

## **MA Academic Skills and Thesis Seminar**

### **Semester I, 2024-2025**

**Group 105**

**Instructor: Damian Pargas ([d.a.pargas@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:d.a.pargas@hum.leidenuniv.nl))**

**Timeslot: Tuesday, 9:15-11:00**

**Location: Herta Mohr, 0.26**

#### **Course description**

This seminar consists of 7 bi-weekly meetings in which students reflect on practical matters and begin work on their MA thesis. During the first half of the course, we discuss fundamental issues such as professional conduct, ethical dilemmas, the relevance of history for society, digital history, and the job market. The students also participate in brainstorm sessions on possible topics for their MA thesis and discuss their first thesis proposals. At the end of the first semester students turn in a thesis proposal. Attendance and active participation in the thesis seminar are compulsory for students in the MA History.

#### **General learning objectives**

The student has acquired:

- 1) The ability to analyse and evaluate literature with a view to addressing a particular historical problem;
- 2) The ability to independently formulate a clear and well-argued research question, taking into account the theory and method of the field and to reduce this question to accessible and manageable sub-questions;
- 3) The ability to independently set up an original research project that can make a contribution to existing scholarly debates;
- 4) The ability to give a clear and well-founded oral and written report in correct English, when required, or Dutch, meeting the criteria of the discipline;

- 5) The ability to participate in current debates in the specialization;
- 6) The ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgments with incomplete or limited information, including the ability to reflect on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of knowledge and judgments;
- 7) The ability to reflect on one's own professional integrity and moral conduct;
- 8) The ability to provide constructive feedback to and formulate criticism of the work of others and the ability to evaluate the value of such criticism and feedback on one's own work and incorporate it;
- 9) the ability to reflect on the use of digital tools for history
- 10) Understanding of the relevance for society of the historical discipline in general and the specialisation in particular.

Final assignment (thesis proposal of 1500 words, excluding sources and bibliography)

*measured learning objectives: 1-5*

Active participation

*measured learning objectives: 6-10*

Weekly assignments

*measured learning objectives: 1-10*

**Readings** (4 texts through links, 1 pdf) can be found on the Brightspace page of the class.

## **Weighing**

5 EC= 140 hours

Workgroups/tutorials: 14 hours

Practical work: 74 hours

Tutoring: 2 hours

Paper(s): 50 hours

Final assignment (thesis proposal): Required (pass/fail)

Participation: 20%

Assignments: 80%

The final grade for the course is established by determining the weighted average with the additional requirement that the final assignment (thesis proposal) must always be sufficient.

### **Resit**

Should the overall mark be unsatisfactory, one or several of the assignments have to be revised after consultation with the instructor.

### **Inspection and feedback**

If a student requests a review within 30 days after publication of the results, a meeting with the instructor will be organized.

## **Course Schedule**

### **Semester I, 2024-2025**

#### **Class 1 (Week 37: Tuesday, 10 September)**

During the first meeting we will discuss the structure and main objective of the course. Students will explain how they have oriented themselves on the job market in the past and intend to do so during the coming year. We will also discuss some best practices of how to organize thesis material (primary and secondary sources, notes, arguments, etc.).

#### **Class 2 (Week 39: Tuesday, 24 September)**

The second meeting will be devoted to the relevance of history for society and ethics for historians. Please read the following texts:

- Lynn Hunt, *Why it matters* (Cambridge 2018), chapter 1, 8-19 (online access through the UBL).
- Peter Novick, 'The Abraham Affair' in: Idem, *That Noble Dream: The Objectivity Question and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge 1988) 612-621. (See Brightspace for pdf).
- American Historical Association, 'Statement on Professional Conduct' [Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct \(updated 2019\) | AHA \(historians.org\)](#)

**Assignment 1:** All students must turn in an individual text on moral dilemmas of the historian (500 words).

#### **Class 3 (Week 41: Tuesday, 8 October)**

During the third meeting we will discuss the job market for students of history. The seminar is particularly devoted to discussing students' second assignment.

**Assignment 2:** In between weeks 39 and 41, students are divided into small groups of 4-5 and will collectively interview alumni of the MA History about their experiences on the job market. (Alumni can be found at job market cafés organised by the History Programme, through the [LinkedIn site of the History Programme](#), through the Alumni Office of Leiden

University mentor network or through your own network). All students hand in an individual text on how they see their own position in the job market and how they value the (academic and non-academic) skills they have learned and are still learning (500 words).

#### **Class 4 (Week 43: Tuesday, 22 October)**

The fourth meeting is devoted to discussing digital tools for historical research. We will also be discussing students' third assignment during class. Please read the following texts:

- Ian Milligan, *The transformation of historical research in the Digital Age* (Cambridge 2022), introduction and conclusion: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026055>
- Maëlle Le Roux, 'Digital History of representations: analysing identity and nationalism in the Capuchin Annual Periodical (1930-1977)', *Journal of Digital History* 1,1 (2021) 14-40: <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/jdh-2021-1002/html>

**Assignment 3:** Students turn in a 500-word essay on their own ideas about the usefulness of digital tools. How useful are they for your own research?

#### **Class 5 (Week 45: Tuesday, 5 November)**

During the fifth meeting we will be discussing students' assignments on the importance of history in society, as well as organize brainstorm sessions on possible topics for their MA thesis. Please think of a possible topic and potential supervisor. **Before the next class students should approach a member of staff with a request to act as the supervisor of their MA thesis.**

**Assignment 4:** All students turn in a reflection about their own ideas on the importance of history for now and the future (500 words).

#### **Class 6 (Week 47: Tuesday, 19 November)**

During the sixth meeting we will briefly discuss everybody's thesis plans (at least their theme and possible sources). Please submit a powerpoint slide before class so we can put it up on the screen for everyone to see.

### **Class 7 (Week 49: Tuesday, 3 December)**

The final meeting will be devoted entirely to discussing the development over students' thesis plans and preparing for the final thesis proposal, which is due on 20 January 2025 at 23:59 hrs. **Late submissions will not be graded and will be entered as a fail.**

### **Final assignment: Thesis proposal**

The thesis proposal must be turned in on 20 January 2025 at 23:59 hrs, and will be graded with a pass/fail. The proposal should be roughly 1500 words (excluding sources and bibliography) and clearly present the thesis project's research question, possible positioning within the relevant historical debates, an evaluation of available sources and source criticism, and a rough outline of the thesis structure.