Course Profile

Course # and Title: RHTH 603, Graduate History Seminar: “Historiography and Method Survey”

NOTE: This course is a Graduate Seminar (but is open to students in other degree programs by permission of the instructor) in History (although students from other disciplines are welcome and may find it useful).

Instructor: Mark N. Swanson and guests
Semester/Year: Fall 2018

Course Rationale and Description
(Why do we offer this course? Which of LSTC’s degree program learning outcomes does it address?):

An interest in history is part of the DNA of the Christian faith. Christians order their lives to events that took place in the first century of the Common Era, in contexts decisively shaped by much earlier events and histories. Some of us are committed (e.g., through solemn ordination vows) to creeds and confessions from the 3rd through the 16th centuries, and are to preach and teach “in accordance with” them—a task of interpretation with a strong historical component. All Christians confess a continuity of the community and its proclamation through time (“one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church”); even more, we claim to be part of a community that somehow embraces space and time (“the communion of saints”), in which we are open to the teaching and example of siblings of other times and places.

Give these realities, questions about who we are—or who we should be—inevitably take on historical dimensions. These historical dimensions become all the more important as we pursue our goal at LSTC of understanding theologies not as systems of timeless verbal content but as Gospel-motivated discourse that arises in and speaks to particular contexts, the better to discern how the Gospel may be spoken afresh in our own day.

It is useful, then, for future teaching theologians to gain some insight into the work of the historian, the ways in which the histories of global Christian communities have been studied and related, and new approaches of the past decades (including the encounter with literary theory and post-colonial studies), with the goal of honoring and learning from members of the communion of saints, especially those who have often been neglected in the standard Western church histories.

1 While I am writing this as a Christian providing a rationale for the course to Christians, it would be possible to make a parallel case for other faith traditions.
This course will address a number of LSTC’s Learning Outcomes for the Th.M. and Ph.D. programs, which stress:

**Mastery of the tools of scholarship.** The course will provide an opportunity to exercise: the capacity to ask productive questions; to conduct research; to make an argument with appropriate evidence, and articulately to present one’s arguments orally and in writing; to engage others in scholarly conversation; and to write and prepare various kinds of papers and presentations.

**Mastery of a particular discipline.** The course is an opportunity for students to explore the shape of disciplines of interest to them, and the specific methods used for conducting research in them.

**Capacity to teach.** The course will be conducted as a seminar, with a variety of opportunities to make presentations and to teach one another.

**Commitment to the vocation of theological scholarship.** We shall conduct our work seriously, in a way marked by honesty and by respect for others, in the service of Church, community, and academy.

### Course Learning Outcomes
(What *difference* will this course make to students’ knowledge, skills, attitudes, and practices?)

1. Some basics: Participants will be able to find and use relevant and reliable information (with emphasis here on making good use of the JKM and University of Chicago libraries and standard online research tools). They will understand the concept of plagiarism, know how not to fall into it by accident, and will be striving for academic integrity. They will grasp the need for careful documentation and be able to create notes and bibliographies in Turabian/University of Chicago format (or according to some other assigned stylesheet). They will have had practice in narrowing their areas of interest from fields to topics to questions to particular problems worthy of research (and yielding results in a realistic timeframe); in evaluating and using sources; and in marshalling evidence and making arguments.

2. Participants will, through critical reading of and group conversation about a number of important articles and chapters, have encountered different forms of argument and types of evidence, and sharpened their sense of what goes into a good paper and what constitutes a strong argument.

3. Participants will have practiced this sense in their own writing, from short papers to a book review to a final paper written not for the sake of a grade, but as a step towards some other goal, e.g. a dissertation proposal or a conference paper or a publishable piece of research.

4. Participants will have had opportunities to teach, applying (or anticipating) the teaching skills learned in the Pedagogy Seminar (including lesson planning, preparation of suitable handouts or visual presentations, etc.).
5. Participants will have some grasp of the variety of methods used by contemporary historians (especially historians of Christianity), and acquire a knowledge of and appreciation for those methods and tools that will help them in their own disciplines and projects of research and writing.

6. Participants will have attained a degree of familiarity with the contemporary study of the history of Christian communities at some various periods in various parts of the world (e.g., the Middle East, India, West Africa), such that the problematics and methodologies encountered in these studies will provide tools for their own disciplines and projects.

7. If the Seminar is successful, participants will have had the experience of working with colleagues in a space of mutual respect in which we help one another with our close attention and critical thinking, suggestions, questions, and comments. Students working on particular projects—in particular, the Dissertation Proposal—will have had the opportunity to share their projects and to seek constructive feedback.

**Strategies for Learning:**
(How shall we go about achieving these outcomes?)

I foresee four main elements to this course:

1. An introduction and time of getting acquainted. (This may involve one-on-one meetings with the instructor, and sharing of a paper, selected by the student, written for a previous class.). Depending upon the needs of students, time may be spent on: reading skills, use of sources, understanding and avoiding plagiarism, research methodology, etc., and may include visits to class from librarians and archivists, and visits to libraries.

2. Over a period of several weeks, we shall have a number of visits from faculty colleagues (usually for an 80-minute period) in order to (a) give an historiographical survey of their particular fields, the shape of or the “lay of the land” in their own particular field of scholarship, so to speak, and/or (b) speak about their own research: the research methods they use and the challenges they face.

3. We shall read widely (concentrating especially on articles and chapters, rather than entire books), and discuss and explore the methodologies we encounter in our reading. Our reading list is negotiable. In the past, the Seminar included sessions on:

   a. The study of early Christianity/late antiquity, in order to demonstrate the turn in recent decades to a social historical approach, and then the “linguistic turn,” and the fruits that new methodologies have brought. Some readings that have been useful in past years include: Evelyne Patlagean, “Ancient Byzantine Hagiography and Social History;” Peter Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity” and “Arbiters of the Holy;” Stephen Davis, “Crossed Texts, Crossed Sex: Intertextuality and Gender in Early Christian Legends of Holy Women Disguised as Men;” Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (especially Chapter 8 where new tools are applied).

   b. The historiography of the church in India. Among readings that have proved helpful: John C.B. Webster, “The History of Christianity in India;” Mary Schaller Blaufuss, “Interactive History in

c. The historiography of the church in West Africa. Among readings that have proved helpful: Ogbu Kalu, “Clio in a Sacred Garb,” “African Church Historiography;” Ken Sawyer, “‘A Continent without a History?’ Rendering Africa Visible in Recent Church History Textbooks”; and others. By way of contrast, from East Africa: Hussein ahmed, “The Historiography of Islam in Ethiopia.”

d. In addition, we may read selected chapters from Georg C. Iggers (ed.), Turning Points in Historiography: A Cross-Cultural Perspective, using Ernst Breisach, Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern, as a work of reference.

e. In addition, we shall write book reviews (limit: 1000 words) on recent books of significance of our own projects; our goal is a set of reviews of publishable quality. We shall share these in class soon after Reading Week.

4. We shall present our own projects. For Ph.D. students, this might mean some anticipation of the dissertation proposal. Others may want to find and do work in something new. But all members of the class will have an opportunity to present their work to the rest of the class. This is an opportunity to teach, and it should be carefully planned.

This course will feature a mix of lecture and seminar that will depend, for its success, on students reading widely—that which is required for class and more—and coming prepared for in-depth discussion of what they have read. Writing is very important in this class: regular reflection papers (which may be read in class), a book review (of publishable quality), and a working paper on one’s own project, later to be polished as a term paper.

Assessment:
(How shall we know if we—students and instructors—have been successful in achieving the outcomes?)

The Seminar format of this class allows for an ongoing conversation in which students and instructor will give feedback to one another (including prompt written feedback on papers). One form of external assessment will be the judgment of faculty colleagues and dissertation colloquy participants as students present their Dissertation Proposals and completed Dissertations.

Bibliography:

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<tr>
<th>Text Title</th>
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**Breisach, Ernst.**  
ISBN-10: 0226072835

### Only if you can find an inexpensive used copy:

**Turning Points in Historiography: A Cross-Cultural Perspective.**  
**Wang, Q. Edward and Iggers, Georg C.**  
ISBN-10: 1580462693

### Depending on the interests of students we may want to read:

**History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn.**  
**Clark, Elizabeth A.**  
ISBN-10: 0674015843

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**Additional information:**

For more information about the Seminar (or for permission to take it if you are not in LSTC’s Advanced Studies Program or its equivalent), please contact Prof. Mark Swanson at [mswanson@lstc.edu](mailto:mswanson@lstc.edu).