State University of New York at Albany
College of Arts & Sciences
Department of History

HIS 634 (9652)                                      Spring 2011
Seminar in International History                  Mon 4:40-6:40
Prof. H. Peter Krosby                                HU-134

SYLLABUS

This is a research seminar, and the main product of your efforts, on which your grade largely depends, is the ultimate version of the research paper you will write. Contributions to our discussions – or failure to contribute – will also influence your grade, as will unnecessary absences from our weekly sessions.

You should read at once Jules R. Benjamin, A Student’s Guide to History, 11th ed. (Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2010), a substantial and technically up to date manual on how “to do” history. Study it carefully before you begin your work. Dated but useful are Andrew McMichael’s brief History on the Web: Using and Evaluating the Internet (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2005), and David J. Cohen & Roy Rosenzweig’s much more substantial Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005). You might also Google history web sites, which are updated regularly. There are still libraries, of course, and they remain highly recommendable!

The final version of your paper should be neat, clean, and without any visible corrections, overlooked typos or other errors. It should also contain some 15,000-20,000 (no more!) words of text (not counting notes or bibliography), be typed double-spaced, and have 1-inch margins all around. If the length of the paper seems forbidding to you, keep in mind that this is a 4-credit graduate course, and the paper is all you have to produce. And that paper is, in effect, an apprentice piece that should demonstrate whether you have what it takes to be a historian (and to go on to a Ph.D., if that’s what you have in mind).

You may choose any topic you like within the framework of 19th - 21st century International History, provided it can be researched thoroughly in this area (or whatever additional library or archival resources you may have access to) and will involve you in some primary research, published or unpublished. Pick your topic quickly, and make it sufficiently narrow to allow you to go in depth. Chances are you will need to narrow your topic as the project advances. Partial drafts are required from time to time and will be subjected to scrutiny by your peers, so be prepared to defend them. The final product is due on November 29; I keep one copy, so please give me two.

You will spend the first two to three weeks collecting sources on the topic you have in mind, recording complete bibliographical information on individual 3” x 5” index cards, screening each source, and developing a more accurate sense of your topic. Then you will prepare a working outline with main headings, subheadings, and still further subdivisions as needed, all marked by letters to facilitate easy organization of research notes.
Only then should you start examining your sources in detail, numbering your bibliography cards from 1 up as you proceed (don’t organize them alphabetically yet!), taking notes on half-sized paper (8.5” x 5.5”), each clearly marked with the number of the source in the top left corner and the letter(s) of the pertinent outline subtopic heading in the top right corner. No note page should include material on more than one subtopic; that allows you to organize the note pages topically according to your working outline, which will make the writing easier later. You reorganize the bibliography cards alphabetically only after all research is done, the final version of the paper written, and the notes completed; until then, keep the cards numbered sequentially in the order you first used the sources.

You will start preparing partial drafts after five or six weeks. Each will be written in your best English and according to the required form (follow Benjamin, or The Happy Footnoter). Never assume that you can wait until the final version to clean up inadequacies or imperfections in form, writing, or typing. Always write as if this is the final version; any draft you submit should be error-free and in accordance with required form and style. It saves a lot of time and trouble later.

No arbitrary number of sources constitutes “enough” research on any topic. At the graduate level, “enough” means everything available, everything you turn up in a thorough search. If that number is overwhelmingly large, you need to narrow your topic further in order to bring the source load down to a manageable quantity.

In using and citing your sources, the general rule is that “the horse’s mouth” is best; never cite a source second-hand when the original is available. Even the most acclaimed authorities make mistakes or have biases, and what they write must be checked against their sources. Neither official documents nor diaries are necessarily reliable, and memoirs are notoriously suspect for obvious reasons, but all of them are by definition primary sources and must therefore be consulted. Whether you accept what they say depends on what you find elsewhere and how, on balance, you judge their credibility.

Your research findings may necessitate a rearrangement of your working outline; if so, move your notes around accordingly. Do not include the outline in your paper either as a table of contents or as in-text subheadings, but it is always a good idea to use your main headings as subheadings in your text. When you do, make them short, align them to the left, underline them, and separate them from the preceding segment by an extra double space. Notes should be footnotes, which are easy on the reader and easy to produce on most computers. A complete, alphabetized bibliography of all works usefully consulted, whether cited or not, brings up the rear. Since it is likely to be a lengthy one, you should probably divide it into categories such as primary sources (subdivided as unpublished, published, memoirs, f.e.x.) and secondary sources (specialized monographs, general studies, articles, newspapers), whatever seems reasonable in view of the nature and volume of your sources.

My office is in SS-145G, my office hours are Mon/Wed 9:00-10:00 & Wed 4:15-5:15, and my e-mail address is hkrosby@albany.edu

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Sessions: Jan 23, 30, Feb 6, 13, 20, 27, Mar 5, 19, 26, Apr 2, 16, 23, 30, May 7.