

HIST 717: HistoryLab: Collaborative Research with the USHMM

Winter 2020, Fridays 1:00-4:00pm, Judaic Studies Conference Room, 2nd Floor, Thayer Hall

Instructor: Professor Rita Chin, 1120 Rackham Building, Dean's Office Suite

Instructor: Professor Jeff Veidlinger, 2000 Thayer Hall

This graduate-level HistoryLab is a research seminar that seeks to help students develop research, critical analysis, and writing skills beyond the traditional framework of solitary scholarship taught in HIST 715/716. Its purpose is two-fold: 1) to provide hands-on, faculty-led training in collaborative historical research methods and practice; and 2) to offer students experience working with non-academic institutional partners. Reading, research, conceptualizing debates and issues, primary source analysis, writing, and disseminating the fruit of this work will take place in teams.

This year, the course will be offered in conjunction with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). Students will learn to work collaboratively with peers in small research teams, guided by UM professors Rita Chin and Jeff Veidlinger in conjunction with staff from the USHMM. The research content of the course will focus on developing new collections for the USHMM's *Experiencing History: Holocaust Sources in Context* project, a digital teaching tool of curated primary sources for the college classroom. The class will be divided into teams, and each team will be responsible for creating a new collection of 15 documents. Together, teams will collaborate on all tasks – from drafting an initial proposal, identifying primary sources, and writing document descriptions to presenting the collection to the museum stakeholders and testing collection materials with UM undergraduates. The class as a whole will travel to Washington, D.C. to present their work to museum stakeholders, meet with staff, and use the museum's vast archive and collection of material objects as part of the process of creating the collection. Rather than the usual article-length, primary source-based research paper, the final product of this course will be the content for two *Experiencing History* collections: "Displaced Persons in Postwar America" and "American Student Responses to Nazism."

The course is open to all History PhD students, as well as doctoral students in humanities departments. Participation does NOT require specific expertise in Holocaust, European, or American history. In the vein of all methods courses, deepening knowledge of one's own intellectual fields is not primary goal. Rather, students will learn how to define a research problem, assess primary sources, manage a project, work on an expedited timeline, and make presentations to external stakeholders through a collaborative process with team members, faculty instructors, and the USHMM staff. Because the course is designed around a client-based project, the research and writing for this collaborative seminar is done for the benefit of the museum, and all final decisions on content will be made by museum staff.

Course Schedule

Before classes begin, please explore USHMM Experiencing History website

(www.experiencinghistory.com; login creation required), read the prospectus for new section on the *Americans and the Holocaust Exhibition*, read description of the two proposed collections to be worked on by HIST 717 teams.

Week 1 – Jan 10: General Historiography on the Holocaust & the US Response to Holocaust

- Reading: Peter Hayes, *Why?: Explaining the Holocaust* (Norton)
- Recommended: Doris Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (Rowan & Littlefield)
- Preparation: Everyone reads general historiographies
- In class:
 - Hour 1: *Experiencing History* team introduces the project
 - Hour 2: Discuss readings and identify key issues/problems for understanding the Holocaust
 - Hour 3: Divide class into teams, assign collections, discuss team management and logistics
- After class: Each team meets to discuss division of labor, including weekly team reports

Week 2 – Jan 17: American Student Responses

- Reading: Selections from Stephen Norwood, *The Third Reich and the Ivory Tower* and Bradley Hart, *Hitler's American Friends*
- Preparation: Everyone reads on student activism; each team meets beforehand to go through Team Building exercises and develop Team Charters, as well as to identify key issues for understanding their collection based on Collection Proposal template
- In class:
 - Hours 1&2 – Collective discussion of readings, with everyone proposing key issues/problems/framing concepts for the collection on “American Student Responses to Nazism”
 - Hour 3 – Collective searching of USHMM database for sources
- After class: Each team files report on team meeting and progress

Week 3 – Jan 24: Displaced Persons and Postwar America

- Reading: Selections from Richard Breitman and Alan Kraut, *American Refugee Policy and European Jewry* and Haim Genizi, *America's Fair Share*
- Preparation: Everyone reads material on refugees and begins to search for primary sources; each team meets to begin drafting collection proposal
- In class:
 - Hour 1 – Collective discussion of readings, especially what undergraduates would need to know to understand the fate of displaced persons and the role of the United States → is it possible to videoconference with Kierra Crago-Schneider?
 - Hour 2 -- Collective debate on key issues/themes/framing concepts for the collection on “Displaced Persons in Postwar America” and collective searching of USHMM database for sources
 - Hour 3 – Videoconference with EH team to prepare for stakeholder presentation
- After class: Each team files weekly progress report

Week 4 – Jan 31: Collection Proposal Presentations

- Reading: Recommended reading according to team, based on each team's collection

- Preparation: Each team meets beforehand to finish collection proposal draft and determine speaking roles for stakeholder presentation
- Assignment: Finish collection proposal by each team (500-word statement that presents summary, scope, purpose, key themes, and possible kinds of sources for the collection), ***due the day before class meeting***
- In class:
 - Hour 1 – Collective discussion of each team’s collection proposal (2:00-2:30)
 - Hour 2 – Videoconference presentations of proposals to USHMM stakeholders (2:30-4:00)
 - Hour 3 – Debrief with EH team on stakeholder feedback, discussion of next steps
- After class: Each team files weekly progress report

Week 5 – Feb 7: Looking for Primary Sources (Rita absent)

- Reading: Recommended reading according to team, based on collection
- Preparation: Continue to read literature as necessary; each team meets to revise collection proposal based on stakeholder feedback and to share primary sources that will be presented to the whole class
- In class:
 - Hour 1 -- Videoconference with Becky Erbelding to discuss first principles of student responses collection
 - Hours 2 & 3 – Each team presents potential primary sources for collection; discuss sources as a group and decide (based on collection first principles) which ones to move forward; search for more sources on USHMM and UM sites collectively
- After class: Each team files weekly progress report

Week 6 – Feb 14: Reading & Research for the Collection

- Reading: As necessary to fill in knowledge of specific collection themes and to help identify, interpret, and contextualize documents
- Preparation: Search archive databases to identify documents and sources for collections; follow leads for documents in other archives (e.g. Bentley, Labadie)
- In class:
 - Hours 1-3 – Each team presents potential primary sources for collection; discuss sources as a group and decide (based on collection first principles) which ones to move forward; search for more sources on USHMM and UM sites collectively
- After class: Each team files weekly progress report

Week 7 – Feb 21: Reading & Research for the Collection

- Reading: As necessary to contextualize and interpret documents
- Preparation: Each team meets and team members present all of their documents to their team, choose 5 to showcase to the class, continue looking for more documents
- In class:
 - Hours 1 & 2 – Each team presents 5 sources to class; collectively discuss and debate documents; choose 1 to highlight for USHMM stakeholder presentation

- Hour 3 – Videoconference with EH team to prepare for USHMM stakeholder presentation
- After class: Each team files weekly progress report

Week 8 – Feb 27-28: Trip to Washington

- Reading: As necessary to contextualize and interpret documents or to frame collection
- Preparation: Each team meets to finalize collection description, decide on speaking roles, and agree on 1 (strong) document description to submit Luke Ryder
- Assignment: Each team must submit 1 document description to Luke Ryder by **Tuesday, February 25 by noon**
- **Each student must arrive in Washington, DC, by 5pm on Wednesday, February 26, for a group dinner**
- In class at USHMM:
 - Presentation to USHMM stakeholders to offer progress report on each collection, including key themes/topics for collection and proposed list of documents
 - Meeting with EH team to get more specific feedback and discuss document description submitted to Luke
 - Research in USHMM collections
 - Meetings with other staff for informational interviews about museum's work & mission
 - Guided tour of the *Americans and the Holocaust* Exhibition
 - Group dinner
 - Optional day of research at USHMM on Friday, February 28
- After class: Each team agrees on division of labor for next phase of work; each team files weekly progress report

Week 9 – Mar 6: Spring Break

Week 10 – Mar 13: Research & Writing for the Collection

- Reading: As necessary to contextualize and interpret documents or frame collection
- Preparation: Each team meets to collectively revise drafted document descriptions (should be at least one per team member) based on discussion at USHMM; each team agrees on 12 remaining sources; everyone works on drafting document write-ups
- Assignment: Each team must submit 5 document descriptions to Luke Ryder by **Monday, March 9 by 5pm**
- In class:
 - Hours 1 & 2 – Videoconference with EH team to discuss 4 documents per collection, discuss specific stumbling blocks around audience, tone, language
 - Hour 3 – Collectively discuss additional sources and decide which documents will make it into final 15
- After class: Each team files weekly progress report

Week 11 – Mar 20: Research & Writing for the Collection (Jeff maybe absent)

- Reading: As necessary to contextualize and interpret documents or frame collection
- Preparation: Each team meets to begin drafting essay for the collection as a whole, finalizes primary source descriptions of 5 more documents
- Assignment: Each team must submit 5 write-ups to Luke Ryder by **Monday, March 16**
- In class:
 - Hours 1 & 2 – Videoconference with EH team to discuss primary source write-ups and frame big questions for collection essay
 - Hour 3 – Collectively discuss each team’s work on their collection essay and the big themes of both collections
- After class: Each team files weekly progress report

Week 12 – Mar 27: Research & Writing for the Collection (Rita absent)

- Reading: As necessary to contextualize and interpret documents or frame collection
- Preparation: Each team meets to continue drafting collection essays, finalize final 5 document descriptions
- Assignment: Each team submits the final write-ups to Luke Ryder by **Monday, March 23**
- In class:
 - Hours 1 & 2 – Videoconference with EH team to discuss final source write-ups
 - Hour 3 – Workshop as a class the provisional draft of each team’s collection essay
- After class: Each team files weekly progress report

Week 13 – Apr 3: Research & Writing for the Collection

- Preparation: Each team meets to finish drafting collection essay
- In class: No formal class meeting
- Assignment: Each team submits final draft of collection essay to Leah Wolfson by **Friday, April 3**
- After class: Each team files weekly progress report

Week 14 – Apr 10: Presentation of Final Collections

- Preparation: Each team meets to finalize all 15 primary source write-ups in light of feedback from Luke, EH team, and class as a whole
- In class:
 - Hours 1 & 2 – Videoconference with EH team to prepare for “product testing” and conducting a “readability test” of the collections, including preliminary testing with Leah and across teams
- After class: Each team files weekly progress report

Week 15 – Apr 17: Presentation of Testing Results

- Preparation: Beginning as early as April 11, each team tests their collection on UM students by setting up feedback stations in common space frequented by undergraduates; each team prepares a short presentation of their testing results
- In class:

- Hours 1 & 2 – Videoconference with EH team in which each team reports results of “product testing” and reflects on skills acquired over the course of the semester
 - Hour 3 – Collective class discussion of collaborative research, working with teams, unanticipated lessons and benefits
- After class: Each student files short report on overall course and experience of product testing with undergraduates