REL S 390B Assignments, Spring 2012

1. One 3-4 page analysis of two articles, due Feb 6, 2012. 25 points

In this assignment you will take two articles assigned for Feb 6 that appear in the course reader: W. H. Hutchinson's article “Southern Pacific: Myth and Reality,” and Michael F. Sheehan’s article “Land Speculation in Southern California: The Roles of Railroads, Trolley Lines and Autos.” You will write a 3-4 page analysis that identifies the point of view two authors take toward the Southern Pacific Railroad. Consider the following questions, but do not limit yourself to them:

- What is the topic of the articles?
- What are the authors’ main arguments or points?
- What sources of historical evidence do the authors use?
- How do the authors use their evidence to support the main argument?
- Do the authors discuss what others have said about the same subject? If so, where do these authors agree or disagree with other historians?

Your article should have an introductory paragraph that sets the stage and includes a thesis statement. A sample thesis is: While historian X says yada yada yada, historian Y disagrees, and asserts blah blah blah. The analysis can take several forms. It could provide evidence about historian X and then provide evidence about historian Y. Or, it could identify three or four main points of disagreement and assess each point using material from both historians. Or, the analysis could take some other form you think works best.

The paper should be typed, double-spaced, in 12 point Times Roman, with one-inch margins all around. I am happy to read a preliminary draft as long as you personally bring it to my office so that we can discuss it in person. **No late copies of this assignment will be accepted, since we will be discussing our work in class.**

2. Group Project, due dates to be determined, but it will occur sometime between Feb 15 and Mar 5, 2012. 25 points

In this project you will work with 5 or 6 other students to present an issue of controversy you identify in the readings on California government and politics. Each group will be assigned a chapter. Each group will read the chapter and decide what issue of controversy they would like to present. The purpose of the assignment is not to repeat what is in the textbook, but to use the material as a point of departure to consider an issue of current interest. In other words, what is happening today in California government that makes the reading relevant and exciting? Issues of particular interest may include budgeting, taxes, fee hikes for CSU students, state support for public higher education, redistricting, current initiatives being considered (e.g., repeal of the
death penalty, legalization of marijuana, etc.), or any one of a number of issues of 
importance.

Work involved includes:

Reading the chapter
Identifying and Researching the controversy (background)
Adopting an approach to present the controversy (formal debate between group members, poster presentation, powerpoint, classroom exercise for all students, etc.)
Developing the project
Presenting the project to the class
Writing a one-page summary sheet that describes the issue

Each group will present the following to the instructor in order to receive a grade:

Class presentation
One-page summary sheet
Group roster listing who did what on the project
Confidential ranking of group members (to be discussed)

We will assign chapters and due dates within the second week of the semester. Groups will be randomly selected by the instructor.


Because the focus of the course is on California history, and the way that history is told, we will take a first-hand look at the way museums present the history of California Indians. This project requires visiting an actual site (see list below), and typing an analysis of your findings in a Field Report. A Field Report sheet appears on Blackboard as a guide, which you should download and complete on your computer.

The purpose of the Site Visit is to examine and describe precisely how the story of Native Americans is told at the museum or exhibit. Are they happy natives once they are freed by the Spanish missionaries? Are they enslaved by the padres? Do they convert to Christianity readily? Are they even a part of the exhibit’s history?

Here are the sites I have come up with so far, but I am open to additional suggestions:

Mission San Diego de Alcalá
Mission San Luis Rey de Francia
Santa Ysabel Asistencia
The Barona Museum (Lakeside)
The Kumeyaay-Ipai Interpretive Center at Pauwai (Poway)
Several other sites of interest, e.g., Mission Trails Park
Cabrillo Point
San Diego Chinese Historical Museum = http://www.sdchm.org/ (probably nothing on Native Americans, but an interesting place to visit to see how the story of California’s Chinese is told)
Museum of Man in Balboa Park
Battle of San Pasqual Park (Escondido, I think)
Mormon Battalion
San Diego Historical Society

Some of these locations may ask for a donation, but just tell them you are a student working on a project for SDSU and ask for free admission (this probably won’t work at Museum of Man, which has free hours on Tuesdays, once a month).

The Field Report form will give you prompts for what to look for, what to observe, and what to write down.

If you have identified a site not on this list, please let me know so you can obtain prior approval for the visit.


JSTOR is an online database available through the SDSU Library that gives you access to a wide variety of scholarly articles. This project asks you to do the following:

1) Identify a subject in California history you’d like to know more about
2) Identify a *scholarly* article on JSTOR that interests you. The article should be at least 20 pages in length, and not be a book review
3) Print out the cover sheet for this article and submit for 5 points on April 16.
4) Read the article, and write a 5-6 page analysis that answers the following questions regarding content and analysis:

**Content Questions**

What is the topic of this historian’s article?
What is the author’s main argument or point?
What sources of historical evidence does the author use?
How does the author use the evidence to support the main argument?
Does the author discuss what other historians have said about this topic? If so, where does the author agree or disagree with the other historians?

**Analytical Questions**

These questions show that you not only can summarize the article, but that you can consider its strengths and weaknesses.
Has the author clearly made an argument about what happened in the past concerning a specific topic or set of topics, why it happened, and why it is important?
How bold is the author’s argument? Is it modest or grandiose? In your opinion, how well has the author proven his or her point?
Are there any limitations or difficulties with the evidence and how the author uses it?
A good historian raises new questions about old topics. Does this article suggest any new questions or issues to you? Does this article fit with or contradict themes we’ve discussed in class?
Is the article well-organized and easy to follow? What could make for improvements?
Overall, what do you think of the article?

I am happy to read a draft of your analysis, if you are willing to come to my office to discuss it with me in person.

The analysis should be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins all around, in 12 points Times Roman.

5. OPTIONAL. Students who want to write a more traditional term paper may opt to write a 10-page analytical paper using primary source documents from the SDSU Special Collections. This might be for students applying to graduate school, those in need of a longer writing sample, or those interested in California history or museum work.

Steps include:

1) Meeting in Special Collections with a group of others to get an introduction to the sources available there.

2) Submitting a one-page proposal. 5 points.

3) Submitting a bibliography that includes at least 10 secondary sources; primary sources are negotiable, depending on the nature of the proposal and project. 10 points.

4) Submitting a first draft that is as complete as possible. 15 points.

5) Submitting a final version. 40 points.

This alternative totals 70 points and is in place of the site visit, field report, and JSTOR article analysis. Instructor permission required. Please let me know by February 8 if you want to take this option.