BA4/PY Research Seminar: Research Practices and Methods

Instructor: Dr. Marcela K. Perett
Class Times: Tuesdays 9:30-11, Thursdays 13:30-15:00
Class Location: P98 Seminar Room 1
Office: Platanenstr. 24.16
Office Hours: Thursday 15:00-16:30 or by appointment
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Course Description
The purpose of this seminar is to support the preparation and writing of the thesis and project year research project. In the seminar, we will learn about how to formulate an interesting, effective, and feasible research question, and to assemble the resources necessary for answering it, such as a comprehensive bibliography. There are three main exercises associated with the colloquium: the first is the submission of a reading list for the project (to be drafted in consultation with the supervisor), which must be presented in class with reference to the order of priority of the reading, and comments on the relation between “primary” and “secondary” material. The second task of the colloquium will be the specification of research questions that arise from the topic of the project: what questions does it provoke? What would be the most productive (and well-defined) line of inquiry? For the research question exercise, faculty supervisors will be present for the discussion. Finally, the colloquium invites the submission of a draft section of the thesis, which will be responded to in writing by another student (who will also present this response in class). This structure is important for learning about a key feature of academic research—peer review—and for reflecting on how one’s own project would be viewed by both a general reader and a colleague evaluating it from the same field. During the course of the colloquium, we will read analyses of the process of research and writing which will be helpful in designing and developing the thesis. Many sessions will be devoted to in-class work on the thesis, centered on particular tasks (such as interpreting a source, or making an argument).

Course Policies and Requirements
Attendance at all sessions is mandatory. Careful preparation of the assignments and active participation are of crucial importance. We will occasionally devote class time to writing. Students are allowed to bring in their laptops to class, but it is required that the wireless be disabled during class. The main assignments for the research colloquium—in addition to in-class writing exercises—are the preparation and presentation of the bibliography, the preparation and submission of the draft section of the thesis, and the preparation and presentation of the peer-review response. The grade distribution is below. Work for the thesis colloquium will be assigned a letter grade which will appear on your final transcript as part
of the senior thesis or project module.

Participation: 30%
In Class Exercises: 10%
Bibliography: 10%
Research Question: 20%
Respondent Paper (Peer Review): 20%
Preparation of Draft: 10%

Class Schedule and Readings
I. Research Practices

Week 1:
9/2       Introduction
9/4       Bring in an “Object”

Week 2:
9/9       How to Frame a Research Question
         (Introduction and Chapter 1 of They Say, I Say)
9/11      In Class Writing

Week 3:
9/16      Primary and Secondary Sources and Citation Styles: Present a Secondary Source
         (Chapter 4 of They Say, I Say)
9/18      No Class: Bibliography Due by 11:59pm

Week 4:
9/23      Faculty Research Panel
9/25      Application Workshop (optional)
II. Shaping a Research Question

Week 5:
9/30  “So What?” Saying Why it Matters
      (Chapter 7 of They Say, I Say)

10/2  Research Question Workshop: Student 1 + Adviser, Student 2 + Adviser

Week 6:
10/7  Research Question Workshop: Student 3 + Adviser, Student 4 + Adviser
10/9  Research Question Workshop: Student 5 + Adviser, Student 6 + Adviser

Week 7:
10/14 Research Question Workshop: Student 7 + Adviser
10/16 No Class: Finalize Research Question

Fall Break

III. Making an Argument

Week 8:
10/27 Research Question (1-2 pages) Due by 11:59pm

10/28 What Makes a Good Argument?
      (Bring in an article and discuss why it is a good one)

10/30 In Class Writing: Making an Argument

Week 9:
11/4  The Art of Crafting a Paragraph
11/6  In Class Writing

Week 10:
11/11 “Her Point Is”: The Art of Summarizing and Quoting
11/13 In Class Writing

Week 11:
11/18 “And Yet”: Distinguishing What You Say from What They Say
11/20 In Class Writing

IV. Peer Review
Week 12:
11/25 Student 1 and 2
11/27 Student 3 and 4

Week 13:
12/2 Student 5 and 6
12/4 Student 7 and Lessons Learned: What makes helpful feedback?

Week 14:
12/9 In class writing workshop
12/11 In class writing workshop

Week 15: Completion Week
12/18 10-page samples of your thesis are due to Advisers by 11:59 pm