**Sophomore Research Seminar: Prof. Stephen Schmidt  
American Slavery Spring Term, 2007**

# MWF 11:45-12:50 Blue House Seminar Room

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 by appointment

**Course Description**

This course is a sophomore seminar dealing with the topic of slavery in the United States. We will consider slavery as an economic and social institution that played a dominant role in determining the history of the period. We will examine why the South developed an economy based on slavery and the North did not, whether slavery contributed to the South’s slower economic development relative to the North, and how slavery disrupted the American political process leading to the war. The course will be divided about equally between the economics of slavery and its social/political effects. The course will focus primarily on the period from 1846 to 1860, and on the American experience, although some topics will deal with earlier or later periods, or with material from outside the United States, and seminar papers can deal in part with them as well.

## Course Objectives

Sophomore seminar is a stepping stone between first-year preceptorial and senior thesis. The main objective of this course is to teach students how to develop knowledge of a specific topic, by locating relevant texts and critically evaluating them, and to expressing their judgments about the issue based on the knowledge they have developed from their reading, both orally and in writing. The long-term goal of the course is to develop skills for independent learning that will allow students to continue learning and keep their knowledge current after they graduate from college.

**Course Requirements**

The course requirements are divided into three categories. The first category helps students develop a broad knowledge of the research on slavery and its economic and political aspects, to serve as a foundation for the research process. Students will be evaluated by participation in class discussion and on the take-home midterm examination. The second category helps students develop the research skills necessary to conduct a research project about a specific issue. Students will be evaluated by library assignments, and an oral presentation on their topic during the first half of the seminar project. The third category helps students develop knowledge of the issue they choose for their seminar paper. Students will be evaluated on the rough draft and final draft of their seminar paper and by an oral presentation of their conclusions to the class. (See Project Schedule, below.)

**Web Resources**

The course uses two web pages. One is the Blackboard page; you can access this page by going to <http://online.union.edu> and logging in. The other is the Library’s resource page for the course, which is at [http://www.union.edu/PUBLIC/LIBRARY/srs/amsl/index.html](https://umail.union.edu/exchweb/bin/redir.asp?URL=http://www.union.edu/PUBLIC/LIBRARY/srs/amsl/index.html).**Grading Policy**

All assignments must be handed in at the start of class on the due date unless you have arranged an extension with me in advance of the due date. Late papers will be penalized 10% per day late. Participation in class discussion is mandatory, and I will call people randomly to ensure that everyone in the class is given an equal chance to participate. On any day you are not in class, you are not participating in discussion, and will receive a 0 for that day’s discussion unless you have conferred with me about your absence in advance and have an acceptable reason for being absent.

**Grading**

Course grades will be determined as follows:

Participation in class discussion: 15%

Short written assignments: 10%

Take-home midterm exam 15%

First oral presentation 10%

Second oral presentation 20%

Rough draft of seminar paper 10%

Final draft of seminar paper 20%

**Reading**

Our course reading will focus on three books, one dealing with the history of slavery, one with the economics of slavery, one with the politics of slavery. The books are:

* History of slavery: *American Slavery*, Peter Kolchin
* Economics of slavery: *Without Consent or Contract*, Robert Fogel
* Politics of slavery: *Conflict and Compromise*, Roger Ransom

There will also be electronic reserve readings assigned; these will include,:

* History of slavery: *The Peculiar Institution*, Kenneth Stampp, chap. 1
* Economics of slavery: *The Political Economy of Slavery*, Eugene Genovese, chap. 1
* “The Economics of Slavery in the Antebellum South “, Alfred H. Conrad and John R. Meyer, *Journal of Political Economy*, 1958.
* Politics of slavery: *The Impending Crisis*, David Potter, chapter 2

In addition, students will be developing their own reading lists relevant to their seminar project. Some of these readings may be assigned for class discussion based on discussion between each student and the professor.

Note that slavery is an actively debated subject and the authors you will read will disagree with one another. You should not assume that I agree with any particular reading assignment, since I will give assignments from both perspectives of debates when possible. An important part of the course, perhaps the most important, is identifying the reasons why different authors disagree and forming independent judgments about which viewpoints are more effective than others at explaining the history of slavery.

**Course Schedule**

Weeks 1 and 2: Overview, material from reserve readings

Weeks 2 and 3: Kulchin, first short written assignments

Week 4: Initial student oral presentations

Weeks 5 and 6: Economics of slavery, Fogel, final short assignments

Weeks 7 and 8: Politics of slavery, Ransom

Weeks 9 and 10: Final student oral presentations

The take-home final exam will be handed out on Monday, May 14th and due back on Wednesday, May 16th.

**Project Schedule**

The first assignment will be a one-paragraph description of the topic on you wish to write your paper. This will be due on Wednesday April 11th.

The second assignment will be a list of at least five sources you intend to read to get started. This will be due on Monday April 16th.

I will meet with each student in my office individually in the third week of the term to assess the progress of the research and prepare for the initial presentation to the class. The primary goal will be to identify the specific question that will form the basis of the seminar paper.

The first presentation to the class will be in the fourth week of the term. This will be a ten-minute presentation in which you explain the specific question you are researching, its relation to the economics and/or politics of slavery, and the theses of at least two authors on the subject whose views contrast.

The third assignment will be a written paper of approximately five pages, discussing the sources you have read so far and outlining your direction for continuing the research. This will be due two classes after your oral presentation (and will normally deal with much of the same material as the oral presentation did).

The fourth assignment will be a complete bibliography (normally with at least 12 sources), and an abstract and outline of the paper. This will be due Wednesday May 9th.

I will meet with each student in my office individually after the third assignment is handed in to discuss the progress made on the research and suggest final directions.

The fifth assignment is a complete rough draft of the paper, due Friday May 18th, which should be at least 15 pages and preferably 18 to 20.

The second presentation to the class will be in the ninth and tenth week. This will be a twenty-minute presentation in which you explain the research question you are asking, the different views of previous authors you have read on the question, and your answer to the question.  
The final draft of the paper will be due in finals week on a date to be determined.

**And a Small Note of Caution**

There are two professors named S. Schmidt at Union College, and to make it worse, both of us are economics professors. I am Stephen J. Schmidt; my namesake is Shelton S. Schmidt. Some paperwork will list us by our middle initials – I am Schmidt, S.J., and he is Schmidt, S.S. It should not be too confusing, but if you have to do paperwork with the registrar or some other arm of the college, please make sure they know which of the two S. Schmidts is the one you are dealing with.