



Course Code & Title	LISS211 Understanding History: How the Past is Constructed		
Convenor(s)	Dr Alan James , War Studies, King's College London		
Institution	King's College London	Department	LISS DTP
Academic Year	2020-21	Term	Spring
Number of Sessions	1	Length of Session(s)	2 hours
Day, Date		Start : End	Room Location
Thursday 11 February 2021		14:00 – 16:00	Online, via Zoom
Enrolment Link:	Click here to enrol on this online course – you may be prompted to log in to SkillsForge		

Course Description:

This is a short course on how our understanding of the past is constructed. It is taught in one, 2-hour interactive session covering the nature of the historian's craft and the principal methodological and historiographical trends of the last two centuries. The aim, however, is to challenge rather than to inform. Students are encouraged to consider the limits of historical knowledge and to examine critically their own, often unspoken, assumptions about the study of the past.

Course Outline:

HISTORY: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Covering the evolution of the academic discipline of history, this session will assess the current state of historical research. The purpose will be to expose the lack of theoretical grounding of much work in the field and the limiting, instinctive reliance by many historians on hindsight and linear models of change. Built upon students' own research interests, the discussion will encourage reflection upon the future of the discipline and the value to it of theoretically-informed approaches to the past. It will include informal discussion of relevant counter-factuals and what such speculation reveals about our assumptions about causality and the value and purpose of historical narratives.

THE HISTORICAL RECORD: THE NATURE OF HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

Historians typically value, above all else, the location, effective handling, and presentation of evidence in the construction of an argument. Yet the nature of historical evidence itself is not frequently enough considered. This session explores the inherent limitations of historical evidence and the hopeless pursuit of 'historical truth'. Whilst it can seem very negative to annihilate objectivity as the historical Holy Grail in this way and to emphasise the very strict practical limits to the powers of the historian, this also opens opportunities to enrich our understanding of the past and to reassess our approach to its study.



London Interdisciplinary Social Science Doctoral Training Partnership

Advanced Research Methods in Social Sciences

Reading List:

None

Eligibility:

This course is designed for students embarking on an historical research project but should be open to anyone who is simply interested in how the past is studied and how this affects the social sciences.

Pre course preparation:

No preparation necessary

Number of students:

Minimum 5, maximum 25