

Undergraduate Unit Project

You will select or be assigned one of the communities we study this semester to explore in more depth. There will be from two to four students working on the unit with you.

This project will require two stages:

- **Prepare an annotated bibliography on that unit of the course.** This should be ten to twenty sources including some to explain how people in that community lived, some that explain discourse from that community, and some on the speakers we will be studying. If appropriate, you may also want to read responses to public life or the speakers of the day in newspapers or magazines from the time and place. You may start with the bibliography on the class website, but should go beyond it. The bibliography should be well rounded. Although some of your sources may be from the internet, the internet cannot always be relied upon for quality sources of information. You will want to make certain that you go beyond strict reliance on the internet. The bibliography should cite, in proper MLA or APA format, sources you have consulted. To each should be added an annotation. An annotation is two or three sentences that (1) describe what is contained in the source, and (2) explain what you learned from the source that you find important to our class discussion. Attach a properly signed honors pledge. You may do the bibliography individually or in a group. All students choosing to complete the bibliography assignment in a group should sign off individually with an honor pledge on a bibliography submitted by a group and will receive an identical grade with all others in the group. The bibliography is due on the day we discuss your unit in the course. The bibliography will be five percent of your grade.
- **Classroom discussion.** Read the material you gathered in the bibliography to prepare yourself for class discussion. It is also a good idea for the group to get together before the class discussion to share the knowledge they have attained in reading the material in their bibliography. You are responsible and will be graded on your participation in class on the day(s) when your community is discussed. I will expect you to have comments that go beyond the reading of the class and the lectures, comments that show your use of the bibliography you have constructed. Your grade on the discussion will be five percent of your final grade.

Recommendations for doing the assignment

Step 1: Planning your research strategy

Conceptualizing the Research. Remember that your purpose is to deepen your knowledge of a particular community studied in the course this semester. I also expect some breadth as you deepen your knowledge. [The assignment](#) indicates three different areas you will need to research: "some [sources] to explain how people in that community lived, some that explain discourse from that community, and some on the speakers we will be studying."

Planning your time. This is not going to be an assignment you complete overnight. You will have read somewhere between three and five hundred pages of material by the time you have finished. So leave yourself plenty of time. But also, don't overestimate what

so leave yourself plenty of time. But also, don't overestimate what you will be able to do. Have an intelligent strategy that allows you to do the assignment well within the time constraints that you have.

General strategies for your reading. What sorts of things are you going to spend your time reading?

[Internet sites](#) often give you shallow explanations of ideas that are important to your understanding but most such sites lack depth or full vetting for accuracy. [Learn to differentiate unvetted from vetted sources](#) when you access material through your computer.

Articles that appear in vetted academic journals or even some well edited magazines have passed the scrutiny of others who are able to judge whether they are accurate and reasonable in the context of their historical period.

Obviously, books are longer than journal articles, so they take longer to read. Yet, they may or may not tell you much more than the article. For example, one can read about the ideograph of <equality> in a journal article by Celeste Condit and John Lucaites or can read their book on the topic. The book will provide you many more details and a fuller historical sweep, valuable to a scholar reading their work. But you may not need that additional depth. If you understand the journal article, you may be able to make your full contribution to the discussion. I do not discourage the reading of a book at some point in your preparation, but deal with books intelligently.

Obviously, reading focused sections of books takes less time but provides less depth than full books. Thus, you could read the section of Condit and Lucaites' book dealing with abolition, but would miss the full context of the ideograph in history. Yet, if the abolition period is your unit assignment, this section may be sufficient reading.

Another type of book collects essays from several authors on a particular subject. These essays function more like journal articles than full books so they can be very useful sources.

I would encourage you to think in terms of starting with shallower sources, perhaps from the internet ([with proper caution](#)), moving quickly to articles from periodicals and essays from, or sections of, books before you take on whole books. Thus, you will have built a kind of upside down pyramid, beginning with shallower material and working yourself toward more depth based on that early reading. But think through this strategy before you begin.

Identifying search terms. As you begin your research you need to find quality sources using data bases. The first step in this is your making a list of search terms to put into the [search engines you will use](#). You should construct this list from the following:

Key terms from the lecture on the unit.

Names of important speakers from the period including those whose speeches you will read.

This list should be expanded as you begin your research and discover new terms to add and search. Drop unfruitful search terms from your list and add terms you discover in your research that seem useful.

Identify Key Databases. To complete your strategy, you need to decide which databases to consult and/or search using the key terms you have developed. I recommend the following:

Begin with the bibliography from the course website.

Indexes accessing reliable and disciplined sources. Available through the RESEARCH PORT at the library's website, including

Communication and Mass Media Complete.
This database will give you access to earlier work in communication.

America: History and Life. **This is an excellent database for the history portion of the assignment.**

Early American Imprints. **This will give you access to some rhetoric written at the time.**

Academic Search Premier. **While this is a general, multidisciplinary database, its size and scope make it worth searching for most academic subjects.**

Non-library internet search engine such as GOOGLE. Realize that material is placed on the internet without regard to its reliability and without benefit of checks for accuracy. Information you gain through this mode of searching should be approached with due caution.

Step 2: Beginning your research

Building your Bibliography. You are now ready to execute your strategy and begin your research.

Don't do your bibliography last, begin it now.

As you find possible sources record them in proper form in a bibliography including information on their call number in the library, URL, or any other information that will help you locate them. You will save yourself time later.

Annotate as you acquire information on what the sources might have in them.

Implement your strategy by placing your bibliography

in the order you want to look at the sources.

Locate your initial sources. You are ready to begin looking for your initial sources.

Follow your strategy decisions above.

Keep your research balanced, looking for six or seven sources in each category that you need to look at.

Don't expect everything you look at to be useful. When it is not, indicate this on the bibliography entry so that you do not go back to sources you have already seen.

Reading sources. As you read read for three different things:

***Knowledge.* How is your understanding growing? What did you learn from the source?**

***Specifics.* What are your finding that you want to add to the class discussion? Take these in notes.**

***Other things to read.* Keep adding to your bibliography from footnotes and references. Pay special attention to books that might be worthwhile to spend the time on.**

Step 3: Completing your research

Follow the hot trails. When you find good material, follow up on it with other sources mentioned by the source.

Keep checking yourself for balance. Remember the balance I am looking for in your reading:

by subject matter, how people lived, the discourse of the community, and speakers we are studying.

by depth and quality, shallower sources such as the general internet and more disciplined sources from your library research.

Work through what you have gained. Look back over your notes and summarize what you know. If you are working with a group sit down and talk through how your work fits together. Think about what you would like to add to the discussion.

Finalize your annotated bibliography. Select the sources that have been most useful in each of the areas of your research and prepare them bibliography to be handed in. Remember to prepare it with a word processor, using proper MLA or APA form. You will be graded on form as well as content. An "A" bibliography will have a well balanced and sufficient choice of sources, will have annotations that assist in your preparation for discussion, and will follow proper form and format.

A note about "the internet"

Obviously electronic access makes the gathering of information easier for all of us. But there are some things that you have to keep in mind when doing research

through this easy method.

It is wise to differentiate between the internet -- that vast accumulation of information that you access through GOOGLE, YAHOO, and similar search engines -- and the less open resources of a library that are increasingly available electronically through your computer. Both are accessible through your computer but they are different reservoirs of information. These reservoirs have different gateways: GOOGLE and YAHOO versus GOOGLE SCHOLAR, RESEARCH PORT, and the ONLINE CATALOG, the latter two found on the university libraries' website..

Not all information available on the internet or anywhere else is equally reliable. There are institutions and processes that are designed and function to examine the truth, comprehensiveness, and reliability of information. Among these institutions are those of academic scholarship and responsible editorial scrutiny. We say that in these institutional processes that information is "disciplined" or "vetted." The internet has greatly complicated our lives with regard to such vetting. Some material found on the internet is disciplined, but much is simply posted by someone without benefit of the full, careful, review of disciplined research. *You must now develop your ability to differentiate between information that has this reliability and information without this reliability.* The library door used to do that for you; now you are on your own. You need to train yourself to recognize the signs of this reliability. Is the material published under the primature of a scholarly organization? Is the source a known reliable researcher in the subject matter involved? Is there evidence of an editorial process that would insist on the reliability of material published? Does a website explain how material is screened for inclusion?

The material that is generally available in the bricks and mortar library is more reliable knowledge, *disciplined* by careful review, correction, and improvement through the editorial processes that are a part of academic life. It is this kind of disciplined knowledge that you pay big bucks to acquire at a university. We are in the midst of a period when the access to this information is shifting from the bricks and mortar library to electronic access. During this period, you will seldom be able to get the full benefit of the library from your computer. You will need to go to the bricks and mortar building to do some of your work.

So, I offer the following advice to you:

Start with what you can access electronically.

Differentiate in your own mind between the internet and electronically accessible library material. Both you access electronically, but with different levels of reliability.

Be prepared to work across the electronic/bricks and mortar threshold of the library.

I do not expect that all your research will have to take place in the library, but I suspect some of it will. I will not penalize you for not entering the library. But I will penalize you for having narrow bibliographies without depth in the areas I have asked for depth. You may penalize yourself if you restrict yourself only to material available on the internet or through electronic sources.

Grading the bibliography

The bibliography will be graded on the following criteria:

Comprehensiveness. Does the overall bibliography treat all I asked: how people in that community lived, the discourse from that community, the speakers we will be studying and, if appropriate, responses to public life or the speakers of the day in newspapers or magazines from the time and place?

Depth. Does the bibliography contain some specific work as well as general treatments of the time, place, and speaker?

Quality. Does the bibliography reflect due attention to the vetting process? That is, is their sufficient material that would indicate academic or carefully edited work?

Quantity. Are there sufficient entries (at least ten to twenty) to achieve comprehensiveness? Note the numbers are guidelines, comprehensiveness is the criterion.

Proper Form. Have you followed APA or MLA form in citing your sources?

Annotation. Do your annotations provide evidence that you have (a) read the material, and (b) thought about how you might use it in class discussion.

An "A" bibliography will be superior in all regards. All students choosing to complete the bibliography assignment in a group will receive an identical grade with all others in the group. The bibliography will be five percent of your grade.

Grading the class discussion

You will be graded on your participation in class on the day(s) when your community is discussed. Criteria will be:

Willingness to contribute. Have you taken the initiative to add valuable content to our class discussion? Notice that there is no linear scale that the more you contribute in class, the better your grade. On the other hand, I expect to see your participating freely and voluntarily.

Depth of contribution. Do your comments go beyond the reading of the class and the lectures? Do they show your use of the bibliography you have constructed?

Relevance and significance of contribution. Do your comments add important insight into the unit and the speaker that we are studying.

An "A" contribution will add significantly to the quality of the learning that takes place during the contribution. Even if your bibliography grade is a group grade, your discussion grade will be individual. Your grade on the discussion will be five percent of your final grade.