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Comparing Historiographical vs. Source-centered Approaches to a History Research Seminar

This project sought to understand when and how students in a semester-long research seminar begin to formulate and define their final project. It compared surveys of students who had completed their projects in history research courses which first asked them to examine the relevant literature and chose a topic based on their readings with student journals in a course which encouraged students to first locate and select possible source materials for a project. While the surveys of students highlighted real difficulties with securing appropriate documents in sufficient time to complete an original research paper, the journal entries of students who first focused on examining possible primary sources were insufficiently detailed in order to make significant conclusions. A refined journaling assignment will be attempted in a subsequent semester. Impressionistic evidence, however, does suggest that the latter approach did result in a higher percentage of student projects which incorporated a substantial analysis of primary documents and were successfully completed in a semester.