

AMERICAN BUSINESS HISTORY
History 158AD/Econ 122D

Professor Balleisen
Duke University
Fall Term, 2010

GUIDELINES FOR THE RESEARCH PAPER

The goal of this exercise is to produce a research paper of 15 pages, inclusive of footnotes. Your paper should explore one of the central themes of the course through intensive examination of a particular historical episode, issue, or context. In most cases, this approach will require a focus on one aspect of one business in a defined period. Your essay should:

a) **tackle one of the topics listed in the Guide to Research Topics.** The list is long, so you should find something that interests you. Each topic relates primarily one of the two thematic units in the latter two-thirds of the course. You may write on a different topic, but if you wish to do so, you must get permission from Professor Balleisen for your alternative choice by Oct 16th. That permission will hinge on your having identified an appropriate historical problem/question, AND appropriate sources. So anyone wishing to pursue this option will need to initiate a conversation about other possible topics well in advance of Oct. 16th.

b) **be based primarily on "primary" sources** -- the "raw material" of historical interpretation -- and not on secondary sources -- the work of historians or other scholars. You MAY draw on secondary sources, and I have suggested secondary works you might wish to consult for particular topics. You may certainly also draw on the historical scholarship you read for class. But your argument should reflect sustained engagement with the primary documents that you have analyzed. If a discussion of scholarship plays an important role in your paper, we expect you to make clear how your own research in primary sources relates to the scholarly literature that you have read. Perhaps you will wish to disagree with some aspects of the analysis by other scholars, or to build on that analysis in some way, or to test the applicability of its conclusions/generalizations against the evidence contained in the primary documents that you examine.

For many of the research topics, I have laid out many more sources than you would need to consult to write a first-rate paper. Your choice of sources within a given topic will almost certainly reflect the particular questions you decide to pursue.

c) **make an interpretive argument.** Thus if you choose to write about Continental Airlines' efforts to become a non-union carrier, you should not simply construct a narrative of the company's bankruptcy and the ensuing legal

maneuvering that resulted in the abrogation of its labor contracts. Instead, you should weave into that narrative an argument about the relationships among transportation deregulation, competition in the airline industry, and the company's new labor strategy, and/or an argument about why Continental was successful in kicking out its unions, and/or, even better, how this episode sheds light on broader trends in business-labor relations during the 1980s and 1990s.

d) **draw connections and/or comparisons** with the material that we will be examining throughout the semester. The most obvious points to consider will fall within the "thematic unit" identified with each topic, but other linkages or comparisons may certainly occur to you as well. Thus in writing about P. T. Barnum's innovations in mass entertainment, you should do much more than simply describe the key episodes in his career. You might consider the connections between his various business strategies and the growth of a national market, or the nature of his responses to the deep-seated cultural opposition that his (and similar) approaches to business engendered. In other words, you should engage in historical analysis, assessing the significance of continuity and/or change over time, and developing explanations for that continuity and/or change.

ASSIGNMENTS AND DUE DATES

There are several discrete assignments associated with the research paper, which are designed to keep you from trying to pull something together in a wild frenzy at the end of the term. On Oct. 18 and Nov. 12, you will have the obligation to spend a session working on your research either at the Special Collections Library, or the Perkins computer area. We have set up these sessions to ensure that you get going on your work early, and that you have ample opportunities to ask questions of the professor, T.A.s, and librarians/archivists.

TAs will grade the assignments associated with the research paper for 3 out of every 4 students in their sections, and meet individually with those students; Professor Balleisen will grade and meet with the remainder of students. We'll let you know which group you are in after the midterm. The written assignments associated with the research paper are as follows:

a) **GENERAL STATEMENT OF PROPOSED RESEARCH**, submitted to your section leader (or Professor Balleisen) by 3:00 on Oct. 26th, via email. This two-page "prospectus," which counts for 3% of your grade, should constitute an initial "road map" for your research. It should lay out the particular question or questions that you wish to answer (these questions may change as you get deeper into the subject matter), and indicate what documents will allow you to develop answers to these questions. You should append:

-- a tentative bibliography that demonstrates the existence and availability of sources that will enable you to tackle your question or questions. (For most topics,

I have given you an extensive list of specific documents from which to work, because finding relevant sources would prove especially difficult and time consuming. If you choose one of these topics, your prospectus should: identify the key sources on which you expect to focus; dig into the kinds of questions you wish to answer; and discuss the relevance of those sources to your questions. You can, of course, identify other relevant sources beyond those I have given you, if you so choose); and

-- two to three pages of notes that you have taken on relevant primary sources, so that we can get a sense of how you have started on the project, and offer you suggestions about effective note-taking practices. (For suggestions about approaches to note-taking and brainstorming, you may wish to consult to some of the websites listed in the Coursesite's "External Links" Section.)

Even if several students choose the same topic, I would expect substantial differences in research agendas, sources, and eventual analyses, since there are many, many potential approaches to every "topic." (See the comments about discussion boards on research topics below.) On either Oct. 28th or Oct. 29th, you will have an individual meeting with your section leader (or with me) to discuss your prospectus and notes.

b) 3000 WORD FIRST DRAFT, submitted to your section leader (or Professor Balleisen, as appropriate) by 7:00 p.m. on Nov. 23rd, through the coursesite's Digital Dropbox. This draft, which counts for 10% of your course grade, need not be a perfectly polished essay; but it should be much more than just disconnected fragments. It should:

- clearly identify what you view, at least at this stage in the proceedings, to be your central argument;
- convey a working narrative structure (you may wish to turn in an accompanying tentative "outline," especially if you have left out a section or two of your paper);
- demonstrate substantial analysis of primary sources related to your topic (In other words, you need to have accomplished meaningful research before you sit down to write the draft); and
- furnish appropriate footnotes. Those students who do not already own a guide to term papers such as *Turabian's Guide* or *The Chicago Manual of Style* can avail themselves of the links provided by the Duke Honor Council at:
<http://www.duke.edu/web/HonorCouncil/citation.htm>

You might also, in an accompanying note, flag potential criticisms of your analysis, or other difficulties/problems that you have encountered in translating your research into a tightly constructed argument.

On Nov. 29th, Nov. 30th, and Dec. 1st, there will be individual meetings to discuss your drafts, including: the persuasiveness of your analysis; the clarity of your writing style and organization; your use of evidence; and possibly, additional avenues of research that you should pursue.

c) FINAL PAPER (15 pages), due at 5:00 on Dec. 10th, again with submission through the Digital Dropbox. This polished, proof-read (not simply spell-checked) final draft, which will be worth 27% of your grade, should respond substantially to the constructive criticism on the first draft, as well as flesh out the argument where necessary; it should also have a full bibliography and appropriate footnotes.

RESEARCH TOPIC DISCUSSION BOARDS

The course website includes discussion boards for each of the suggested research topics, available through its "Communications" link. Students pursuing the same general research topic should feel free to converse with one another through the relevant discussion board, especially about useful sources that they have uncovered either in the library or online. You may also, if you choose, throw out ideas or questions that you are pursuing and/or respond to the approaches, questions, and ideas of others addressing the same topic. Participation in a research discussion board is not required, but will help your participation grade for the course.

This semester, archivists will be monitoring the research discussion boards for the topics that require research in sources housed at Special Collections. If you post questions about sources or research strategies to the archivists, they will respond through the site within a few days.

NOTE WELL: If you find out about a source through a fellow student, or if you receive especially useful feedback from another student, you should credit that student appropriately in your footnotes. Although we encourage conversation about your research efforts with other students tackling the same general topic, we expect each student to develop his/her own approach to the topic, to engage in independent research of whatever sources he/she relies upon, and to construct his/her own arguments and prose.

WRITING STUDIO TUTORS

Duke furnishes ALL of its students (yes, even those of you who already write with great clarity, sophistication, and flair) with a remarkable opportunity to improve

writing skills -- appointments with tutors at the Duke "Writing Studio." The Studio furnishes tutors at both Lilly and Perkins Libraries, who are available during most afternoons and evenings. Everyone in the class can benefit enormously from discussing their writing assignments with a Writing Studio tutor. Have a look at their website:

<http://www.ctlw.duke.edu/wstudio/index.html>

MIDDLESWORTH AWARD

Any student who bases her/his research paper on archival materials in the Special Collections Library is eligible for the Middlesworth Award, which is presented every year to the student (or students) who produce the best research paper at Duke using such evidence. (Several students have received recognition from the Middlesworth Committee for papers written for this course.) At the final exam, we'll let students know if we would like to nominate their research papers for this award.

DURDEN AWARD

Students who complete a research paper based on primary sources not in Special Collections are still eligible for the Durden Award, which is presented every year to the student (or students) who produce the best research paper at Duke based on inventive use of library resources writ large. At the final exam, we'll let students know if we would like to nominate their research papers for this award.