

Interdisciplinary Methodology
HIST 2001 (course number 36069), 3 credits
Fall 2009, Monday 1:00 – 3:25, 3700 WWPH

Courseweb: <http://courseweb.pitt.edu>

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office hour: Monday 11-12 and by appointment

1. Overall Objective

The objective of this interdisciplinary graduate course is to encourage the development of a multidisciplinary academic discourse at Pitt, particularly emphasizing global perspectives, in which interested graduate students and faculty members participate, under the aegis of the Global Studies Program.

2. Course Description.

HIST 2001 is an advanced course in interdisciplinary methods, offered in the Fall Semester 2009. The course addresses yet goes beyond the basic methodological skills of historical research. The three purposes of the course are (1) to enable each student to gain literacy in a variety of disciplinary and topical methodologies, including associated theories; (2) to enable each student to develop substantial strength in one new methodology; and (3) to enable students based in several disciplines or sub-disciplines to develop a language for cross-disciplinary discussion and analysis.

The methodologies among which the course will draw for study range across the humanities, social sciences, and into the natural sciences. Examples include political science, economics, sociology, history, demography, psychology, gender studies, environment, literature, art history, and linguistics—and subfields within these. Geology and biology manage to work their way in somehow.

Students will have assignments on three levels.

(1) Each student will select a method to learn in depth, and to prepare over the course of the semester a substantial paper articulating that method and discussing an application. The paper will be posted and discussed.

(2) A selection of methods to be studied and the order of their discussion will take place based on the instructor's consultation with enrollees before the opening of the semester. Each week, one or two students will select, assign, and lead discussion on readings conveying the nature of the method and the significance of its results. In weeks when they are not presenting, students are responsible for learning and debating the principles of each method.

(3) During each week's discussion, attention will be paid to the epistemology apparent in each method, and to developing a language for cross-disciplinary discussion.

The instructor will assist students in locating relevant methodological guides and local specialists with whom to consult. Class activities will lead to construction of a website on methodologies applicable to historical studies. All in all, the course can be seen as an academic exercise in Global Studies.

Introductory sessions

The first three meetings (Aug. 31, Sept. 14, Sep. 21) will be directed by the instructor, and will introduce the general framework for the seminar: Epistemology on August 31, philosophy on September 14, and quantitative social science on September 21. On Aug. 31, students will select the topics and times of their presentations on disciplines; on Sept. 14 students will identify the topic of their major methodological paper.

Disciplines

In the eight meetings from September 28 through November 16, pairs of students will identify and present on an agreed-upon discipline or disciplines. The presenters will select and assign readings of 100-150 pages, and will distribute them (preferably via Courseweb) at least 7 days in advance of their discussion.

Topics for discussion in presentation of a methodology:

- Objectives
- Materials
- Methods
- Theories
- Journals
- Standard works
- Debates
- Evolution of the field
- Accomplishments
- Links to other fields

Major Papers

Each student will write a paper of roughly 20 pages in length, presenting a critical exploration and defense of a methodology likely to be of importance to his or her future research. The methodology may be that of a single discipline or sub-discipline, or a combination of techniques from different disciplines. The papers must reflect substantial reading and reflection, and must convey the logic and the relevance of the problem to significant research issues. This is not a research paper, but an articulation and defense of a methodology which could readily be applied to research. Papers are due on December 7, and are to be posted on Courseweb; they are to be presented orally to the seminar as scheduled on December 7 or 14.

Wrapup

The four final sessions begin with a November 23 section, led by the instructor, on techniques for reading *Nature* and *Science* and gaining entry to the literature on natural sciences. The November 30 session will be an open-ended review of the readings, with discussion of techniques for learning disciplines and making critiques across disciplinary lines. In the last two sessions, each student will make a presentation of 20 minutes (including discussion)

Course Schedule, HIST 2001 (Fall 2009)
(to be updated periodically as additional readings become available)

Week 1. August 31.

Introduction: Epistemological dynamics – new developments in disciplines and methods [Manning]

Reading: King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*, pp. i-xi, 1-33.

September 7 – Labor Day Holiday

Week 2. September 14.

Philosophy: Positivism, Post-modernism & Realism; causation and feedback [Manning]

Reading: King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*, pp. 34-114

Campbell, Donald T., *Methodology and Epistemology for Social Sciences*, vii-xix

Thompson, Willie, *Postmodernism and History*, 6-26, 56-73

Week 3. September 21.

Quantitative Social Science [Manning]

Reading: King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*, pp. 115-230

Week 4. September 28. [Manning]

How to read *Nature* and *Science*

Reading: fifteen articles from *Nature*, *PNAS*, and *Science* – see Courseweb for downloads.

Week 5. October 5. [Rogers, Van Etten]

Literary Theory

Reading:

Castle, Gregory. *The Blackwell Guide to Literary Theory*. (Oxford:Blackwell Publishing, 2007)

Cunningham, Valentine. *Reading After Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002).

Schmitz, Thomas A. *Modern Literary Theory and Ancient Texts: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007).

Week 6. October 13 - Tuesday. [Bisbee, Rivero-Valdez]

Material Culture [Bisbee]

Religious Studies [Rivero-Valdez]

Reading:

Anne Kelly Knowles, "Afterword: Historical Geography since 1987," in Thomas McIlwraith and Edward Muller, eds, *North America The Historical Geography of a Changing Continent* (Second Edition), (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001)

Jeffrey K. Stine and Joel Tarr, "At the Intersection of Histories: Technology and the Environment," *Technology and Culture*, Vol.39, No.4 (Oct.,1998), pp. 601-640.

Timothy Collins, Edward Muller and Joel Tarr, "Pittsburgh's Three Rivers," in Christof Mauch and Thomas Zeller, eds, *Rivers in History*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008).

Week 7. October 19. [Fitzgerald, Hoffman]

Literacy

Reading: to be assigned by student leaders of class session

Week 8. October 26. [Izmirliglu, Myers, Nicholls]

Ecology

Reading: to be assigned by student leader of class session

Week 9. November 2. [Hommes, McRae]

Linguistics and Theories of Pedagogy

Reading: to be assigned by student leaders of class session

Week 10. November 9. [Chyutin, Florez Javier, Reardon]

Sociology

Reading: to be assigned by student leaders of class session

Week 11. November 16. [Molnar, Forlow]

Cultural Anthropology & Oral History

Reading: to be assigned by student leaders of class session

Week 12. November 23. [Pierson, Bisette]

Gender Studies

Reading: to be assigned by student leaders of class session

Week 13. November 30.

Review: Learning new disciplines; learning to thrive in a world of Interdisciplinarity

Reading: review of readings to date

Week 14. December 7.

Presentation of main papers (first half)

Reading: paper summaries circulated by authors

[Week 15. December 14.]

Presentation of main papers (second half)

Reading: paper summaries circulated by authors