

# Methods of Historical Research (HIST 4301)

Spring Semester 2026  
Tuesdays 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.  
Classroom: CAB 334

Instructor: Dr. Michael J. O'Brien  
Office: CAB 313G  
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OFFICE HOURS:  
By Appointment



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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will teach you the research and, especially, writing skills that historians and prehistorians use in their professions. You will be expected to formulate a topic of inquiry and a short thesis and then conduct research to support (or negate) that thesis in a written paper and oral presentation. Class topics will include the identification of source materials, critical evaluation of those materials, proper citation of sources, and the composition of a written narrative using source materials as the evidentiary basis for a thesis-driven essay. In addition, we will spend considerable time on **how** to write, including such seemingly mundane things as grammar, punctuation, developing coherent and logical sentences, and avoiding hyperbole. Regardless of whether you continue on as a historian or find yourself attracted to another occupation, you absolutely need to know how to write. And, despite what others might have told you, there really is only one way to write—and that is “correctly.”

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Develop critical thinking skills through discussion, research, and writing assignments;
- Practice and improve analytical writing skills;
- Present research findings in written, visual, and oral formats; and
- Develop an original thesis and support (or negate) it with evidence.

## REQUIRED TEXT

*Turabian: The Easy Way* (9<sup>th</sup> edition); the paperback ISBN is 978-1-93535-663-9. Additional readings will be posted on Blackboard.

## COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

### • PAPER PROSPECTUS

You'll be expected to prepare a **one-page**, double-spaced explanation of your topic, its *historical* significance, and a thesis statement. These will form the basis of our discussion on **March 24**. You'll turn in your prospectus at the end of that class period.

### • RESEARCH PRESENTATION

During the final three class periods (not counting the pizza party), each person will give a 20–25-minute PowerPoint presentation of his/her research project, followed by discussion.

### • FINAL WRITING ASSIGNMENT

You'll be expected to turn in your 15-page research paper by **May 8**.

## GRADING SCALE

Attendance—150 points

Class Participation and **Leading** Discussions—150 points

Prospectus and Presentation—150 points

Final Paper—300 points

Class Presentation—250 points

**TOTAL POINTS: 1000**

**A = 1000–900; B = 899–800; C = 799–700; D = 699–600; F = 599 and below.**

## POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

**Attendance and Participation:** Class attendance is part of your final grade (see above). I guarantee that you will not succeed if you miss class. Please be punctual; don't arrive late and don't leave early. If you know that you will be late or must leave early, please inform me ahead of time. In addition, you **must** participate and engage in classroom discussion of the lectures and readings.

**Extra Credit:** No such thing.

**Late-Work Policy:** No such thing.

**Blackboard:** We have a Blackboard site, which is where your grades will be posted. I'll also use Blackboard for course announcements and readings.

**Classroom Etiquette:** Please be respectful in the classroom. Don't get up and leave early; do turn your cell phone off. Laptops may be used only for taking notes and looking up relevant material.

**Communication:** Students may e-mail me at any time regarding questions or concerns. I do my best to respond to email within one day. You may also schedule an appointment to speak with me.

**AI Policy:** No use of Generative AI is permitted *without my express permission*. I assume that all work you submit will have been generated by you, working individually or in groups, and not by a chatbot such as Open AI's ChatGPT, Anthropic's Claude, or by any other person. Please don't test me on this; I was a beta tester for both ChatGPT-3 and ChatGPT-4, and I know the tricks and backdoors to catch you.

## WEEKLY SCHEDULE

### Week 1: January 20

Course Introduction & Syllabus; Research Strategies

**Week 2: January 27**

Writing Like a Pro I

**Week 3: February 3**

Writing Like a Pro II

**Week 4: February 10**

Writing Like a Pro III

**Week 5: February 17**

Plagiarism, AI-Assisted Research and Research Integrity

**Week 6: February 24**

The Difference between Primary and Secondary Sources and How to Cite and Reference Them; Preliminary Discussion of Research Topics

**Week 7: March 3**

Differences in Organization and Design of Scholarly Articles/Books (including Figures and Tables); Preliminary Discussion of Research Topics (con't.)

**Week 8: March 10 (Spring Break)****Week 9: March 17**

Prospectus for Final Paper Presented in Class

**Week 10: March 24**

In-Class Peer Review of Each Prospectus from Last Class (have detailed notes ready for the review and discussion)

**Week 11: March 31**

No Class; Work on Drafts and Prepare for Presentations

**Week 12: April 7**

Presentation of Research Papers (and Feedback) I

**Week 13: April 14**

Presentation of Research Papers (and Feedback) II

**Week 15: April 21**

Presentation of Research Papers (and Feedback) III

**Week 16: April 28 (Last Class Period)**

Lessons Learned (Plus Pizza)

**May 8: Turn in Final Research Papers (by email)**

## SUPPORT SERVICES AND DISCLOSURES

**Academic Accommodations for Persons with Disabilities:** The Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) of 2008 and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 are federal anti-discrimination statutes that provide comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Title II of the ADAAA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act require that students with disabilities be guaranteed equal access to the learning environment through the provision of reasonable and appropriate accommodation of their disability. If you have a diagnosed disability that may require an accommodation, please contact Disability Support Services (DSS) for the coordination of services. DSS is located at the Main Campus on the 2nd floor of the Central Academic Building in suite 210. The phone number for DSS is (210) 784-1335 and email is [dsupport@tamusa.edu](mailto:dsupport@tamusa.edu).

**Academic Learning Center:** All currently enrolled students at Texas A&M University-San Antonio can utilize the Academic Learning Center for subject-area tutoring. The Academic Learning Center is an appointment based center where appointments are made through the Navigate platform. Students access Navigate through Jagwire in the Student Services tab. The Center is active on campus outreaching to students to highlight services offered. You can contact the Academic Learning Center by emailing [tutoring@tamusa.tamus.edu](mailto:tutoring@tamusa.tamus.edu) or calling (210)-784-1332. Appointments can also be made through JagWire under the services tab.

**Jaguar Writing Center:** The Jaguar Writing Center provides writing assistance to graduate and undergraduate students in all three colleges. Writing tutors work with students to develop reading skills, prepare oral presentations, and plan, draft, and revise their written assignments. Students can make individual or group appointments with a writing tutor. The Writing Center is located in the Central Academic Building, Suite 208. Appointments can also be made through JagWire under the services tab.

**The Six-Drop Rule:** Students are subject to the requirements of Senate Bill (SB) 1231 passed by the Texas Legislature in 2007. SB 1231 limits students to a maximum of six (6) non-punitive course drops (i.e., courses a student chooses to drop) during their undergraduate careers. A non-punitive drop does not affect the student's GPA. However, course drops that exceed the maximum allowed by SB 1231 will be treated as "F" grades and will impact the student's GPA.

**Financial Aid and Verification of Attendance:** According to the following federal regulation, 34 CFR 668.21: U.S. Department of Education (DoE) Title IV regulation, a student can only receive Title IV funds based on Title IV eligibility criteria which include class attendance. If Title IV funds are disbursed to ineligible students (including students who fail to begin attendance), the institution must return these funds to the U.S. DoE within 30 days of becoming aware that the student will not or has not begun attendance. Faculty will provide the Office of Financial Aid with an electronic notification if a student has not attended the first week of class. Any student receiving federal financial aid who does not attend the first week of class will have their aid terminated and returned to the DoE. Please note that any student who stops attending at any time during the semester may also need to return a portion of their federal aid.

**Academic Misconduct Policy:** Students at Texas A&M University-San Antonio are expected to adhere to the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Academic Dishonesty for which a student is subject to penalty includes **cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, multiple submissions, misrepresentation of academic records, facilitating academic dishonesty, unfair advantage, and ethical misconduct**. This includes holding other students to the same standards and reporting any incidents of alleged violation of the honesty policy to the instructor involved or, if necessary, to the appropriate academic department head. All students are responsible for being familiar with the Academic Dishonesty Policy, which may be found in the Texas A&M University-San Antonio Student Handbook.

University policy prescribes serious consequences for acts of academic misconduct including, but not limited to, a grade of 'F' on the particular paper or assignment or a failing grade in the course. Also, a referral may be issued to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities where the sanctions can vary up to possible expulsion from the University. Considering the potential consequences of academic misconduct, it is obviously in students' best interests to avoid even the appearance of such behavior. If you are ever unclear whether a specific act might constitute academic misconduct, please contact your instructor for an assessment of the situation. All student term papers and other written assignments are subject to analysis by anti-plagiarism software.

**Counseling Resources:** As a college student, there may be a time when personal stressors interfere with your academic performance and/or negatively impact your daily functioning. If you or someone you know is experiencing life stressors, emotional difficulties, or mental health concerns at A&M-SA, please contact the Office of Student Counseling & Wellness Services (SC & WS) located in Modular C Room 166 (Rear entrance) or call 210-784-1331 between the hours of 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM. All mental health services provided by SC & WS are free, confidential (as the law allows), and are not part of a student's academic or university record. SC&WS provides brief individual, couples, and group therapy, crisis intervention, consultation, case management, and prevention services. For more information, please visit [www.tamusa.edu/studentcounseling](http://www.tamusa.edu/studentcounseling).

**Statement of Harassment and Discrimination:** Texas A&M University-San Antonio is committed to the fundamental principles of academic freedom, equality of opportunity and human dignity. To fulfill its multiple missions as an institution of higher learning, the university encourages a climate that values and nurtures collegiality, diversity, pluralism and the uniqueness of the individual within our state, nation, and world. All decisions and actions involving students and employees should be based on applicable law and individual merit. In accordance with applicable federal and state law, the campus prohibits discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Individuals who believe they have experienced harassment or discrimination prohibited by this statement are encouraged to contact the appropriate offices within their respective units.

Our faculty are committed to helping create a safe learning environment for all students and for the university as a whole. If you have experienced any form of sex- or gender-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic or dating violence, or stalking, know that help and support are available. We have staff members trained to support

survivors in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, and more.

The university strongly encourages all students to report any such incidents to the university. Please be aware that all employees (other than those designated as confidential resources, such as counselors and other healthcare providers, are required to report information about such discrimination and harassment to the university. This means that if you tell a faculty member about a situation of sexual harassment or sexual violence, or other related misconduct, the faculty member **must** share that information with the university's Title IX Coordinator. If you wish to speak to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting responsibility, you can contact the Student Counseling Center at (210) 784-1331.

**Students' Rights and Responsibilities:** The purpose of the following statement is to enumerate the essential provisions for the student freedom and responsibility to learn at Texas A&M University–San Antonio. All students are required to follow all policies and regulations as set forth by The Texas A&M University System. This includes the A&M–San Antonio Student Code of Conduct.

### ***Students' Rights***

1. A student shall have the right to participate in a free exchange of ideas, and there shall be no university rule or procedure that in any way abridges the rights of freedom of speech, expression, petition and peaceful assembly as set forth in the U.S. Constitution.
2. Each student shall have the right to participate in all areas and activities of the university, free from any form of discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, genetic information or veteran status in accordance with applicable federal and state laws.
3. A student has the right to personal privacy except as otherwise provided by law, and this will be observed by students and University authorities alike.
4. Each student subject to disciplinary action arising from violations of university student rules shall be assured a fundamentally fair process.

### ***Students' Responsibilities***

1. A student has the responsibility to respect the rights and property of others, including other students, the faculty, and the administration.
2. A student has the responsibility to be fully acquainted with the published University Student Rules found in the Student Handbook, Student Code of Conduct, on our website, University Catalog and students must comply with them and the laws of the land.
3. A student has the responsibility to recognize that student actions reflect upon the individuals involved and upon the entire university community.
4. A student has the responsibility to recognize the University's obligation to provide an environment for learning.
5. A student has the responsibility to check their university email for any updates or official university notification.



6. We expect that students will behave in a manner that is dignified, respectful, and courteous to all people, regardless of sex, ethnic/racial origin, religious background, sexual orientation, or gender.

The complete academic calendar is available online:

<http://www.tamusa.edu/provost/academicresources/academiccalendar.html>