Indigenous History in North America Before 1900

Course Time: Wednesday, 2:30 – 5:30
Course Location:
Office Hours: TBA

Instructor: Professor Carolyn Podruchny
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Contact Info: I encourage students to visit me during office hours, and will make appointments with those who have scheduling conflicts. Expect responses to email within 3 days and telephone messages within 5 days.

Description:
This course critically analyses source materials used for understanding North America’s indigenous peoples before 1900. Each week we will examine a different type of source, including documentary sources, oral sources, and material culture. Students are required to read the materials and contribute to weekly discussions.

Books:
NOTE: The books listed below will be available for purchase in the York bookstore and they will be on reserve in Scott Library. I strongly encourage sharing books wherever possible to reduce costs and searching for used copies in stores and on the internet (www.amazon.ca) and checking online availability (such as google books and Project Gutenberg).

The main book for this course will be: Jennifer S. H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert, eds., Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History, 2nd edition (Broadview, 2003).

Although I have ordered the books listed below and they will be available in the bookstore, you will not be required to read them all, so wait before buying them all to see which ones you will want.

Assignments:

Written Assignments: Total Value: 60%
All written assignments must be typed. Save all of your rough notes or rough drafts of your assignments; you may be asked to hand these in as well. All assignments must include proper citations following the Chicago Manual of Style.

Essay One: This assignment requires students to compare similar types of primary sources. Choose one week from the course syllabus, and within the list of readings, compare two or three of the sources. The essay should be between 6 and 10 pages (1,500-2,500 words). Discuss the quality and types of information that can be gleaned from the sources, as well as the problems that may arise in using the sources.

Due Date: Value: 25%

Essay Two: This assignment requires students to find a small body of material on indigenous history in the Ontario Archives and discuss what the material reveals about indigenous history. How might historians use the source in writing indigenous history? The essay should be between 3 and 7 pages (750-1,750 words). Discuss the different types of information that can be uncovered about your chosen topic from the different primary sources.

Due Date: Value: 10%

Essay Three: This assignment requires students to compare different types of primary sources. Choose one topic that is represented in at least three different types of primary sources that were consulted throughout the course. The essay should be between 6 and 10 pages (1,500-2,500 words). Discuss the different types of information that can be uncovered about your chosen topic from the different primary sources.

Due Date: Value: 25%

Participation: Total Value: 40%

Class Participation Value: 30%
I expect attendance at every class and participation in discussions. The day before class (midnight deadline), you are required to email me a brief summary of the assigned readings (100-300 words) and 3 questions about them. Be prepared to raise these questions in the class discussion.

Leading Discussion Value: 5%
Students must lead the class discussion once during the course.

Presentation of Research in Ontario Archives Value: 5%
On the final day of class, students will present their findings from their research in the Ontario Archives. Presentations should be informal and last between five and ten minutes.

Academic Honesty:
The Policy on Academic Honesty is an affirmation and clarification for members of the University of the general obligation to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty. As a clear sense of academic honesty and responsibility is fundamental to good scholarship, the policy recognizes the general responsibility of all faculty members to foster acceptable standards of academic conduct and of the student to be mindful of and abide by such standards. I strongly encourage you to take the Academic Integrity Tutorial at http://www.yorku.ca/academicintegrity.

Academic honesty requires that persons do not falsely claim credit for the ideas, writing or other intellectual property of others, either by presenting such works as their own or through impersonation. Similarly, academic honesty requires that persons do not cheat (attempt to gain an improper advantage in an academic evaluation), nor attempt or actually alter, suppress, falsify or fabricate any research data or results, official academic record, application or document.

Suspected breaches of academic honesty will be investigated and charges shall be laid if reasonable and probable grounds exist. A student who is charged with a breach of academic honesty shall be presumed innocent until, based upon clear and compelling evidence, a committee determines the student has violated the academic honesty standards of the university. A finding of academic misconduct will lead to the range of penalties described in the guidelines which accompany this policy.

In some cases the University regulations on non-academic discipline may apply. A lack of familiarity with the Senate Policy and Guidelines on Academic Honesty on the part of a student does not constitute a defense against their application. Some academic offences constitute offences under the Criminal Code of Canada; a student charged under University regulations may also be subject to criminal charges. Charges may also be laid against York University students for matters which arise at other educational institutions. For further information, see <http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/policies/document.php?document=69>.
Course Outline:

WEEK 1 Introduction

Visiting the Archives of Ontario. Assigning chairs to upcoming weeks.

WEEK 2 The Literature of European Exploration

When Europeans first traveled to the “New World” to explore its lands, trade with Aboriginal peoples, and establish colonies, they wrote letters, ship’s logs, and daily journals. These were usually turned into a narrative of exploration, published soon after the return of the explorer. Although explorers’ observations went through many stages of writing, editing, and imagining (often carried out by editors who had never left Europe) before they were published as books, these texts are an important source for historians. They can be read for their raw data, for the mindset of the explorer, and as pieces of literature with their own internal merit.

Choose one of the exploration texts listed below and think about the following questions:
- How much input did the explorer have in constructing the published text? How did his direct observations become packaged as a piece of exploration literature? What is the provenance of the explorer’s writings?
- Can you extract any raw data from this text? How can you trust it?
- What does the exploration text reveal about the author’s mindset and assumptions about the New World and its people?

Texts:

1. Martin Frobisher: George Best, A true discourse of the late voyages of discoverie, for the finding of a passage to Cathaya, by the northeast, under the conduct of Martin Frobisher generall . . . (London, 1578); reprinted in Stefansson ed. (infra), I, in Hakluyt, Principal navigations, VII (1903–5), and in Collinson ed. Available on Early Canadiana Online.

Additional Readings (* Must read):
* Paul W. DePasquale, “‘Worth the Noting’: European Ambivalence and Aboriginal Agency in Meta Incognita, 1576-1578” in Reading Beyond Words
* Daniel Clayton, “Captain Cook and the Spaces of Contact at ‘Nootka Sound’” in Reading Beyond Words
WEEK 3 Conquests

What happened when Europeans tried to establish colonies in the “New World”? Choose one of the following texts below that represent each French, English and Spanish colonization in different parts of North America. Consider the following questions:

-How did the colonizers represent their successes and failures?
-Can you imagine how this story would have been told differently by different people (foot soldiers and seamen, Aboriginal leaders, ordinary Aboriginal people)?


Additional Readings (* Must read):
*Frederic W. Gleach, “Controlled Speculation and Constructed Myths: The Saga of Pocahontas and Captain John Smith” in *Reading Beyond Words*

WEEK 4 Indigenous Voices on Paper, Part One

Genuine voices of indigenous people form the early periods are extremely difficult to find because when indigenous had the inclination and occasion to record their voices in a written form, the documents often did not survive to the present day. Their words and writings were not valued by European conquerors nor published or saved in archives. Here are a few exceptions. Choose one to read:

WEEK 5  Oral Traditions, Part One

Most indigenous cultures in North America used oral means to develop, share, and preserve their ideas and history. But this information is difficult for historians to master because it was produced and saved in indigenous languages, and it was encoded in indigenous epistemologies. This week we will read indigenous oral traditions recorded on paper and mediated by a university-based scholar. Think about how the scholar has framed and/or translated the indigenous oral traditions. Is this a useful tool for helping to translate oral traditions to outsiders with no cultural frame of reference or does the scholar apparatus interfere with readers’ direct experience with the oral tradition or limit the stories’ interpretive potential? Choose one of the following:


WEEK 6  READING WEEK, NO CLASS

WEEK 7  Oral Traditions, Part Two

A great deal of historical data can be gathered from living oral traditions among First Nations groups. These materials should be considered carefully in much the same manner as other historical sources. Although the sources listed below have been framed by university-based scholars and published in academic presses, they have little scholarly apparatus. Does this make a difference in how you read them? Is it difficult to understand them? Choose one of the following to read:


Additional Readings (*must read*):
WEEK 8  Oral Traditions, Part Three

It is a completely different experience to listen to stories than to read them on paper. Indigenous oral traditions were always performed, and shaped by the context of the telling, the teller and the audience. When stories are recorded on page, they are completely torn from their context of performance and so much of the meaning is lost. When stories are recorded in an audio or video format, less of the performative context is lost. Your assignment this week is to listen to a body of oral traditions online and to think about how your experience of the stories is different than if you would have read them. Choose one of the follow websites and listen to a sampling of stories:

1. Omushkego Oral History Project (Louis Bird’s stories) <http://www.ourvoices.ca/index>
5. Listening to Our Past (Inuit) www.tradition-orale.ca

Additional Readings (* must read):
*Julie Cruikshank, “Discovery of Gold on the Klondike: Perspectives from Oral Tradition” from Reading Beyond Words
*Frieda Esau Klippenstein, “The Challenge of James Douglas and the Carrier Chief Kwah” in Reading Beyond Words
*Alice Beck Kehoe, “Transcribing Insima, a Blackfoot ‘Old Lady’” in Reading Beyond Words

WEEK 9  Visual Sources

Visual sources are important to historians of all eras. These are not confined simply to paintings and photographs, but rather encompass a range of styles, formats and media. This week students will examine drawings in books (codices or scrolls) that may be representations of people, objects, and ideas. Students will also look at representations on other types of media, such as rocks and coats. Think about when and how the representations were created and attempt to read their meanings. Read one of the following from each of the two lists:

2. Codex Mendoza, Section 3
3. Codex canadiensis. Available online at the Library and Archives Canada.
5.

AND

3.

Additional Readings (* Must read):
*René Fossett, “Mapping Inuktut: Inuit Views of the Real World” in Reading Beyond Words
WEEK 10  Material Culture

11 Nov  Similar to visual sources, material sources can be carefully read for historical meaning. In the weeks preceding this class, take a field trip to one of the following places:

1. Royal Ontario Museum (Toronto), new First Nations exhibit.
2. Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto), Canadian and First Nations documentary art
3. Woodland Cultural Centre Museum (Brantford, Ontario)
4. Crawford Lake Conservation Area with Iroquoian Village (Campbellville, Ontario)
5. Ste. Marie Among the Huron (near Midland, ON)
6. Petroglyphs Provincial Park (northeast of Peterborough, ON)
7. Ojibwe Cultural Foundation (15 Highway 551, M’Chigeeng, Manitoulin Island, ON P0P 1G0, Tel: 705-377-4902)
8. Scugog Shores Museum (Port Perry, ON)

In the class discussion be prepared to report on the place and its indigenous content.

Additional Readings (* Must read):
*Trudy Nicks, “Dr. Oronhyatekha’s History Lessons: Reading Museum Collections as Texts” in Reading Beyond Words
*Maureen Matthews and Roger Roulette, “Fair Wind’s Dream: Naamiwan Obawaajigewin” in Reading Beyond Words

WEEK 11  Other European Sources: Missionaries

18 Nov  Missionaries to colonial North America have long been recognised as the earliest ethnographers of indigenous peoples, recording their customs, beliefs, rituals, and material culture. These descriptions are steeped in their biases as colonisers. Missionaries came to North America usually under the sponsorship of a European crown. They implemented colonisation programs in an effort to transform indigenous peoples into Europeans, encouraging them to settle in villages, take up farming, and dress in cloth, ingredients deemed essential to becoming a Christian. At the same time, missionaries were drawn to the New World to find a special connection with God, and to fight on the front lines against paganism and evil. North America was especially attractive to those missionaries seeking martyrdom because of the difficult living conditions and hostile Indians. Missionaries thus sought to win both bodies for “civilisation” and souls for God.

Scholars of indigenous peoples have generally been sceptical of missionaries’ texts, regardless of missionaries’ relation to indigenous communities, institutional identification, or methodological orientation. These sources are too often dismissed as hopelessly biased and thus not useful to understanding indigenous history. Missionaries and their sources, however, generated complex encounters. Communication across cultural divides, including the production of written and oral texts, caused transformations of both missionary and indigenous worlds.

**Additional Readings (* Must read):**
*Laura Peers, “‘The Guardian of All’: Jesuit Missionary and Salish Perceptions of the Virgin Mary” in *Reading Beyond Words*
*George Fulford With Louis Bird, “‘Who is Breaking the First Commandment?’: Oblate Teachings and Cree Responses in Hudson Bay” in *Reading Beyond Words*

**WEEK 12  Indigenous Voices on Paper, Part Two**

25 Nov  
Did indigenous voices recorded on paper change over time? Where indigenous people able to successfully convey their people’s perspectives when they were educated in European schools and learned to write European languages? Choose one of the following to read:

http://olivercowdery.com/texts/1827cusk.htm

**Additional Readings (* Must read):**
*Winona Wheeler, “The Journals and Voices of a Church of England Native Catechist Askenootow” in *Reading Beyond Words*


**WEEK 13  Archival Research and Scholarly Views on Indigenous Voices**

2 Dec  Students will report on their research projects in the Ontario Archives. Discussion of indigenous voices in secondary sources.

**Additional Reading (* Required) These are all on line:**

The syllabus may be subject to minor scheduling adjustments as the course progresses.