

Research Methods

RELI 5780A

Religion

Carleton University

College of Humanities

Winter 2014

Tuesday 2:30-5:30pm; PA 2a46

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Evaluation and Objectives

The mark you receive will be based on whether and to what extent you meet the course objectives:

- 1) To engage fully and participate *every week*;
- 2) To perform at a high level on course exercises;
- 3) To offer high quality interaction (detailed questions, comments, critiques, support) on the work of your peers;
- 4) To submit a high quality *20 page written section of your MRP plus bibliography* on or before April 26, 2014.

There is in this course no “minimum” and then you’re done. It is not the case that participation is worth x%, and interaction with your peers happens twice and is worth x%. They all work together and measure together whether you have met the objectives of the course. When it comes to the “quality” of your interaction with your peers, the questions are: Were you helpful and did you ask useful questions? Were you fully engaged? Were you comatose? When it comes to the “quality” of your workshop exercises (bibliography, editing exercises, etc), the questions are more obvious: How well did you master the software? Did your editing improve the work, or worsen it?

The graduate student grade-range most prominent in North America is A+ to B-, where a B- is the equivalent to an F, and a B is equivalent to a D. It is *generally* the case that graduate grades in the B range mean you will not be going on to doctoral level work. Take grades in the B-range extremely seriously.

- B+ indicates that you barely met the objectives;
- A- indicates that you met the objectives but only adequately;
- A indicates that you met the objectives really well (this is the most common grade);
- A+ indicates that you went well beyond the objectives; your work was exceptional.

Work Schedule

Jan 7	The process of writing long papers. How we do research. How we publish.
Jan 14	Bibliography Software
Jan 21	In-Class Presentation of MA Essay Outlines 1 (LD, RL, JLT, DM)
Jan 28	In-Class Presentation of MA Essay Outlines 2 (TN, TON, CP)
Feb 4	Discussion of Editing Exercises
Feb 11	Student-led Seminar 1 (LD, RL)
Feb 18	Reading Week
Feb 25	Student-led Seminar 2 (JLT, DM)
Mar 4	Student-led Seminar 3 (TN, TON)
Mar 11	Student-led Seminar 4 (CP)
Mar 18	Preparation Day Off
Mar 25	Discussion of MA Essay Proposals (LD, RL, JLT)
April 1	Discussion of MA Essay Proposals (DM, TN)
April 8	Discussion of MA Essay Proposals (TON, CP)

NB: Presentation order: the order of presenters is alphabetical by last name. You are free to arrange with a classmate to exchange dates if you wish, but you must let me know in advance. Otherwise, the assumption will be that the order here stands.

Course Exercises

Write an Academic Agenda (Jan 7)

- Due electronically on Jan 7.
- Chart an academic agenda for yourself. What do you have to do to finish on time? How are you going to do it? What are your weaknesses as a scholar?
 - Is it your writing? Systematic research? Synthesizing material?
 - More importantly: how are you going to address your weaknesses? Being a scholar is about being self-critical, self-aware.

Editing Workshop (Jan 7-Feb 4):

- Step One: On Jan 7, submit (original electronic file, not the marked up copy) to me a document you wrote for any university course in the past.
- Step Two: On Jan 7, I will give you a book review written by me, into which I have introduced errors. Edit it. Hand it in at the start of class on Jan 14.
- Step Three: On Jan 14, I will give you 2-3 pages of your own work for you to edit. Edit it by hand, return it to me at the start of class on Jan 21. I will make copies of your edited page during the break and distribute it to everyone.
 - The objective here is to learn to become ruthless editors of your own writing
- Step Four: On Jan 28, we will have an editing workshop and discussion, in which we will peer-review everyone's *self-editing*.
- Step Five: Write a brief reflection piece on how you might become better editors of your work. Due at the start of class Feb 4.

***In-Class Presentation of MA Essay Outlines* (Jan 21 + 28)**

- Students will present a 2-3 page outline (point form is fine, with some prose, but it should be fairly detailed) of what they think their MA Essay will look like.

***Annotated Bibliography* (Feb 11)**

- On Feb 15, you will “share” with me your annotated Bibliography. By this point your bibliography should be very nearly full, but I do not need to see the whole thing. I only need to see 20 items with annotations from your bibliography.
- Annotation means you have read the work, can say a few words by way of summary, and offer a few critical thoughts on what it contributes to your work.
- Having this deadline forces you to make sure your work is advancing, and it helps me know your work better.

***Student-led Seminars* (Feb 11-Mar 11)**

- Students assign one article or chapter each (not whole books please) that:
 1. got them thinking about their research topic; or
 2. represent the key issues or questions in their research topic; or
 3. were foundational in setting the boundaries of their research topic.
- Each student leads a one-hour seminar discussion of the article assigned. Others should come having read the piece, and be prepared to discuss, ask questions, challenge, etc. You are also encouraged to think how, if possible, the work you’re reading might intersect in any way with your own project. It might be a good idea to avoid spending all week talking about the article among yourselves, lest you deplete your conversation before I get to hear (and assess) it.
- The key here is that your peers learn more about your topic, beyond just the title/description, but also about the questions, issues, theories, ideas, etc. This will enable them to be better interlocutors when they are engaging critically with your proposal.
- Readings must be distributed to us all one week before your session.

***Abstract Writing* (Feb 4-Mar 11)**

- It is an important skill to be able to write an abstract. It will also be the only thing most people read of your crowning-achievement, your MRP. So, in preparation of that, I will lead a brief discussion on Feb 4 about how to write an abstract.
- After that, each of you will write a 150 word abstract (word limit strictly enforced) for all 6 readings that are assigned (e.g., that includes your own). The abstracts are due the same day the article is being discussed in class.

***Peer-Review of MRP Section* (March 25 – April 8)**

- Papers must be distributed one week before they are being discussed in class. Papers can either be sent to each other, or to me for distribution. Do not send things as PDFs.
- Students will read the works closely, and come to class prepared to engage rigorously and to assist in improving the works. These works will not be read or presented in class, since everyone will have read them already. Class time will be devoted exclusively to discussing each others’ work.
- What is submitted for review should be 20 pages. This is not finished work, but the more finished the section is, the more useful the feedback you can hope to receive.

Final Submission of MA Research Essay Proposal

- Due April 26, 2014.
- 20 double-spaced pages including notes. There should be a full bibliography (not merely a works cited list) but this does not count towards the page-count.
- Bibliography and notes should follow Chicago Style (quick guide is available here: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html; please follow the “Notes and Bibliography” option, not “Author-Date”).
- The content of the proposals will vary according to the type of work being undertaken. I will trust you to consult with your essay director to establish the best form for you. Remember, the goal is to end up with a solid section that jump-starts you on your summer MRP project, and that sets you up to complete it on time.
- Please submit them electronically.
- I will glance at them, but I will not mark them. Since I am not your director (unless I am your director), it is not my job to do that close analysis.
- I strongly encourage you to maintain contact with your MRP directors throughout the course, and especially to make sure they see this work. They don’t want any surprises coming out of this course (e.g., you decided on a new topic!).