

DEVIL IN THE DETAILS: MICROHISTORY & HISTORICAL NARRATIVE



Class Meeting Times: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 4:30-5:45

Class Locations: Gottwald Science Center C112

Instructor: Douglas Winiarski, dwiniars@richmond.edu, (804) 683-3152 (cell)

Office Hours: By appointment

GroupMe: Click [here](#) to join

Religious Studies Department Social Media: [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#)

Witches and heretics, religious prophets and confidence men, Indian captives and murdering mothers, cat massacres and slave conspiracies: these are the subjects of “microhistory,” a distinctive approach to the study of the past that seeks to reveal broader forces of historical change through detailed stories of obscure individuals and unusual events. In this First-Year Seminar, you’ll learn how scholars research and write these gripping historical narratives. We will probe beneath the grand narratives of conventional history textbooks and develop theoretical and methodological competencies in the subfield of cultural history. The seminar will provide opportunities to read and analyze a challenging array of primary texts, from newspapers to private journals. Toward the end of the semester, you will research and write your own microhistories on a little-known 1720 infanticide case from colonial New England.

FYS Requirements, Course Goals & the Big Picture

I have designed “Devil in the Details” to satisfy the guidelines of the University of Richmond’s First-Year Seminar (FYS) program. To learn more about the FYS goals and requirements, click [here](#).

What else can you expect to take away from this course, beyond a letter grade and a General Education requirement checked off on Grad Tracker? That’s a tough question to answer. It will depend of a few things, including our commitment to building a supportive and collegial intellectual community. It will also depend on your willingness to set aside the pervasive belief among college students that their coursework primarily involves mastering content related to potential careers rather than training generally in the classic liberal arts disciplines: critical thinking and reading, persuasive speech and writing, and ethical reasoning. This is not a zero-sum game, to be sure, but, in the end, the content of “Devil in the Details”—while perhaps (hopefully?) interesting—is far less important than the overarching learning goals of the FYS program, which I interpret as follows:

- I am committed to teaching you how to *consume information responsibly*. We’ll approach this issue as historians. Yet when viewed as part of your broader training in “information literacy,” the historical competencies you’ll be building in this class will contribute to your development as global citizens capable of confidently navigating a volatile world of disinformation, fake news, artificial intelligence, social media, and the overall diminution of facts, science, expertise, and scholarship.
- I trust that you’ll expand on your ability to *develop compelling, thesis-driven arguments* and begin to *produce new knowledge*, both verbally and in writing. We’ll start small in this class. (It is a microhistory seminar, after all!) Yet the research and argumentation skills you’ll be honing in this FYS are directly applicable to your broader training at UR and beyond.
- I earnestly hope that you will begin to *envision your writing as an extension of the self*. This claim may seem overly philosophical, but writing is a way of engaging the world. I hope you’ll pour yourself into to the papers for our class, and, by so doing, learn how to claim your own voice in ways that will enrich cover letters, lab and business reports, op-ed essays, position papers, stories, articles, poetry, and books as yet unwritten.
- I want you to become more comfortable tolerating ambiguity and taking risks. (We’ll talk more about this as the semester unfolds.)
- In terms of the content of our seminar, we’ll be working to *develop an appreciation for the small scale, the odd or offbeat, the idiosyncratic, and the different*. We’ll pursue this goal in the realm of early American and early modern European history where the stakes seem unusually low (that’s by design), and yet valuing difference is an essential building block in the creation of a more just and equitable society. And historians have much to teach the world about the importance of difference.
- In the end, I hope that you will *come to enjoy—or at least respect and value—the art of learning* itself. After all, learning is an art or skill, something that can be mastered with patience and diligence.

Course Procedures & Requirements

“Devil in the Details” has no prerequisites and assumes no prior knowledge of the topic. Our bi-weekly meetings will consist of short presentations and seminar-style discussions. Keeping up with the scheduled reading assignments is crucial.

Attendance is mandatory. I will evaluate the quality of your participation in each of our class discussions using the following scale: 5 (excellent: multiple informed/insightful comments), 3 (good: moderate contributions), 1 (poor: minimal participation), and 0 (incomplete/absent).

I have designed our course to meet the University’s standard 10–14 hours time-on-task requirement. Plan to spend an average of two to four hours preparing for each class and roughly two hours per page when writing papers for class.

During the semester, course participants will produce a portfolio of short essays, a medium-length book review essay, and a final research paper. Our Blackboard website describes these graded assignments in greater detail.

I expect all students to annotate our readings and take Cornell-style notes during our class discussions. I will occasionally collect, review, and evaluate your reading annotations and class notes using the same 5, 3, 1, 0 scale described above. The combined score of these unannounced critical reading/note-taking check-ins and other occasional homework assignments will count 10 percent toward your final grade.

Final grades for the semester will be calculated as follows:

Class Attendance & Participation	20%
Class Preparation, Homework Assignments, & Reading Annotations	10%
Bunnell Microhistory Writing Portfolio (3 short essays)	15%
Microhistory Critical Review Essay (5–7 pages)	15%
Microhistory Critical Review Presentation	10%
Elizabeth Atwood Research Essay (8–10 pages)	30%

Required Texts

During the semester, we will read a series of primary texts and scholarly articles available in one of three formats: (1) online; (2) through one of Boatwright Library’s subscription databases; or (3) PDF files stored on our Blackboard website. *You must print copies of these readings and bring them with you to class.*

COVID Resilience

We’ll need to work together to navigate the difficult landscape of the Omicron spike this semester. I anticipate teaching all of our classes in person this semester. But in the event multiple members of our class test positive for COVID, we’ll shift to a hybrid model.

Here's how it will work. I'll divide the class into two groups for each class session: an "In Person" cohort of 8 students; and a "Zoom" cohort of 8 students. Each cohort will meet for 35 minutes of our standard 75-minute class period. Healthy students will take turns rotating into the Zoom session in order to balance the two cohorts.

I'll explain more if and when we are forced to make a switch. Hopefully, it won't come to this less-than-optimal class schedule. You can help by staying vigilant, encouraging your peers to properly wear their masks at all times inside campus buildings, and limiting your exposure to the virus by curtailing off campus travel or gathering in large groups.

Library Research Workshops

Throughout the semester, we will be working to enhance your information literacy/library research skills. These skills will be developed through a series of library research sessions with our designated FYS librarian, Carol Wittig. The library research sessions will introduce you to resources in historical studies available at Boatwright Library, including the library website, catalog, and various research databases. The sessions will also discuss the proper ways to cite and evaluate primary texts and secondary literature.

Disability Accommodations

Students with disabilities for whom accommodations have been formally granted by a University of Richmond Disability Advisor must present a copy of their "Disability Accommodation Notice" to each professor within the first week of the academic term. Accommodations must be negotiated in advance for each scheduled course assignment. Students should plan to consult with me at least one week prior to any scheduled deadline.

Cell Phones & Other Devices

While in class, please disable all cell phones and other communication devices. In addition, I ask all students to refrain from using laptop computers, tablets, and other electronic devices, which create distractions that disrupt the flow of our seminar discussions.

Grade Scale

Final grades will be assigned based on the following grade scale: A+ (98–100); A (93–97); A- (91–92); B+ (88–90); B (83–87); B- (81–82); C+ (78–80); C (73–77); C- (71–72); D+ (68–70); D (63–67); D- (61–62); F (60 and below).

5, 3, 1, 0 Conversion Scale

I calculate Class Attendance & Participation and Class Preparation, Homework Assignments, & Reading Annotations grades using the following conversion scale: A+ (5.0–4.9); A (4.8–4.2); A- (4.1); B+ (4.0–3.7); B (3.6–2.9); B- (2.8–2.5); C+ (2.4–2.0); C (1.9–1.3); C- (1.2–1.1); D+ (1.0–0.8); D (0.7–0.3); D- (0.1); F (0.0).

Class Schedule

What is Microhistory?

Tuesday, January 11 **Introduction to the Course**

Thursday, January 13 **A Troubled Frontier Family**

Readings (Complete before Class)

- “Genealogy of the Bunnell Family” (Blackboard).
- “Document #1: Anne Bunnell’s Divorce Petition” (Blackboard).
- “Document #2: Abner Bunnell’s Answer” (Blackboard).
- “Document #3: Anne Bunnell’s Replication” (Blackboard).
- “Document #4: Trial Record & Verdict” (Blackboard).

Mini-Lecture (In-Class Presentation)

- Annotating, Note Taking & Other Reading Strategies.

Tuesday, January 18 **Macrohistories of Western Shakerism**

Readings (Complete before Class)

- Brewer, “Shakers of Mother Ann Lee,” pp. 37–56 (Blackboard).
- Winiarski, “Shakers and Jerkers: Part 1,” pp. 90–99 (Blackboard; read introduction only).
- Winiarski, “Shakers and Jerkers: Part 2,” pp. 84–96 (Blackboard; read introduction only).

Homework (Due in Class)

- Download and complete Homework Worksheet #1.

Mini-Lecture (In Class Presentation)

- Making History: Types of Academic Scholarship.

Thursday, January 20

Becoming a Shaker

Readings (Complete before Class)

- “Document #5: Autobiography of Thomas Hunt” (Blackboard).
- “Document #6: Excerpt from Stephen Spinning’s ‘Short Sketch’” (Blackboard).

Mini-Lecture (In-Class Presentation)

- Research Tools: Oxford English Dictionary & BibleGateway.com.

Tuesday, January 25

Writing Workshop I (The One Paragraph Argument)

Readings (Complete before Class)

- “Document #7: Hannah Bowers to Abner Bunnell” (Blackboard).
- “Document #8: Abner Bunnell to Hannah Bowers” (Blackboard).

Assignment Deadline!

- One-Paragraph Argument Assignment due in class.

Thursday, January 27: *Bunnell and Bunnell v. Scudder*

Readings (Complete before Class)

- “Document #9: Petition of Abner Bunnell” (Blackboard).
- “Document #10: Answer of Benjamin Scudder” (Blackboard).
- “Document #11: Replication of Anne Bunnell” (Blackboard).
- “Document #12: Bunnell & Bunnell vs. Scudder Trial Verdict” (Blackboard).
- “Document #13: Benjamin Scudder’s Deed to Anne Bunnell” (Blackboard).
- “Document #14: Extracts from the Diaries of Benjamin Scudder” (Blackboard).

Tuesday, February 1

Research Teams

Reading (Complete before Class)

- “Document #15: Lebanon *Western Star*” (Blackboard).

Research Team Readings (Complete before Class)

- Research Team A: Ohio Divorce Laws (Blackboard).
- Research Team B: Anne Bunnell & Josiah Decker (Blackboard).
- Research Team C: Estate Papers of Anne Bunnell (Blackboard).

Homework (Due in Class)

- Download and complete Homework Worksheet #2.

Thursday, February 3

Writing Workshop II (Two-Minute Microhistory)*Assignment Deadline!*

- Two-Minute Microhistory Assignment due in class.

Tuesday, February 8

The Ballad of Anne Bunnell*Reading (Complete before Class)*

- Winiarski, “Ballad of Anne Bunnell,” pp. 1–42 (Blackboard).

Assignment Deadline!

- Article Summary Assignment due in class.

Theorizing Microhistories

Thursday, February 10

Research Lab w/Carol Wittig*Mini-Lecture (In-Class Presentation)*

- Finding Secondary Sources: Monographs.

NOTE: CLASS MEETS IN BOATWRIGHT LIBRARY (BLIB SEMINAR 2, ROOM 181).

Tuesday, February 15

Research Lab w/Carol Wittig*Homework (Due in Class)*

- Review this composite bibliography of microhistory monographs and come to class with a list of 3–5 options from which to select your Critical Book Review Project (due in March).

Mini-Lecture (In-Class Presentation)

- Finding Secondary Sources: Book Reviews.

Assignment Deadline!

- Bunnell Microhistory Portfolio (revised One-Paragraph Argument, Two-Minute Microhistory, and Article Summary) due in class.

NOTE: CLASS MEETS IN BOATWRIGHT LIBRARY (BLIB SEMINAR 2, ROOM 181).

Thursday, February 17**Theorizing Microhistories I***Readings (Complete before Class)*

- Bednarski, *Poisoned Past*, pp. xvii–xviii, 1–21 (Blackboard).
- Begin reading selected microhistory.

Tuesday, February 22**Theorizing Microhistories II***Readings (Complete before Class)*

- Darnton, “Introduction,” pp. 3–5 (Blackboard).
- Lepore, “Historians Who Love Too Much,” pp. 129–144 (Blackboard).
- Continue reading selected microhistory.

Mini-Lecture (In-Class Presentation)

- Clifford Geertz & Thick Description.

Thursday, February 24**Theorizing Microhistories III***Reading (Complete before Class)*

- Brown, “Microhistory and the Post-Modern Challenge,” pp. 1–20 (Blackboard).
- Continue reading selected microhistory.

Homework (Due in Class)

- Download and complete Homework Worksheet #3.

Mini-Lecture (In-Class Presentation)

- Hayden White & Metahistory.

Tuesday, March 1**Assessing Microhistories***Readings (Complete before Class)*

- Magnússon and Szijártó, “Postscript,” pp. 147–159 (Blackboard).
- Wood, “Microhistory,” pp. 119–132 (Blackboard).
- Finish reading selected microhistory.

Mini-Lecture (In-Class Presentation)

- Citing Sources with the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

Thursday, March 3**Writing Workshop***Homework (Due in Class)*

- Download and complete Homework Worksheet #4.

Tuesday, March 8 **No Class—Spring Break**

Tuesday, March 10 **No Class—Spring Break**

Tuesday, March 15 **Student Presentations**

Thursday, March 17 **Student Presentations**

Assignment Deadline!

- Submit Microhistory Critical Book Review Essay via email (dwiniars@richmond.edu) before 12:00 midnight.

Constructing Microhistories

Tuesday, March 22 **Letter from an Ipswich Gaol**

Reading (Complete before Class)

- Atwood to Mather, July 2, 1720 (click [here](#) to view the recto [front side] of the original manuscript and [here](#) for the verso [back side]; if you have trouble reading the original, see Blackboard for a modernized transcription).

Homework (Due in Class)

- Download and complete Homework Worksheet #5.

Thursday, March 25 **The Trial of Elizabeth Atwood**

Reading (Complete before Class)

- Winiarski, ed., “Trial of Elizabeth Atwood,” T.B.A (Blackboard).

Mini-Lecture (In-Class Presentation)

- Social History Techniques.

Tuesday, March 29 **Social History & the Atwood Trial**

Homework (Due in Class)

- Download and complete Homework Worksheet #6.

Thursday, March 31 **Research Team Huddle I**

Tuesday, April 5 **Research Team Huddle II**

Thursday, April 7 **Research Workshop (w/Carol Wittig)**

Mini-Lecture (In-Class Presentation)

- Finding Secondary Sources: Journal Articles.

Assignment Deadline!

- Submit Research Team Report before class via email (dwiniars@richmond.edu).

NOTE: CLASS MEETS IN BOATWRIGHT LIBRARY (BLIB SEMINAR 2 ROOM 181).

Tuesday, April 12

Contextualizing the Atwood Case I

Readings (Complete before Class)

- Readings T.B.A

Thursday, April 14

Contextualizing the Atwood Case II

Readings (Complete before Class)

- Readings T.B.A

Homework (Due in Class)

- Download and complete Homework Worksheet #7.

Tuesday, April 19

Contextualizing the Atwood Case III

Readings (Complete before Class)

- Readings T.B.A

Thursday, April 21

Putting the Pieces Together & Course Evaluations

Reading (Complete before Class)

- Review Atwood trial documents one final time (Blackboard).
- Review Final Microhistory Essay guidelines.

Blackboard Bibliography

- Brown, Richard D. "Microhistory and the Post-Modern Challenge." *Journal of the Early Republic* 23 (2003): 1–20.
- Darnton, Robert. "Introduction." In *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, pp. 3–5. New York: Vintage, 1984.
- Lepore, Jill. "Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography." *Journal of American History* 88 (2001): 129–144.
- Magnússon, Sigurður Gylfi, and István M. Sziójártó. "Postscript: To Step into the Same Stream Twice." In *What Is Microhistory? Theory and Practice*, pp. 147–159. New York: Routledge, 2013.
- Wood, Gordon S. "Microhistory." In *The Purpose of the Past: Reflections on the Uses of History*, pp. 119–132. New York: Penguin Press, 2008.