Semester Project: The Holocaust Historical Commission

The semester-long project in this seminar will center on the writing of public history. Most countries, states, and even cities establish historical commissions, which are empowered to research, to write, to disseminate (for example, in the schools), and to stage (for example, in museums and public monuments) the history of the community. One of the biggest challenges for such commissions is to deal with controversial topics in the community’s history, topics such as the Holocaust, which also require a community to come to terms with the less virtuous aspects of its own history.

Students in this seminar will divide into two groups to form two Holocaust Historical Commissions, one for each of our case studies, Poland and France. In consultation with the instructor, the students in each group will assign themselves different topics. In addition to the readings assigned for class, students are expected to research their specific topics. That research should be conducted not just online but should also make use of the many resources in the William H. Hannon Library as well as the knowledge of the librarians. Three graded components will be part of the Holocaust Historical Commission project.

1. **Annotated Bibliography (5% of course grade):** In doing their research for the Holocaust Historical Commission project, students will compile bibliographies on their chosen topics. The bibliography should be divided into two sections, one for primary sources (two required, one text and one audio-visual source or piece of material culture) and one for secondary sources (at least five), and all citations should follow Chicago style. The bibliography should also be annotated. To wit, students must consult the sources listed and then, in the bibliography, provide a brief (2–3 sentence) annotation, in which they concisely give the subject of the source and evaluate its relevance and significance for the project. Due Friday, November 1st by 5:00 p.m. on MyLMU Connect.

2. **In-Class Debate (10% of course grade):** Historical commissions engage in vigorous internal debates before making official proposals about school textbooks, museums, public monuments, and so on. Each group will engage in one in-class debate, with the other group serving as an audience. Each member of the Holocaust Historical Commission holding the debate will make a short (circa 3 minutes) introductory speech on her particular topic. After the initial speeches, there will be a period of debate among the Commission members themselves, after which they will field questions from the audience. Students should bring drafts of their speeches to their meetings with the instructor during the week of November 12th. Written drafts of the speech will also be exchanged for peer review in the writing workshops during the same week (see course schedule for details). The debate grade for each student will be determined by the quality of her speech, in both content and delivery, her performance during the debate, and her performance as an audience member for the other group’s debate. The debates will be held during the week of November 19th, at which point students must also submit a final version of the speech on MyLMU Connect (before class).

3. **Position Paper (20% of course grade):** The debate speech will serve as the first pass at the position paper that each student must write about her topic. The position paper will be based on the student’s research into her topic, which will mainly be a reading of secondary literature – i.e., some of the
scholarship — on the topic. The position paper should include a brief review of the various arguments advanced regarding the question in the existing literature. But it should not merely summarize the literature; it should also offer the student’s own analysis and, most importantly, the student should advance an argument about how the Commission will interpret topic — that is, how will the Commission deal with the issue at hand in its history of the Holocaust in Poland or France. The position paper should also identify two primary sources (one text and one audio-visual source or piece of material culture) that speak to the topic and support the argument advanced by the author. These papers should be approximately 7–10 pages in length, typed and double-spaced. A draft of the position paper is due on MyLMU Connect by 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, November 26th. The final position paper should be submitted as part of the final portfolio on Thursday, December 12th.

3. Group Presentation (10% of course grade): While each position paper is the work of the individual student, the students must also come together as a group to stage a museum exhibit about the history of the Holocaust. The exhibit will encompass the various topics but should not merely jump from topic to topic. It must also integrate them into a coherent narrative, one that also addresses the complexities of any history of the Holocaust, especially when it comes to the question of bystanders. Together the group will put together a PowerPoint Show, which should include the exhibit texts (that is, an introductory slide for the exhibit as a whole as well as each part of the exhibit, the types of texts that you see mounted on the wall as you move from room to room in a museum) as well as images of the items to be on display in the exhibit (primary documents, photographs, artifacts, etc.). During the last week of the semester, each group will present their exhibit to the rest of the class. Every member of the group must take part, with a speaking role, in this presentation. The individual student’s grade for this component will determined by two factors: the quality of the group presentation overall (including the PowerPoint Show) and the quality of the individual student’s presentation.