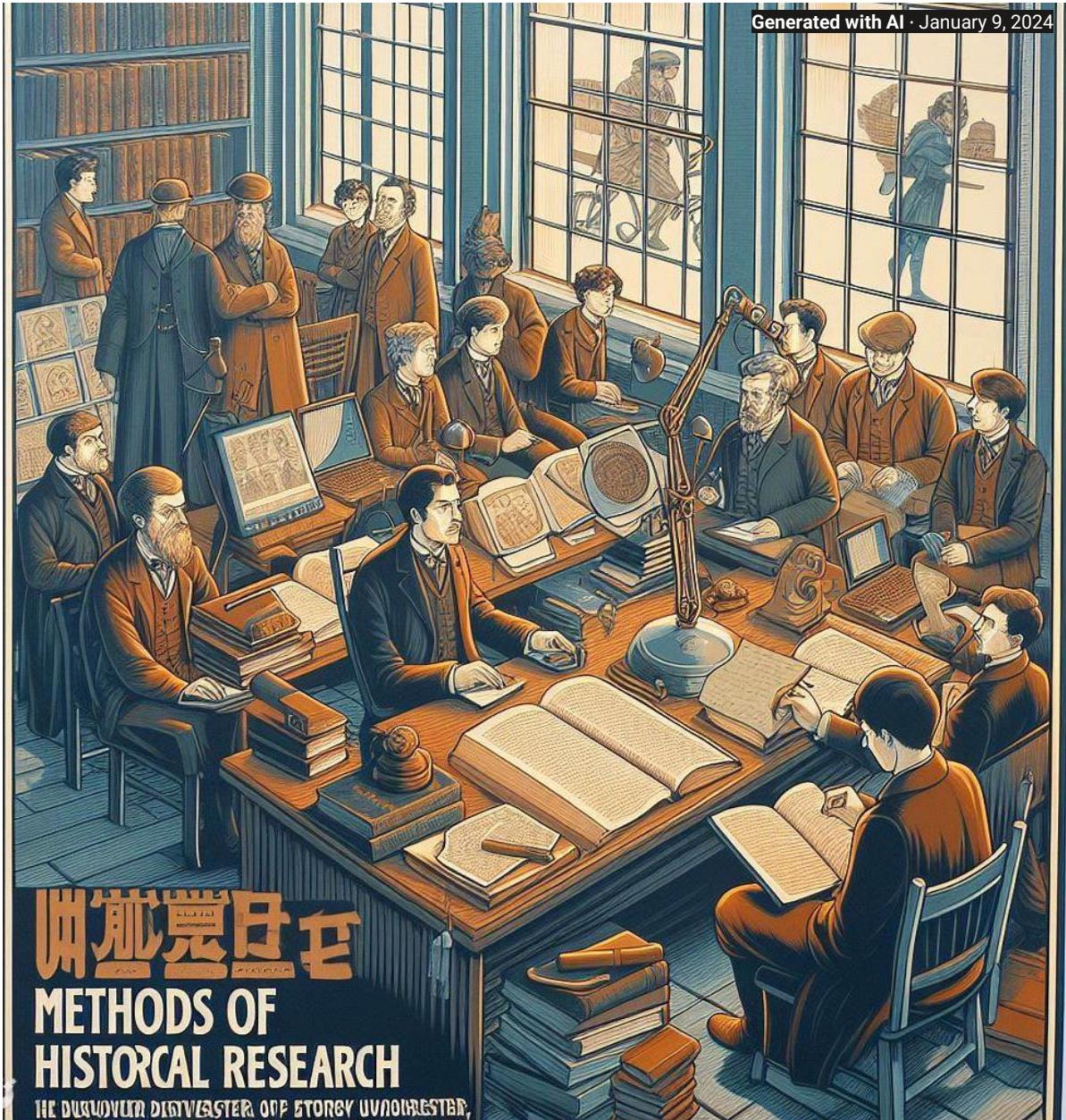


Spring 2026 Texas A&M University-San Antonio

HIST 4301 (23450)

Methods of Historical Research

TTH 9:30-10:45 am Classroom Hall 321



Instructor: Dr. Zhaojin Zeng

Email: zhaojin.zeng@tamsa.edu

Office: CAB 313B Office hours: TTH 10:45 am-12:15 pm & Zoom appointment

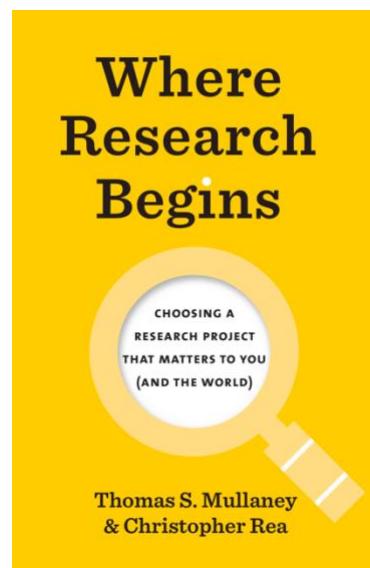
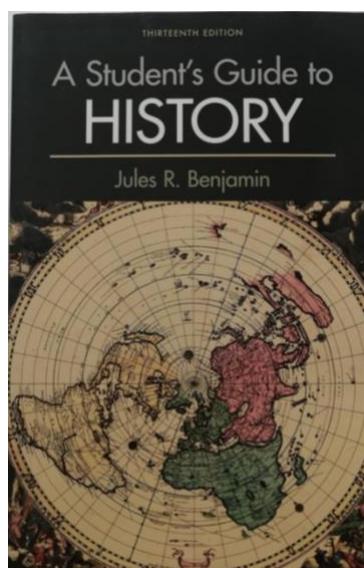
Course Description and Goals

This course introduces students to concepts, methodologies, and research and writing techniques in the academic discipline of history. Students will learn to craft ideas, formulate topics, collect data and materials, and draft and refine writings – all essential steps for completing a primary source-based research project. Throughout the semester, students will also have opportunities to work with the instructor as well as with classmates to carry out a series of study activities that help them develop a robust mechanism for productive writing and become familiar with resources and professional opportunities in the profession. At the end of the course, students will produce a serious research paper based on original ideas and solid source materials.

Course Texts and Study Resources

Required Textbooks:

- Benjamin, Jules R. 2016. *A Student's Guide to History*. Thirteenth edition. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's. Paperback ISBN: 978-1319027513. Notes: Latest or earlier editions are also acceptable; Physical copies are reserved at the library.
- Mullaney, Thomas S., and Christopher Rea. 2022. *Where Research Begins: Choosing a Research Project That Matters to You (and the World)*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Paperback ISBN: 978-0226817446. Notes: digital copy might be accessible on Blackboard.



Course Assignments & Grading

1. Attendance (10%): Students are required to attend all class meetings. Attendance for each class meeting is taken on a credit/non-credit basis in the formats of sign-up sheets, pop quizzes, and exit notes, among others. There is no make-up for missed attendance. Each absence results in a one-point deduction in your final grade. Exceptions can only be made with a doctor's note or other legitimate documentation for extreme conditions/causes.

2. Class Participation (10%): Students are required to fully engage in the class by asking and responding to questions, actively participating in discussions, carrying out group work, and performing other required class activities. You are expected to fully engage in the Paper Development Workshop series. The grade is based on the instructor's subjective, but very fair, evaluation of student involvement in class activities during the entire period of the course.

3. An Original, Primary Source Based Research Paper (60% in total): A full-length research essay of 16 pages minimum, double-spaced, 12pt Times New Roman, one inch margin, excluding bibliography (required) and appendix (optional). The grading structure is as follows:

- 3.1 Research prospectus (up to 1 page): **10%**
- 3.2 First draft (8 pages minimum): **10%**
- 3.3 Peer review and critique paper (up to 2 pages): **10%**
- 3.4 Final Paper (16 pages minimum of main texts): **30%**

- [Additional Opportunity] Students who work on topics related to as **Texas, American Southwest, or US-Mexico Borderlands** are encouraged to apply for student research awards from the San Antonio Genealogical and Historical Society (SAGHS). There will be two awards granted each year, and each award recipient will receive a \$500 stipend with no restrictions on its use once issued. Please reach out to the instructor for more details.

4. Final Research Presentation (20%): Students will deliver a 15-minute-long PowerPoint-based presentation to introduce your research project, including your topic, primary and secondary sources, main findings or thesis, and contributions to the field and to the broad audience. The presentations will be scheduled at the end of the semester.

5. Extra Credit Opportunities (2 additional points towards final grade): In order to incentivize student participation in talks, lectures, or other extracurricular events on campus or in the city of San Antonio, one extra point, for each event you attend, will be given toward your final grade.

Two points/events maximum for each student. Prior to attending the events, students need to consult by email and seek written approval from the professor. Upon returning from the extracurricular event, students will submit on Blackboard a 250-word report that briefly summarizes the event and shares your experience and thoughts.

*** Final Grade Scale:**

A = 90 to 102, B = 80 to 89, C = 70 to 79, D = 60 to 69, F = 0 to 59.

*Straight letter grades only, no plus or minus (+/-).

Course Policies

Disabilities: The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disability. If you believe you have a disability that may require accommodations, please contact Counseling and Disability Support Services for the coordination of services. If you have any questions or need additional information, contact DSS at: (210) 784-1335.

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 & 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 includes 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 his/her 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 his/her federal aid.

Academic Integrity 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.

Student Misconduct: Appropriate conduct is essential to the effective functioning of the University. University policy defines unacceptable conduct, both academic and non-academic misconduct, and penalties for such behavior in The Student Handbook and The Student Code of Conduct. 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.

Course Writing Policy: All assignments should be crafted originally and directly by students. In the meantime, all information/materials, created by others and then used in students' work, should be given credit to in the appropriate academic citation styles. Note that writing first in a language other than English and then having it translated into English through digital tools is prohibited.

AI Policy: Per University requirements, this course specifies the following rules regarding the use of generative AI tools, including but not limited to, GhatGPT, MS Bing, Google Bard, etc. 1) Students should create original work for this course, and the use of AI can only be allowed when it serves as a *supplemental* tool for writing improvement, material/data locating, and other non-essential research processes. 2) AI-generated contents, as well as writings and sources created by others, should always be properly cited and acknowledged in your work; otherwise it is considered as plagiarism and violation of academic integrity. 3) If students do use AI tools in any process of their coursework, students must provide a detailed statement on how AI tools informed their research and writing process and the final product, including how you validated any AI-generated contents; this statement does not contribute to the word count of your assignments and does not automatically justify your use of AI tools. 4) The instructor reserves the right to request further information or reassign the assignment in the case of lack of transparency in the use of AI-generated contents in your work.

Submission Policy. Students need to follow the course instructions to submit all completed assignments, on time, to the correct places, online, in print, or in class, etc. *Submissions late for the first hour will be penalized for 5% deduction in grade and for 20% deduction if late between*

the 2nd hour and one day. Late assignments will NOT be accepted if submitted beyond 24 hours past the due time.

Grading. Students wishing a reconsideration of their grades may consult the professor, and requests must be made by email within THREE days of the posting of the grades. In the case of regrading, assignments will be graded afresh. Grades may go up or down. Students should immediately inform the professor of any discrepancies between grades recorded on the course website and the grades they have received on assignments.

Digital Device Policy or “No Screens” Policy. On-screen distractions in class have become a besetting problem, frustrating other students and faculty alike. This course thus simply complies with the History Department’s “no screens” policy: *laptops or cellphones are NOT allowed to use during the class and must be stowed in your bags.* Students will be notified in advance if laptops will be needed during a particular session for a group activity, or to consult readings they may not have printed out.

Communication Policy. In-Class Communication: The physical or virtual classroom in this course also serves as an intellectual space for open and free academic conversations between class participants, which consist of the instructor and registered students. Visitors and audit/outside students can be allowed only if the instructor grants approval in advance. Recording, and spread to outside outlets of, class conversations in any way is strictly prohibited unless there is written permission from the instructor. Email Communication: E-mail me directly any questions or concerns that you might have in relation to your coursework. Please do NOT use the “send message” function on the Blackboard platform. All correspondence between professors and students must occur via University email accounts. You must have a Jaguar email account ready and working. If it is not working, contact the help desk at sahelp@tamus.edu or 210-784-4357

Etiquette. Please arrive on time. Please do not come and go during the class period. If you are unavoidably late, as a courtesy to the class, please enter quietly so as not to interfere with the concentration of other students.

Student Support and Resources

Student Academic Success Center: The Student Academic Success Center takes a developmental approach to help students complete their academic goals from orientation through graduation. The Center offers academic and skills workshops, one-on-one appointments, and online resources to help retention efforts at Texas A&M University-San Antonio. The goal of the Center is to help students discover, self-reflect, and become independent learners. To contact the Center, call 210-784-1307.

The Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center: The center provides writing assistance to graduate and undergraduate students in all three colleges at Texas A&M-San Antonio. 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. Email writingcenter@tamusa.edu to make an appointment.

TAMUSA Library: Librarians from the Archives & Special Collections offer one on one research assistance by appointment for history students. Topics include brainstorming a topic, search techniques, or even citation help. Feel free to make an appointment with the librarian via the link: <https://tamusa.libcal.com/appointments?u=30503>

- Leslie Stapleton, Head of Archives and Special Collections at TAMUSA library, has expressed willingness to work with each of you in this course to offer advice and support regarding library resources. Please reach out to her to make appointments.

Class Schedule

(Assigned readings should be finished prior to class meetings)

Week	Tuesday <u>Methodologies for Historical Research</u>	Thursday <u>Your Research Project</u>
Jan. 20&22	Course introduction: Read Syllabus & <i>Where Research Begins</i> , Introduction, pp.1-15.	Topic: What is history and how historians work? Read: <i>A Student's Guide to History</i> , Ch.1.
Jan. 27&29	Discuss: How to conduct historical research? Where to begin with? Read: <i>A Student's Guide to History</i> , Ch.7	Class used for departmental duty <i>(students will participate in faculty candidates' teaching demonstration)</i>

Feb 3&5	<p>Topic: What makes a historical research questions and subjects</p> <p>Read: <i>Where Research Begins</i>, Ch.1, “Questions.”</p> <p>Identify: your research subject and formulate a few questions.</p> <p>Read: <i>Where Research Begins</i>, Ch.2, “What’s Your Problem.”</p>	<p>Class used for departmental duty (students will participate in faculty candidates’ teaching demonstration)</p>
Feb. 10&12	<p>Topic: Sources, Data, & Evidence</p> <p>Read: <i>A Student’s Guide to History</i>, Ch.3.</p> <p>Homework: Write up a list of potential sources</p>	<p>Paper Development Workshop (1): Discuss your research questions and potential sources.</p> <p>Read: <i>Where Research Begins</i>, “Primary Sources and How to Use Them,” pp. 67-82</p>
Feb. 17&19	<p>Explore TAMUSA Library and other University Academic Resources: How to explore academic research resources.</p>	<p>Paper Development Workshop (2): Write a Research Prospectus.</p> <p>Read: <i>Where Research Begins</i>, Ch.3, pp.82-116</p>
Friday Feb. 20	<p>Due: One-page Research Prospectus due on Blackboard</p>	
Feb. 24&26	<p>Topic: Reading, Interpreting, and Evaluating Historical Evidence</p> <p>Read: <i>A Student’s Guide to History</i>, Chs. 4&5.</p>	<p>Paper Development Workshop (3): Conduct a preliminary analysis of your source materials; Develop an effective research and writing plan.</p> <p>Read: <i>A Student’s Guide to History</i>, Ch.6.</p>
Mar. 3&5	<p>Topic: Writing, Citing, and Concluding</p> <p>Read: <i>A Student’s Guide to History</i>, Chs. 8&9.</p>	<p>Independent Study: Formally getting started with your project</p> <p>Read: <i>Where Research Begins</i>, Ch.6.</p>

Mar. 10&12	Spring Break – No Class	
Mar. 17&19	<i>Independent Study</i>	<i>Independent Study</i>
Mar. 24&26	<i>Independent Study</i>	<i>Independent Study</i>
Friday Mar. 27	Due: First draft (8 pages minimum) due on Blackboard	
Mar. 31&Apr. 2	<i>Independent Study</i>	Paper Development Workshop (4): In-class: Discuss and offer peer-review and critique on drafts.
Friday April 3	Due: Peer review and critique paper (2 pages) due on Blackboard	
Apr. 7&9	<i>Independent Study</i>	<i>Independent Study</i>
Apr. 14&16	Topic: Strategies for Effectively Developing a Research Presentation Read: <i>A Student's Guide to History</i> , Ch.10	Paper Development Workshop (5): Discuss strategies for finalizing your research and concluding your writing.
Apr. 21&23	Individual Meetings with Instructor	Individual Meetings with Instructor
Apr. 28&30	Final Presentations (1)	Final Presentations (2)
Monday May 4	Due: Final Research Paper due on Blackboard (and one additional session for presentations if necessary)	