

AMH 4930: History Research Seminar

Salem Witch Trials

Fall 2023

T 7 (1:55 – 2:45 pm) R 7-8 (1:55 – 3:50 pm)

Keene-Flint 117

Instructor: Prof. Jon Sensbach, Dept. of History

Office: 025 Keene-Flint (main History Dept. office)

Office hours: T R 9:30 – 11:30 am and by appointment

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This seminar offers an introduction to the famous Salem witchcraft trials of 1692 that led to the execution of twenty accused witches. By focusing on the events leading to the trials and the motivations of accusers and accused, and on the socio-religious origins of suspected witchcraft, the course will investigate why and how the prosecutions unfolded as they did. By studying the voluminous wealth of firsthand testimony and other documents from the trials, as well as divergent interpretations by modern historians, students will gain insight into the psychology of witchcraft accusation and defense, experience in working with primary documents, and practice in developing historical interpretation and arguments. The goals of the course are:

1. To study the causes, effects, and historical context of the Salem witch trials.
2. To gain an introduction to the theory, methodology, and practice of history.
3. To write a major research paper using the techniques of the historian's craft.

The course is designed to satisfy the senior seminar requirement for history majors. In addition to learning about the subject matter of the course, students will gain experience in the philosophy, methodology, and practice of history. By studying primary and secondary documents and by writing several short papers as well as a longer research paper, students will become equipped to undertake advanced work in history or in other research-related fields.

Requirements: The principal requirement of the course will be an 18-20 page final paper (16-18 pages of text, plus endnotes and bibliography) of high literary merit based on original research in primary sources on a topic chosen in consultation with the instructor. You will present a three-page prospectus of the project midway through the semester of the problem to be addressed, methodology and primary sources to be used, and bibliography of at least half a dozen books and articles. You will turn in a rough draft of at least nine pages of the research paper about two weeks before the end of the semester. There is an additional 5-page paper consisting of an analysis of several witchcraft testimonies; the specific assignment will be announced early in the semester.

The course is designed to be more demanding than the average lecture-based history course. As a seminar, the course requires consistent preparation before class and active participation by students during class every week. There is no midterm and no final exams.

Attendance: Because class will not be held during several weeks to allow for research time, there is an attendance policy for the remaining weeks. Beyond excused absences for medical reasons, family emergencies, religious holidays and other contingencies, each student is allowed two unexcused absences. Subsequent unexcused absences will be deducted from the participation grade.

Research project:	70%
Final paper	40%
Rough draft	20%
3-p. prospectus	10%
5-page document analysis	15%
Class participation	15%

Required texts:

Richard Godbeer, ed., *The Salem Witch Hunt: A Brief History with Documents* (Bedford/St. Martin's, 2nd ed. 2018).

Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (Vintage, 2002).

Mary Lyn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History* (Bedford/St. Martin's, 9th ed., 2017).

Schedule

Week 1. Aug. 24. Introduction.

Week 2. Aug. 29-31. Beginnings of the witchcraft crisis.

Reading: Godbeer, *Salem Witch Hunt*, p. 1-64.

Week 3. Sept. 5-7. Identifying the witch: early modern precedents

Reading: Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany*, chap. 5, "Sabbaths," and chap. 7, "Crones" (pdf)

Various primary documents TBA (pdf)

Week 4. Sept. 12-14. Salem witch trials and the historians

Reading: Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 3-155.

Week 5. Sept. 19-21. Analyzing evidence

Reading: Godbeer, *Salem Witch Hunt*, 67-146.

Assignment: 5-page paper on due

Week 6. Sept. 26-28. Defining the research problem

Reading: Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*, 156-313.

Rampolla, *Pocket Guide*, pp. – 1-7, 83-89

Individual conferences with instructor

Week 7. Oct. 3-5. Developing the research paper

Reading: Rampolla, *Pocket Guide*, pp. 8-25, 90-103

Work on prospectus

Week 8. Oct. 10-12. **3-page prospectus due**

Week 9. Oct. 17-19. Thinking like a historian

Reading: Rampolla, *Pocket Guide*, pp. – chap. 4 (52-82)

American Historical Association, “Historical Thinking Skills”

Week 10. Oct. 24-26. Research week

Week 11. Oct. 31 - Nov. 2. Writing the research paper

Rampolla, *Pocket Guide*, pp. – chaps. 6-7 (104-55)

Week 12. Nov. 7-9. No class – work on papers

Week 13. Nov. 14-16. Second round of individual conferences with instructor

Week 14. Nov. 21-23. Thanksgiving week – no class

Week 15. Nov. 28-30. Student presentations

Rough drafts (at least 9 pages, hard copy, please) due Nov. 30

Week 16. Dec. 5. Conclusion – student presentations



AMH 4930 class celebrating the end of the semester

Final papers due by 5 p.m. Monday, Dec. 11.

The Department of History is working to inform students about events and funding opportunities. You can learn about these opportunities by following @UFHistory on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), or [Facebook](#).