

**Electronic Communication**

Students are responsible for checking UNCG email on a regular basis to keep up with communications sent outside of class time. Students are encouraged to utilize email and other forms of digital communication when interacting with the instructor (lctolber@uncg.edu). When using email, students are to be professional and courteous. Students should also remember email is an asynchronous form of communication. Thus, while a prompt response may be desired, it may not always be possible (especially late at night and on weekends). Students should allow at least 24 hours (48 hours on weekends) for a response. That said, the instructor answers emails in the timeliest fashion possible.

**Late Assignment Penalty**

Meeting deadlines is an essential element of professional behavior. Please note that unless arrangements have been made well in advance of due dates, graded assignments will be penalized by a 3% reduction in the final assignment grade for every day the assignment is late. Graded assignments later than one week will not be
accepted for credit without an extremely impressive explanation. Using effective quantitative reasoning, your grade average can recover from an F on an individual assignment more successfully than it can recover from a “0”. It is better to turn in an incomplete assignment on time than to turn in nothing at all. As explained in the participation policy above, late Discussion Board assignments will not receive credit.

**Academic Accommodations**

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds and abilities. If you feel you will encounter any barriers to full participation in this course due to the impact of a disability, please contact the Office of Accessibility Resources and Services (OARS). The OARS staff can meet with you to discuss the barriers you are experiencing and explain the eligibility process for establishing academic accommodations. You can learn more about OARS by visiting their website at [https://ods.uncg.edu/](https://ods.uncg.edu/) or by calling 336-334-5440 or visiting them in Suite 215, EUC.

**Health and Wellness**

Your health impacts your learning. Throughout your time in college, you may experience a range of health issues that can cause barriers to your learning. These might include physical ailments, illnesses, strained relationships, anxiety, high levels of stress, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, or loss of motivation. Student Health Services and The Counseling Center can help with these or other issues you may be experiencing. You can learn about the free, confidential mental health services available on campus by calling 336-334-5874, visiting the website at [https://shs.uncg.edu/](https://shs.uncg.edu/) or visiting the Anna M. Gove Student Health Center at 107 Gray Drive. Help is always available.

**Required Texts/Readings/References**


Recommended:

Rampolla, Mary Lynn. *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*. NY: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2012. This book will serve as the style standard for the course. It is based on Turabian style.

### Course Schedule

**January 13**       **Course Overview and Introductions**

**Discussion Board**: Select an object from your life that reflects an aspect of your cultural identity. Describe the object in detail. What is its purpose or function? Explain why you chose this particular object as a meaningful reflection of your cultural identity. If it is a mass-produced object be sure to explain how it reflects something meaningful about you as an individual. Post your 1-page, single-spaced essay to the Discussion Board by **noon on January 14**. Be prepared to discuss your object in class on Wednesday. Optional: bring your object or a photograph of the object to class to share with us.

**January 15**       **Objects and Meanings**

**January 20**       **MLK Holiday, No Class**

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**Case Study 1: Firedogs, Looking Glasses, and Sugar Boxes**

*What can probate inventories tell us about how people lived in eighteenth-century Virginia?*
January 22  Historians and objects as evidence

January 27  Introduction to Probate Inventories

January 29  Reading an article for methodology

February 3  Using a probate inventory as historical evidence

Discussion Board: Post research questions by noon on Feb 4. See instructions posted to Canvas.

February 5  Probate Inventory Analysis Workshop: Asking good research questions

Discussion Board: due by noon on Feb 9. See instructions posted to Canvas.

February 10  Probate Inventory Analysis Workshop: Applying historical methodologies from assigned readings

Discussion Board: due by noon on Feb 11. See instructions posted to Canvas.

February 12  Probate Inventory Analysis Workshop: Research findings

Case Study 1. Probate Inventory Analysis due by midnight on Feb. 14.
Case Study 2:
Writing with Scissors

How are scrapbooks “authored” and what can they tell us about student identities in the early twentieth century?

February 17  Introduction to the History of Scrapbooks
Read:

February 19  Meet your scrapbook (class meets in Jackson Library, Hodges Reading Room)

February 24  Scrapbooks as Objects
Read:
Garvey, Ellen Gruber. Writing with Scissors: American Scrapbooks from the Civil War to the Harlem Renaissance. NY: Oxford University Press, 2013. Introduction, Chapter 1. Reuse, Recycle, Recirculate; Chapter 2 Mark Twain’s Scrapbook Innovations
https://login.libproxy.uncg.edu/login?url=http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195390346.001.0001

Discussion Board: due by noon on Feb 25. See instructions posted to Canvas.

February 26  Scrapbook analysis workshop I

March 2/4  Spring Break
March 9 Writing with Scissors--authorship

Read:

https://login.libproxy.uncg.edu/login?url=http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195390346.001.0001

March 11 Scrapbooks and Gender

Read:

https://login.libproxy.uncg.edu/login?url=http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195390346.001.0001

March 16 How do archives (re)shape scrapbooks?

Read:

https://login.libproxy.uncg.edu/login?url=http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195390346.001.0001

Discussion Board: due by noon on March 17. See instructions posted to Canvas.

March 18 Scrapbook analysis workshop II

Case Study 2. Scrapbook analysis due by midnight March 20.

Case Study 3: Eat My Words

How do cookbooks document community, domesticity, class, and identity?
March 23  Meet your cookbook (class meets in Jackson Library, Hodges Reading Room)
Read:

March 25  Cookbooks and Communities
Read:

March 30  Cookbooks and Authorship
Read:

Discussion Board: due by noon on March 31. See instructions posted to Canvas.

April 1  Cookbook project workshop

April 6  Cookbooks and Gender, part 1
Read:

April 8  Cookbooks as Politics
Read:


April 13  Cookbooks and Gender, part 2
Read:
April 15  Cookbooks and Technology
Read: Marling, Karal Ann. “Betty Crocker’s Picture Cook Book: The Aesthetics of Food in the 1950s.” posted to Canvas

Discussion Board: due by noon on April 19. See instructions posted to Canvas.

April 20  Cookbook project workshop

April 22  Cookbook project workshop

April 27  Cookbook project workshop

April 29  Last Day of Classes. Summations and Evaluations. Final Case Study 3 Project due