

**HISTORY 480**  
**Historical Research and Writing**  
**TuTh 2:00-3:15**  
**MJ 201**  
**art.marmorstein@northern.edu**

**Art Marmorstein**  
**TC 363**  
**W 1-3, TuTh 11-11:50**  
**MW 9-10**  
**Phone: 626-2608**

## **INTRODUCTION:**

A typical syllabus introduction tells you what the class is all about and the reasons for taking the class. I can't quite do that here. In preparing for the class, I looked at research and writing syllabi from three different professors, NSU professors David Grettler and Mark Bartusis and North Greenville University's Brendan Payne. While all three classes had things in common, each professor took an entirely different approach to the class as a whole.

Why is this?

Research and writing depends on your philosophy of history. What is history all about? What is the nature of historical truth? How can we be sure what we claim to be true really is true? How can we share what we have discovered to be true with others? These are questions we'll explore throughout the course, and, by the end of the course, you should have pretty solid answers, answers you've arrived at on your own.

Focusing on the "big" questions should go a long way toward helping you improve your research skills (discovering what is true) and your writing skills (learning to share what you've learned with others). Clear writing and clear thinking go hand in hand, and this class should help you both think more clearly and write more clearly.

Past versions of the course required students to complete a major research project. Many students wrote fine papers, sometimes winning prizes for their work.

Other versions of this course asked students to contribute toward group projects. Twenty years ago, Dr. Bartusis' students helped put together a fine history of NSU, a book that covered the first 100 years of NSU history.

I would really love for students to have something of both experiences. I'd like you to have an individual paper you can be proud of, something you might submit to a history conference or use as a writing sample when applying to graduate school.

I'd also like the class to do an update to the history of NSU. It's been 20 years since the NSU history was published, and it would be great if we could come up with a good supplement to the Bartusis history. Dr. Usitalo is thinking of doing an updated NSU history anyway, and it would be great if we could give him a good start here. It's easy to self-publish on Amazon, and it would be wonderful if we could have a 20-year update to the NSU history available there.

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

A Pocket Guide to Writing in History (Mary Lynn Rampolla)  
On Writing Well (William Zinsser)

Rampolla's Pocket Guide to Writing in History is an excellent resource for learning/reviewing the nuts and bolts of historical writing. It covers well things like proper citation of sources, avoiding plagiarism, and some of the stylistic conventions of historical writing.

Zinsser's On Writing Well is a thoughtful reflection on non-fiction writing in general. When Dr. Grettler teaches this class, he uses Strunk and White's Elements of Style, a book initially written more than a century ago and that many still consider the "classic" guide to good academic writing. Zinsser notes his own indebtedness to Strunk and White in the introduction. If you happen to have a copy of Strunk and White, you might want to refer to that book too when you are writing your papers for this class.

Note that many/most class sessions will focus on topics covered in either the Rampolla or Zinsser books. It will help class discussion a lot if you have read the relevant chapters in these books ahead of time. I'd appreciate it if you would also add comments to the relevant post on the class blog before class. I want this to be a discussion-focused class rather than a lecture class, and good blog posts will help get the discussions going.

**ONLINE MATERIALS:**

I may have some materials on my regular website (<http://www.marmorstein.website>), but most online material will be on D2L page. However, the online material will not be a good substitute for being in class.

**BLOG:**

For each class day that includes a reading assignment (almost every day the class meets), I would like you to add an entry to the class blog (<https://scribesandpharisees.blogspot.com>). Most often, the blogs will ask you to comment on either the Rampolla or Zinsser reading assignment for that day.

**JOURNAL:**

Each student should have a journal for this class. The journal will include your class notes, writing exercises done in class, and occasional outside-of-class assignments.

**GRADING:**

Approximately 50% of your grade for this course will be based on your journal, your blog entries,

and daily class participation. I expect all students to attend class faithfully, to keep up with the readings, and to participate in class discussion. I do take attendance into account when figuring out your final grade.

The other 50% of your grade will be based on the two papers, your individual paper and your paper updating the history of Northern.

### **PAPER ONE—UPDATING THE HISTORY OF NSU**

Below are fourteen possible chapters in our update of the NSU history. Who gets which topic? And can you write on something not on the list?

To get a paper accepted for a conference or for publication, you usually have to start by submitting a proposal or a paper abstract. I am going to have you write abstracts describing what you would do if you were to write on some of the topics below. In addition, I'll ask you to write an abstract for a potential chapter \*not\* included on the list.

Ultimately, each of you will write a well-sourced, accurate, and interesting account of either one of the chapters below or an alternative chapter that meets with class/professor approval. I suspect some chapters will be more “popular” than others. If multiple students want the same topic, the chapter will go to the student who turns in the best abstract.

In addition to submitting your paper in writing, you will be presenting your research conference-style to the class and to invited guests. At the “conference,” each of you will also have a chance to be a panel moderator, commenting on the papers and inviting questions from those in attendance.

1. Build it and they will come—maybe
2. Northern by the numbers
3. The dark side: NSU administration
4. Once around the race course (curriculum at NSU)
5. Fine arts (plays, musical production, personnel, outstanding students)
6. Arts and sciences (faculty, curriculum, outstanding students)
7. School of Business (faculty, curriculum, outstanding students)
8. School of Education (faculty, curriculum, outstanding students)
9. Town and Gown: Northern and the Aberdeen Community
10. Student life (intramurals, clubs, etc.)
11. We survived Covid 19
12. Wagging the Wolf: NSU athletics
13. We survived NSU: Alumni Achievements
14. The past guide to the future: what is NSU today, and where are we headed?

## **PAPER TWO—ONCE AND FUTURE HISTORIANS**

Your second paper for this class will be on a topic of your choice. It might be an extension of your history of NSU paper or a topic you hope to do research on in graduate school. There is an annual student history conference at SDSU, and I would be delighted if you'd work on a paper you might submit to that conference. There is also a Brown County Historical Society contest, and if you come up with something suitable for contest entry, that would be excellent. Finally, NSU has writing awards as well, and a paper suitable for the Brock contest would impress me.

As with your initial paper, you'll start by presenting an abstract first. Once your abstract is accepted, you'll start doing your research. Quality is more important than quantity. Most conference papers take about 20 minutes to present, and that would be just about the right amount of material for this paper.

As with the first paper, you will present your research to the class and invited guests at a class "conference." Again, class members will serve as moderators, and there will be a question-and-answer session.

## **SCHEDULE OF CLASSES, READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS**

- 1/10 Introduction: What are we doing here?
- 1/12 Does anybody care? (Rampolla I)
  
- 1/17 Safe on database (Library Session I)
- 1/19 Searching for treasure: archival research (Library Session II)
  
- 1/24 Hogwarts at NSU: mastering sourcery (Rampolla II)
- 1/26 Read before you write: a history of history (Rampolla III)
  
- 1/31 How do I put this? Writing a good Thesis (Rampolla IV)
- 2/2 Modest proposals: starting the NSU History update (Abstracts due)
  
- 2/7 Writing nuts and bolts (Rampolla V)
- 2/9 A capital offense and how to avoid it (Rampolla VI)
  
- 2/14 In search of 100 proof history (Rampolla VII)
- 2/16 In search of 200 proof history (Library Session III)
  
- 2/21 It takes two: writer and reader (Zinsser I)
- 2/23 How not to write like a stuffy professor (Zinsser I)
  
- 2/28 A beginning, a middle, and... (Zinsser II)
- 3/2 Another beginning! (Zinsser II)

- 3/7 People, places, and things: what we write about (Zinsser III)  
 3/9 Like a joke: humor in history Zinsser III)

3/11-19 **\*\*\* Spring Break: No Class \*\*\***

- 3/21 The joy of writing (Zinsser IV)  
 3/23 Choice words (Zinsser IV)

3/28 **\*\*\* Assessment Day: No Class \*\*\***

- 3/30 The first annual mock history of NSU conference—Day I

- 4/4 The first annual mock history of NSU conference—Day II  
 4/6 What about me? Finding a research direction

- 4/11 What I'm doing for the rest of the semester (Abstract II)  
 4/13 Eyes on the Prize I (peer reviews)

- 4/18 Eyes on the Prize II (peer reviews)  
 4/20 Eyes on the Prize III (peer reviews)

- 4/25 Eyes on the Prize IV (peer reviews)  
 4/27 They say that all good things must end

**\*\*\*\*\* Final: Mock History Conference--Friday May 5, 2:15-4:15 \*\*\*\*\***

## **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY STATEMENT**

Cheating and other forms of academic dishonesty and misconduct run contrary to the purposes of higher education

Please be especially careful to observe academic integrity standards on the blogs. The blog entries are intended to make sure you have done the primary source readings, and your comments should be based on your own observations, not someone else's ideas. Plagiarism (e.g. copying material from the internet or recycling work done by another student) is not allowed.

This goes double for you class papers. Plagiarism merits the death penalty, a failing grade in the course. We'll talk extensively about plagiarism: what it is, and what it isn't. Please pay special attention to the plagiarism section in Rampolla VI.

Northern State University's official policy and procedures on cheating and academic dishonesty as outlined in the [Northern State University Student Handbook](#) applies to this course. Students caught cheating will receive a zero for the assignment, and, since zeros are worse than F's, they are likely to fail the course as a whole.

**NSU DISABILITY POLICY:**

Northern State University recognizes its responsibility for creating an institutional climate in which students with disabilities can thrive. If you have any type of disability for which you require accommodations, please contact the NSU Office of Disability Services (626-2371, Student Center 217) as soon as possible to discuss your particular needs.

**BOARD OF REGENTS ACADEMIC FREEDOM POLICY:**

Under Board of Regents and University policy student academic performance may be evaluated solely on an academic basis, not on opinions or conduct in matters unrelated to academic standards. Students should be free to take reasoned exception to the data or views offered in any course of study and to reserve judgment about matters of opinion, but they are responsible for learning the content of any course of study for which they are enrolled. Students who believe that an academic evaluation reflects prejudiced or capricious consideration of student opinions or conduct unrelated to academic standards should contact the academic dean administratively in charge of the class to initiate a review of the evaluation.

**NORTHERN STATE UNIVERSITY DIVERSITY STATEMENT:**

Northern State University strives to build an academic community of people from diverse backgrounds and experiences who are committed to sharing diverse ideas in a mutually respectful environment. We value open discourse and consideration of multiple perspectives on issues of regional, national, and international importance, in which individuals are free to express their points of view. Our goal is a diverse learning community with equal opportunity for all.