

**WOH 4930**  
**ARCHIVES, FRAGMENTS, AND THE WRITING OF HISTORY**

Fall 2025

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Office: 494 Grinter Hall  
Office Hours: Mon 2:00-400

Course Schedule:  
Wed periods 6-8 (12:50-3:50)  
229 Keene-Flint Hall

**Course Overview**

Archives offer the illusion of plenitude but can only provide fragmentary glimpses of the past. How should historians approach this dilemma? And how do fragmentary sources shape the writing of history? In this seminar, students will read scholarship about archives and historical theory and then work with a range of fragmentary sources to prepare original research papers.

**Learning Objectives**

The goal of this history research seminar is for students to bring together the main elements of the discipline: independent research, evaluating primary and secondary sources, methodological rigor, analytical thinking, and argumentative writing. Through a series of small assignments and workshops, students will experiment with sources and methods and work toward writing a 15–20 page research paper. More generally, students will develop their reading and writing abilities—precious skills in our information-rich world.

**Required Course Texts**

Amitav Ghosh, *In an Antique Land* (Granta, 1992).

WOH 4930 Course Pack (Target Copy).

Patrick Rael, *Reading, Writing, and Researching History*, [available online](#).

Apart from Rael, you must purchase hard copies of the required texts. The Ghosh book is available for purchase at the UF Bookstore and from online booksellers. The course pack is available for purchase at Target Copy.

## Evaluation

- |                           |       |       |
|---------------------------|-------|-------|
| • Primary Source Analysis | (10%) | 9/30  |
| • Proposal                | (10%) | 10/15 |
| • Presentation            | (5%)  | 11/12 |
| • Final Paper             | (40%) | 12/3  |
| • Participation           | (35%) | - - - |

I will provide more detailed guidelines for the assignments in the coming weeks.

## Procedure

Rather than a typical lecture course, this seminar consists of weekly discussions based on the assigned readings. We will also work through a series of workshops focused on the methodological skills required for writing history essays.

Before each class, you must complete the assigned readings, submit two open-ended discussion questions to Canvas, and be ready to take part in the workshop activities. You should have detailed notes and be prepared to participate actively.

Your participation grade will be based on quality contributions to class discussions. Please remember to be respectful and empathetic toward one another during discussions. We all learn and process ideas in our own ways.

If you have questions about the course, please first consult this syllabus. You may also come to my office hours or contact me by email. I will do my best to respond within one business day.

## Course Schedule

### Week 1 Introduction to the Course

8/27 Course overview; Introductions and expectations

Questions: What are archives? What are archival fragments? How do historians write history?

### Week 2 Archival Allure

9/3 Reading: Brent Hayes Edwards, "The Taste of the Archive," *Callaloo* 35, no. 4 (2012): 944–72.

Questions: How do scholars find sources? Why are they drawn to some and not to others? How do historians assemble narratives?

**Week 3      Library Visit**

9/10      Workshop Activity: Using Archival Collections at UF with Dr. Jim Cusick, Dr. Rebecca Jefferson, and Dr. Dan Reboussin.

**Week 4      Archives and Slavery**

9/17      Readings: Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 1–14; Memoirs of Florence Hall.

Questions: What are the links between archives and slavery? How do scholars attempt to surmount archival silences?

Workshop Activity: Analyzing primary sources

**Week 5      Digital/Analogue**

9/24      Readings: Lara Putnam, "The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitized Sources and the Shadows They Cast," *The American Historical Review* 121, no. 2 (2016): 377–402; Yuko Miki, "In the Trail of the Ship: Narrating the Archives of Illegal Slavery," *Social Text* 37, no. 1 (138) (2019): 87–105.

Questions: What are the advantages and disadvantages of digitized sources? How do keyword-searchable sources shape the kinds of histories we write?

Workshop Activity: Choosing research topics and finding secondary sources

**Week 6      Primary Source Analysis Workshop**

10/1      Workshop Activity: Share primary source analysis in class.

PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS DUE 9/30

**Week 7      Philosophies of History**

10/8      Reading: Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, 1940.

Questions: What are the uses of history? What kinds of questions should historians ask of the past? What are the connections between past and present?

**Week 8      Proposal**

10/15      No Class

PROPOSAL DUE 10/15

**Week 9      Fragments and History Writing I**

10/22      Reading: Amitav Ghosh, *In an Antique Land* (Prologue, Lataîfa, Nashâwy)

Questions: What archives does Ghosh work with? How do sources shape the histories we can and cannot tell?

**Week 10      Fragments and History Writing II**

10/29      Reading: Ghosh, *In an Antique Land* (Mangalore, Going Back, Epilogue)

Questions: How do narratives distort the past? What does Ghosh's narrative style accomplish and obscure?

Workshop Activity: Writing and Revising Historical Narratives

**Week 11      Tracing and Assembling**

11/5      Reading: Philip Janzen, "Linga's Dream? Interpreters, Entextualization, and Knowledge Production in Central Africa," *American Historical Review* 127, no. 2 (2022): 755–85.

Questions: What kinds of traces does the past leave in the present? What traces do historians leave in their writing?

Workshop Activity: Introductions and argumentation

**Week 12      Conference**

11/12      Conference presentations

**Week 13      Individual Work**

11/19      No class – individual research and writing

**Week 14      No Class**

11/26      \*\*\* Thanksgiving Holiday \*\*\*

**Week 15      Research and Writing**

12/3      FINAL PAPER DUE 12/3

## COURSE NOTES

### Attendance

Frequent unexcused absences will result in a low participation grade. Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found [here](#).

### Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center. See the “Get Started With the DRC” Disability Resource Center [webpage](#). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

### Grading Scale

A	93-100	B-	80-82	D+	67-69
A-	90-92	C+	77-79	D	63-66
B+	87-89	C	73-76	D-	60-62
B	83-86	C-	70-72	E	Below 60

Click [here](#) for more info on UF policies for assigning grade points.

### Other Policies and Information

This course complies with all other UF academic policies. For information on those policies and for resources for students, please see [this link](#).