

## Interdisciplinary Research Design and Thesis Writing

**Lecturer:** Dr. Kobi Kabalek

**Semester:** Spring 2018

**Class Time:** Sunday, 12:15-13:45

**Room:**

**Office Hours:** Sundays, by appointment

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This course teaches students how to design and execute an original research project in the field of Holocaust Studies. Our aim is practical—to guide students through the MA thesis-writing process, as well as conceptual—asking what makes a research project valuable, compelling, and original. This course differs from other courses in the program, in which students are required to read much. While reading in this course will be minimal, the students will be asked to write a substantial number of short texts, with the goal of sharpening students' critical perspectives and providing them with useful techniques of written (as well as oral) articulation. The students are encouraged to apply these techniques on the topics they are interested in and use this course as a platform for improving their research and writing skills for the purpose of working on an MA thesis.

### Assignments:

Throughout the course, students will be asked to write assignments on a weekly basis. In order to pass the course you must submit *all* assignments.

The assignments must be emailed to me by 4 pm, on the day before class (if you do not write on Saturday, send me the assignment earlier). I will then upload them (anonymously) to our moodle page. You are asked to come to class after you have read at least half of your peers' assignments and have a few things to say about them. We will then discuss your points in class. When you send me the assignments, please give them a title that includes your last name and then the number of week in which the assignment is for. For example, the first Assignment will be called LASTNAME1.

Seminar papers: The course's initial aim is to assist students in writing their first seminar paper in the program. Students are thus asked to send seminar papers in progress and, if they wish, also papers they have previously written, so that we can work on them together in class.

### **Week 1 (February 25): Introduction**

#### Assignment:

Think of what you would like to learn from this course.

What are your weak points and what are your strengths in academic writing?

Which texts would you like to work on in class (papers you have written or are supposed to write)? What is your seminar paper about?

### **Week 2 (March 4): Arguments and Structure**

#### Assignment:

Break Amos Goldberg's article down to its different elements:

1. Create a schematic sketch (this could include: main arguments, secondary arguments, assumptions and foundations, reactions and criticism, body of research, contradictions, findings, conclusion/s, etc.).
2. Then write an abstract that summarizes the article (of up to 200 words).

Reading: Amos Goldberg, "The Victim's Voice and Melodramatic Aesthetics in History," *History and Theory* 48 (2009): 220-237.

### **Week 3 (March 11): Inter/disciplinary approaches to Holocaust Studies**

#### Assignment:

Work in groups of 2-3 with people who work with a different disciplinary approach than you. Compare 2-3 articles of different disciplines and present them shortly in class (5-7 minutes for each group).

Together we will think about the following questions:

- What kind of questions do scholars pose in each of the disciplines?
- How do they define sources? How do they approach the problem of writing?
- What should one discipline learn from others? How do the disciplines challenge each other?
- What is the author's writing voice and what are its conceptual consequences?
- What are successful models for combining disciplinary concerns?
- Are there research problems unique to the field of Holocaust Studies?

### **Week 4 (March 18): Interesting writing, clear writing**

#### Assignment:

1. Try to think of an article or book that you found interesting. Identify in writing the reasons for your interest in it.
2. Present a research topic (no more than 350 words) that you are acquainted with or fascinated by. Try to write it in a way that would be both interesting and serious.
3. Write a very short description of your topic (1-2 sentences) that "everybody" could understand.
4. Write the same (1-2 sentences) for people from your field.

### **Week 5 (March 25): Synthesis of research literature**

#### Assignment:

Write a synthesis of research literature (up to 1000 words) for your thesis or from a paper you are writing or have written (you may retouch older texts). A synthesis does not mean a listing of the different publications that may have anything to do with the research you are conducting, but rather requires you to observe which studies are relevant for your work and why, to identify the different information, interpretation, and perspectives of these studies, and what is missing in these studies that your research will introduce or where do you disagree with their observations.

Make sure to include the most essential sources (secondary and primary, "classic" and more recent or unconventional) of the topic you chose, but see that you are not simply repeating the "usual suspects."

## Passover break – March 28-April 6

### Week 6 (April 8): Formulating a research question and a thesis – 1

#### Assignment for half the class:

1. Formulate a research question (no more than 100 words).
2. Formulate an argument (thesis or hypothesis) related to your research question (up to 500 words). Make sure that you address the questions *what* your paper is about, *why* is it relevant (or how it contributes) to existing studies on the topic, and *how* will you go about answering the research question.
3. Create a schematic sketch of your thesis' structure.

### Week 7 (April 15): Formulating a research question and a thesis – 2

#### Assignment for the second half of the class:

1. Formulate a research question (no more than 100 words).
2. Formulate an argument (thesis or hypothesis) related to your research question (up to 500 words). Make sure that you address the questions: *what* your paper is about, *why* is it relevant (or how it contributes) to existing studies on the topic, and *how* will you go about answering the research question.
3. Create a schematic sketch of your thesis' structure.

### Week 8 (April 22): Sources

#### Assignment:

Choose at least two specific examples of different *kinds* of sources (letters, official documentation, diaries, oral testimonies [video or audio], pictures, monuments, archeological findings, films [documentary or fiction], memoirs, literature [novels, short stories, poetry], theater, etc.) that you find interesting and/or relevant for your work and write:

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each source for your research question?
2. How to approach these sources? What do we need to know in order to best analyze them (inter/disciplinary skills)?

Make sure to use quotes (either in the form of text or as links, images, or whatever) and refer to them when making your points.

We will discuss some topics and look closely at some examples, and ask: How should we use quotations? When is it better to paraphrase?

## April 29 – NO CLASS

### Week 9 (May 6): “Background,” Context, Analytic Framework

#### Assignment:

1. Describe shortly (in no more than 200 words) the context of a Holocaust study you have read.
2. Write a text (of between 700 and 1000 words) that demonstrates a contextualization of a research topic of your choosing.

Consider in your responses:

What is the purpose of this context (what is it supposed to show/explain/enable/provide the analysis)? What is the framework (temporal, spatial, collective, milieu, etc.) that you use as the foundation of your context and be prepared to say why (in class). Where to start and end, or: what is relevant, what is not, and what should be pushed to the footnotes?

Read:

Peter Burke, "Context in Context," *Common Knowledge* 8: 1 (2002): 152-177.

Maja Suderland, "Introduction: Topic and Research Question," in her *Inside Concentration Camps: Social Life at the Extremes* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 3-11.

### **Week 10 (May 13): How to write a seminar paper?**

By this date, all students must send us or at least discuss in class their seminar paper. Make sure to consider the different elements and aspects of writing that we discussed so far and know what they are used for.

We will summarize what we have done so far and discuss the writing of research proposals.

### **May 20 – Shavuot – NO CLASS**

### **Week 11 (May 27): Presentations of research proposals – 1**

Presenters may use any visual, written, or other means to help them introduce their work in progress.

### **Week 12 (June 3): Presentations of research proposals – 2**

Presenters may use any visual, written, or other means to help them introduce their work in progress.

### **Recommended reading:**

Christopher Browning, "Survivor Testimonies from Starachowiec: Writing the History of a Factory Slave Labor Camp" in *Collected Memories: Holocaust History and Postwar Testimonies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

Alon Confino, "Narrative Form and Historical Sensation: On Saul Friedländer's *The Years of Extermination*," *History and Theory* 48: 3 (October 2009): 199-219.

Sara Horowitz "The Night Side of Speech" in *Voicing the Void: Muteness and Memory in Holocaust Fiction* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997).

Dominick LaCapra, "Writing History, Writing Trauma" in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

Donald Bloxham and Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust: Critical Historical Approaches* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

Henry Greenspan, "The Unsaid, the Incommunicable, the Unbearable, and the Irretrievable," *Oral History Review* 41: 2 (2014): 229-243.

Kobi Kabalek, "Edges of History and Memory: The 'Final Stage' of the Holocaust," *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* 29: 3 (2015): 240-263.