HIST 124 – Exam Study Strategies

EXAM FORMAT
• Two-Part, Three Hour Exam
  • Part I: Primary Source Analysis
    • Engage with documents and sources like those provided in the Visions textbook
  • Part II: Essay Question
    • Synthesize course material and draw conclusions about broad themes and discussion points

HOW TO STUDY
• Strategies for primary documents
  • Think contextually
    • Engage with documents within their context
  • Think thematically
    • Envision documents as part of a course theme
  • Think critically
    • Address how topics seek to contest or support a historical narrative discussed in the course
• Strategies for essay writing
  • Thematic evidence
    • Use evidence from the course that supports or contradicts a course theme to show your understanding
  • Informed discussion
    • Utilize course sources like the Visions textbook to inform your understanding and ground it in scholarly sources
  • Thoughtful conclusion
    • Apply your knowledge of the course and its themes to show how HIST 124’s methods, information or lessons are relevant to broader historical contexts

HOW TO STUDY (CONTD)
• Practicing primary documents
  • Analyze Visions (independently and in groups)
    • Past Exams (Exam Bank)
• Practicing essay writing
  • Write essay outlines
    • Make outlines for likely questions, using evidence from the course to improve your memory and recall
  • Review overarching course themes
    • Discuss key course themes in groups, analyzing their usefulness for certain possible questions
    • Summarize and review major points regularly – even 15 minutes’ work can help!
  • Past Exams (for past years’ essay questions)
    • Examine past exams to see how the prof phrases questions, and which parts of the course are usually highlighted

STUDY AND EXAM PREP RESOURCES
• Visions textbook
  • Primary sources contained within the textbook make for great practice for Part I and scholarly evidence for Part II
  • Professors and seminar leaders are still available to answer questions
• SASS online resources and templates cover key academic and writing skills:
  • Time management
  • Writing history essays
  • Compare and contrast essays
  • Memory strategies

COMMON MISTAKES
• Mass memorization
  • Attempting to memorize the entirety of the course, without addressing course themes or frequent topics
• Overwriting
  • Using extra or overly complex words to make your answers seem longer and more substantial than they are: focus on evidence and argument
• Lack of analysis
  • Statements describing sources rather than thinking critically and analyzing them for their content
• Fact fishing
  • Including facts in your essays or answers to make your work seem correct without considering whether facts add to your argument
• Time crunch
  • Running out of time on the exam as you spent too much or too little item on one section. Practice beforehand!

PLANS FOR NEXT YEAR
• Take stock of strategies
  • Many of the useful learning strategies that work in HIST 124 also apply to other history classes, or indeed other disciplines entirely!
• Remember the experience
  • Learn from your first-year exam and apply the lessons to the winter exam and other courses:
    • What worked and what didn’t?
    • Which strategies should I use?
    • Should I ask for help next time?
    • Where did I go wrong and where can I improve?