

History Group Projects

History Group Projects

Aims

The aims of this module are:

- To enable students to undertake directed research on a project of their choice, as a preliminary to final-year dissertation work and as a means to develop student-centred learning
- To offer students the opportunity to develop skills in working in groups, including setting objectives, assigning tasks, collating information and completing co-operative assignments.

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this module students should be able to:

- Contribute to the design of a group research project, including framing research questions and identifying source materials
- Contribute to the allocation of tasks within a group setting
- Work successfully within a group in pursuit of shared goals
- Undertake research using relevant primary sources
- Evaluate primary and secondary source materials for use in the group presentation
- Produce an individual synthesis based on a reading of primary and secondary sources.
- Contribute to a group presentation setting out the results of the research project
- Contribute to the completion of a research portfolio.

Research streams

The group project is a research project. It provides an opportunity for genuine research by undergraduates, but in a more structured manner than the final year (individual) dissertation. All projects must identify and use primary source materials to answer or address a clearly framed question or problem.

Generally there will be at three 'research streams' available in a given year. Each will focus on a broad area of history, allowing groups to develop their own projects across a range of types of history (cultural, social, political, etc.) as well as relating diverse times and places. Research streams are intended to *facilitate* not *restrict* the group's research. By placing each group within a broad research stream it will be possible to ensure that the group mentor can give advice in a field in which s/he has

expertise. It also means that groups can be given a head-start in terms of suggestions for the direction of research, preliminary reading, recommended sources etc. However, it is the responsibility of each group to design its own research project. A group can undertake research in an area outside its research stream (or only related in a rather general way) *if* agreement is reached by the group as a whole and *if* the feasibility of the project is agreed by the mentor.

The group mentor must in any event approve the research proposal in terms of its feasibility by week 8 of Michaelmas term.

Forming a group

Students will rank their preferences for the 'research stream' which they wish to join at the end of the Freshman year. Where possible, students will be given their highest-ranked choice. Submitting your preferences early could help ensure you obtain your first choice.

Allocation of students to groups will be the responsibility of the Course Director, who may consult the Group Mentors in coming to a decision. Students are not permitted to form their own groups, nor to lobby the Course Director concerning group allocation. In cases where there are existing inter-personal problems between two or more members of a group, the student(s) affected should contact his/her/their College tutor(s) in the first instance, and ask the tutor to present a case to the Course Director for re-allocation.

The Course Director will not deliberately seek to bunch together students pursuing the same programme of studies e.g. History and Political Science, but rather aim at ensuring each group includes students from a range of programmes, if possible.

Students will be notified of their 'research stream' before the beginning of Michaelmas term, and of their group allocation no later than at the induction meeting in week one.

Module structure

Activities connected with the module falls into four categories:

- Induction (week one of MT): this will consist of a preliminary meeting for all students to explain what is involved in group projects (conducted by the course director) followed by preliminary meetings for each 'stream' where mentors will discuss kinds of projects and suitable sources.
- Mentor meetings: a series of scheduled meetings between each group and the assigned mentor, to follow on from the preliminary meeting in week one. There will be at least three further meetings in Michaelmas term, and three meetings in Hilary term, each lasting 30 minutes. One of these meeting will be scheduled in week eight of Michaelmas term, when mentors will sign off on preliminary proposals.
- Group meetings: meetings held by group members apart from the mentor and logged (see below). It will be expected that each group meet for the equivalent of 30 minutes per week (for each week where no meeting with a mentor is scheduled). Some groups may find it more less often, but for longer sessions. The minimum number of hours to be logged by each group is seven hours over the year as a whole.
- Presentations: groups in the same 'research stream' will meet towards the end of Hilary term to give presentations as part of a two-hour session.

Running your group

Meetings with mentors will be arranged by the mentor in conjunction with the group. Each group is also required to make its own arrangements for meeting held without their mentor, but it is recommended that use be made of the Group Study Rooms in the Berkeley Library, and in other libraries on campus. For details on how to book these rooms see

<http://www.tcd.ie/Library/using-library/study-rooms.php>

Note: responsibility for arranging times and places to meet must be shared within the group. If the group delegates this duty to one member, s/he must be compensated by the allocation of other tasks to other members of the group.

The first meetings should focus on identifying a research project acceptable to the group as a whole. Perhaps it is best to begin with one or more suggestions, which members of the group can explore, and report back on, to subsequent meetings, before a final decision is taken. This should be done by the second half of Michaelmas term at latest. At that point a research topic should be approved by the group's mentor, and though of course the topic can develop thereafter, as some aspects expand or may turn into dead ends, no change should be made to the overall subject without the mentor's approval.

By the second half of Michaelmas term, groups should be moving on to allocate research tasks among the members of the group, and framing questions or hypotheses to be addressed. Students should also be deciding on individual essay titles – these will be signed off by the end of Michaelmas term.

Most of the work in Hilary term should focus on three aspects: completing the research you need to undertake as your subject evolves; determining how your research can be used to address the questions or problems identified (or where necessary, changing them); framing your presentation.

Assessment

Assessment will consist of three elements.

- Presentation (50%): this will be delivered by the group, to all those within their research stream, at the end of Hilary term. Each group member will take part. The mark will be awarded jointly by the group's mentor and a second mentor or the Course Director. All students present will be asked to rank the presentations, offering brief comments, and the two assessors will use these results in their evaluations.
- Essay (40%): to be submitted in week 3 of Hilary term. Each student will submit her/his own essay (2,500 words), related to one aspect of the wider project, and will obtain an individual mark.
- Group portfolio (10%): each group will maintain a portfolio over the course of the module, including a progress journal. The quality of the portfolio will be evaluated by the group mentor. S/he will award a mark to the group as a whole, but is at liberty to vary the mark by up to 20% if the journal gives clear evidence of non-participation by one or more members of the group, either in terms of attendance or of limited contribution to portfolio materials.

Penalties and problems

All members of the group are required to participate across the year as a whole. The groups' journal will record attendance and participation. Persistent non-attendance should be notified to the Course Director as soon as possible. S/he may determine that a student has demonstrated non-participation, and may be excluded as a result. This will normally be on the basis of greater than 25% absenteeism, or absence from the presentation (on other than medical grounds).*

* Students who complete the module, but are unable to take part in the presentation for medical reasons will be assigned an appropriate replacement assignment by the group mentor in association with the Course Director. This will usually take the form of a written assignment relating to that part of the presentation assigned to the student in question.

Should persistent tensions arise within a group which cannot be resolved by the group members, these should be raised with the group mentor and, failing that, with the Course Director.

Students excluded from the group will be required to complete an extended essay (4,000 words) in lieu of the presentation.

Should a group fail the module, each member will be required to complete an extended essay (4,000 words) to be submitted the supplemental examination session.

Portfolios and progress journals.

Each group will maintain a portfolio consisting of two components:

- Research materials accumulated over the course of the year – these could include bibliographies, draft plans or lists of research questions, schedules of work allocated between group members. Each of these items should identify the group member(s) responsible for producing it.
- Progress journal: this should be a brief record of each meeting held by the group, usually one paragraph (less than half a page) per meeting. Each entry should record: attendance; a summary of proceedings at the meeting; allocation of tasks; fulfilment of tasks assigned at earlier meetings.

Responsibility for maintaining the journal and the portfolio must be shared among all members of the group. At each meeting the group should assign (a) a moderator, who will chair the next meeting and (b) a secretary who will complete the journal record for that meeting and add any research materials. Both duties will then move on so that each student fulfils each role at least once.

Presentations

End-of-year presentations will normally take the form of an oral presentation by the group, using PowerPoint or similar. It should be accompanied by a short bibliography, to be delivered on the same date. It is recommended that each group also produce a short handout for attendees – this can be a print-off of a PowerPoint presentation. Each member of the group will be required to participate in the delivery as well as the composition of the presentation. Normally a presentation should last twenty-five minutes with five minutes of questions to follow. Mentors will require groups to finish on time, so a practice run is recommended.

Presentations will be assessed to take account of:

- the quality of the research: this is a research project, so groups will need to use primary sources extensively in their work. Groups should make clear in the presentation the sources they have used, and should offer some evaluation of the sources as part of their presentation.
- the integration of the project: though delivered by the group, the presentation should not consist of five or six separate items, loosely connected. Successful presentations will demonstrate how the research undertaken by each member of the group has been integrated into the overall project. A successful presentation should offer analysis and not just information, and aim to address a problem or construct integrated arguments.
- the manner of presentation: assessors will be looking for clarity of presentation (oral and visual) so that the audience can grasp the aims of the project, its findings and their significance. This can mean sticking to time (neither too long nor too short, nor too rapidly delivered); using visual material with care (well-chosen, effective and relevant); structuring your presentation to maximum effect; answering questions effectively.

Essays

Essays are 2,500 words long and count for 40% of the final mark. Essay titles should be agreed approved by the group mentor, at latest by the end of Michaelmas term. The submission date is Monday of week 4 of Hilary term. Each essay will related to one aspect of the wider project (though the same aspect may be addressed by more than one student), and will obtain an individual mark. Examples might include: assessment of one primary source/set of sources, or one event within the wider topic; historiographical review of relevant secondary literature; analysis of a particular historical problem within the wider question.

Schedule

Michaelmas term

Week 1: Induction with Course Director (all students)

Preliminary meetings: all students and mentors in each stream attend

Each group will have three scheduled meetings with the group mentor (30 minutes each), usually including weeks 8 and 11; each group will also meet regularly (at least three further occasions).

Week 8: Submission of Preliminary Proposal to be signed off by Mentors.

Week 11: Submission of Essay Titles to be signed off by Mentors.

Hilary term

Each group will have three scheduled meetings with the group mentor (30 minutes each); each group will also meet regularly (at least three further occasions).

Week 3: Submission of essays.

Week 12: Presentations – all students in a given stream to attend.