This course will explore and apply the central methods and theories of modern historical research. In weekly readings and discussions, we will probe how historians choose topics, frame questions, gather evidence, and draw conclusions. Throughout the semester, meanwhile, each student will practice these skills via an original piece of primary research. The goal is to expand history, not simply to “examine” it.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
1. Reading: For each week, I will assign several short readings. Several of the readings are drawn from two books, both available in at the bookstore:

Hasia Diner, Lower East Side Memories
Peter Charles Hoffer, Past Imperfect

The other readings come from a variety of publications. Most of them are available on the Internet, via the Bobst Library website. The rest will be available on “Blackboard,” as indicated below.
2. Responses: Each week, I will ask you to hand in a BRIEF (1-2 pages, maximum) response to the assigned readings. As my questions on the course schedule should indicate, I hope this exercise encourages you to apply the readings to your own historical research. Please note: I do not accept late responses.
3. Attendance: In this course, I want us all to learn from each other. So it is imperative that you prepare for--and attend--every class, on time. If an emergency forces you to be tardy or absent, I would ask that you please notify me (by phone or e-mail) beforehand.
4. Classroom Presentation: During the last three classes, each student will present their key historical argument. To illuminate it, please use at least one visual or aural aid (photograph, film, music, etc.).
5. Final Essay: In lieu of a final exam, I will collect your essays on May 5. My prime criteria in evaluating them will be the originality and clarity of your argument. So as you research and write, ask yourself: What is the state of current knowledge on my subject? How will my project alter or augment it? Have I demonstrated how my own claims differ from other historians’ work? Please note: I do not accept late essays.

GRADING
Weekly Responses: 25%
Classroom Presentation and Participation: 25%
Final Essay: 50%

COURSE SCHEDULE
January 20: Course introduction

January 27: The Historical is Personal: Choosing a Subject
   “Round Table: Self and Subject,” Journal of American History 89 (June 2002), 17-53.
Response: How do historians choose their subjects of study? Which subject have you selected? Why?

February 3: Framing a Question, I: Probing the Secondary Literature
Response: How do historians use other scholars’ work to ask new questions about their subject? What secondary literature do you expect to address in your own research?

February 10: Framing a Question, II: Identifying Primary Sources
   Gabriella Petrick, “‘Like Ribbons of Green and Gold’: Industrializing Lettuce and the Quest For Quality in the Salinas Valley, 1920-1965,” Agricultural History 80 (2006), 269-295 (on Blackboard)
Response: How do historians select primary sources? How do they use these sources to frame new questions and suggest new answers? Which primary sources will help you frame and answer your own question?
Presentation: Dr. Gabriella Petrick, Department of Nutrition and Food Studies; Dr. Diana Turk, Department of Teaching and Learning

February 17: The Theory--and Practice--of History
   Hoffer, Past Imperfect, chs. 1-4
Response: How have American historians’ dominant theories and practices changed over the past century? Which of these theories and/or practices might influence your own project? How?

February 24: “New” sources, I: Oral Histories

Response: How does oral-history evidence differ from other sorts of primary data? How might you use oral histories to further your own project?

March 3: “New” sources, II: Photography, Film, Architecture, Art
   Diner, Lower East Side Memories

Response: How do historians draw conclusions from so-called “visual” sources? How might these sources improve your own project?

Presentation: Dr. Hasia Diner, Department of History

March 10: Bringing It All Together (I Hope)

Response: What do the evaluations and revisions of this essay tell us about the process of creating history? What “lessons” might you derive from this exchange that you could apply to your own scholarship?

March 24: RESEARCH UPDATE AND TROUBLE-SHOOTING
   Please E-MAIL a tentative introduction and outline to the group NO LATER than Friday, March 20.

March 31: “Objectivity” and Fraud in History
   Hoffer, Past Imperfect, chs. 5-7 and conclusion

Response: What accounts for the recent spate of scandals surrounding “facts, fictions, and fraud” in American historical scholarship? How might knowledge of these episodes affect or alter the way you pursue your own scholarship?

April 7: History and its Publics
   Jonathan Zimmerman, “Across the Great Divide: American Historians and Their Publics” (on Blackboard)
   Selected articles and op-ed pieces by Jonathan Zimmerman and others (to be distributed)

Response: Who should determine how our past is written and commemorated? What role do historians play—or should they play—in public discourse? How might your own project contribute to public discussion or debate?

April 14: Presentations, I

April 21: Presentations, II

April 28: Presentations, III
May 5: FINAL PROJECT DUE