

## **The Annual Best Senior Seminar Paper Prize Contenders 2017-2018**

The History Department has long had our graduating seniors write an extensive work of original research within the Seminars that are the capstone of the liberal arts degree. After years of being impressed with the hard work and effective histories produced by our students, we began offering a Best Senior Seminar Prize that required the faculty who taught the Seminars to nominate the best papers and a committee of other faculty to read through all the nominees and determine the winner. At times, the decisions on the winner is a difficult and divided one. We thus thought it was time to celebrate more of our students' work. With this inaugural issue, we will start an annual journal of the SUNY New Paltz History Seminar Papers. The five papers presented here were all admirable works representing intensive research, skilled writing, and clear argument. With this journal, you can see the results of an education in history at SUNY New Paltz.

The winner of the department's Best Seminar Paper Award was Dan Hulseapple. During a seminar with Professor Akira Shimada, Dan worked with Professor Akira Shimada to develop a historiographically rich and analytically sharp paper that sophisticatedly dealt with the ancient world's shortage of historical records. He sought to reconstruct the political system of the Akkadian State in third millennium BCE Mesopotamia. His analysis of inscriptions, art, and archaeological discoveries was sophisticated and deep. With a clear writing style and effective organization, Dan was able to effectively build an original historical argument over thirty-five dense pages. The committee praised his research and critical analysis. Dan has effectively cultivated an expertise in the ancient Near East as an undergraduate, preparing him well for his future career choice in antiquities law.

Marissa Alperin's paper focused on twentieth century Germany and the pseudo-sciences used to subjugate the Jewish population. Her focus on the ways German proponents of the physical culture movement othered the bodies of Jews adds to the historical understanding of the racializing practices that had devastating effects under Nazi power. Her paper was researched and written during the whole academic year with the help of a Sillins Foundation scholarship. Marissa's "Constructing Jewish Bodies in Germany through Physical Culture and Racial Pseudo-Science" both earned her high marks in Professor Hamilton Stapell's Senior Seminar on the Physical Culture Movement and became her honors thesis. Several of the committee members pointed to her work as a real contender for this year's Best Seminar Paper award.

Jessica Sommerfeldt's topic couldn't be further from Dan's, but her work too impressed the committee with its historical analysis and excellent writing. She wrote on Gerald Ford's presidency and his role in healing the United States in the wake of Richard Nixon's crimes. She sets the stage effectively by raising Ford's pardon as unimaginable as Nixon stepped down, an important political action by the new president one month later, and immediately reviled but ultimately praised by the public and public intellectuals. In an essay that covered Ford's personal history, character, and ideology, Jessica successfully and concisely contextualized one of the most controversial presidential acts in U.S. history and its aftermath. Professor Bernstein nominated her paper from his seminar and she received the next highest number of votes for the Award.

Scout Mercer holds the dual achievement of being the history department's "Outstanding Graduate" in the history major and contributing one of the top nominees for the Best Senior Seminar Paper competition. Her paper was an honors thesis and Professor Susan Lewis oversaw the work over the 2017-2018 academic year. Her topic is significant given the hundredth anniversary of women's suffrage in New York and the contemporary political debates over women's autonomy and reproductive rights; this was a significance she clearly developed by comparison of the historical rhetoric with today's. She focused on the two prominent advocates for women's rights, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Margaret Sanger. Highlighting the differences between the two, Scout effectively assessed their different impacts.

Julia Morini wrote the final 'honorable mention' paper for the department's Award competition. For a seminar on local history taught by Reynolds Scott-Childress, Julia wrote on the gendering of art by focusing on two 19th century painters. The contrast between the education, public reception, and posterity of these cousins with similar talent and background highlights how gender alone compartmentalized artists and limited their reception by art historians in the future. Her strong arguments were aided by her case study technique and familiarity with local archival resources.

We hope you enjoy!

Sincerely,



Heather Morrison  
Department of History