

# Graduate Research Guide Final Report

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**INSTRUCTIONS:** GRGs should fill out the following form and email it to [undergraduateresearch@ou.edu](mailto:undergraduateresearch@ou.edu) by **Tuesday, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016**. Please keep in mind that in addition to program evaluation, the intended audience for this document includes future GRGs and/or instructors wanting to do similar projects, so your responses should be brief and focused on what will be most useful for those purposes.

**1. GENERAL INFORMATION:**

- a. **GRG name:** Brent Purkapple
- b. **Instructor name:** Dr. Steven Livesey
- c. **Course number & name:** History of Science 3823: Science in Medieval Culture

**2. OVERVIEW:** *Provide a 1-3 sentence summary of your GRG project.*

Every student in the class completed a detailed analytical essay focused on a primary source text from the middle ages. The process was broken into distinct stages: Selection of Primary Source, Research of Pertinent Secondary Sources, and Individual Analysis. I helped with each stage, both individually as well as with five class periods devoted to developing skill with each part, known as “research days.”

**3. BACKGROUND:** *This section should give the reader just enough context to understand your project.*

- a. **Course description:** *Provide 1-3 sentences describing the course overall.*

The course was in the History of Science Department, “Science in Medieval Culture.” As such it focused both upon the culture of the medieval period as well as the development of science within it.

- b. **Typical students:** *Provide 1-3 sentences describing the typical student and their experience level doing research/creative projects.*

The typical student was either a junior or a senior, taking the course for a Gen Ed requirement. There was only one History of Science major in the course.

**4. LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

- a. **Need for project:** *Provide 2-4 sentences describing the need for the project in the class. What were students not learning before that you wanted them to learn with this project? What student struggles did the GRG address?*

A major learning goal of the project was to teach students the process of doing history. Most of the class time was intended to provide broad contextual information about the period, which provides only limited understanding of the way history is done. The individual research project was intended to teach that component, teaching students the proper steps to examine and describe a historical object.

- b. Learning objectives:** *List the learning objectives for your GRG project. Add more rows if needed.*

LEARNING OBJECTIVES "Students will understand/will be able to..."
Explain and describe a historical object.
Find pertinent secondary sources relating to their historical object.
Create a coherent essay explaining their historical object while integrating secondary sources.

**5. IMPLEMENTATION:**

- a. Activities:** *Describe the activities implemented by the GRG. What did you do with the students? Please include any materials (slides, worksheets, etc.) that others might find useful as attachments.*

The main method was individual meetings. In the beginning I helped students find primary sources in a language readable by them (typically English). Then, I helped them find secondary sources. And, towards the end, I helped them put it all together into a coherent essay. Along the way, during select class periods, Dr. Livesey and I held 5 "research days" during which we slowly guided them through this process. About 1-2 weeks after each research day, a small chunk of the project was due in order to allow Dr. Livesey and I to give feedback along the way.

- b. Activity log:** *Fill out the following table to give a general sense of how your hours were spent.*

ACTIVITY	# HOURS
1. Research question consultation.	14.75
2. Research design methodology (general).	8.5
3. Research design methodology (specific).	4
4. Refining their research process.	1.5

5. Assisting with the drafting of a final product.	
6. Assisting with the refinement of a final product.	7
7. Professional development	1
8. Coordinating instruction from other OU units (libraries, Writing Center, etc.).	1
9. Meeting/planning with main instructor of course.	4.75
10. Other (please list).	3.5
<b>TOTAL HOURS: 46</b>	

**6. DISCUSSION:**

- a. Effectiveness of research project:** *Provide a short paragraph reflecting on the student learning from the research project. How effective was the project in achieving the desired learning objectives? Were there unexpected benefits or logistical problems that you encountered?*

I think for about 25% of the class, the project was highly effective. They were interested in their topics, performed competent research, were conscientious of deadlines, and seemed to enjoy the process. For about 50% of the class I think it was a rather mixed experience. They generally met all the guidelines and did all the work, but I'm not sure they were very interested in their topics. My suspicion is that most of them were likely taking this class more because it fit a Gen Ed requirement, and less because of their interest in the medieval period. And as a result they were only minimally interested in the research process. For the last 25% I think it was a rather dismal experience. They weren't conscientious of the work, and didn't meet deadlines or basic project requirements. For them, I'm not sure they would look back on this positively. However, I'm not sure what else we could have done to help them since the success of the project depends on student engagement, and much of their struggle had to do with a lack of interested engagement.

- b. Plans for revision:** *Provide 1-3 sentences describing what changes, if any, you would make if you were to do a similar project with a class in the future.*

I found one of the biggest obstacles to be how quickly the students had to familiarize themselves with the medieval world and decide on a research topic. For some, this led to a bad selection for a research project. To help with this, I would create the assignment with a list of "sure wins" from which all students would select. If a student wanted to do something not on the list, the burden would be on them to do a lot of work early on to convince me otherwise. I think this is the difficulty of a research project in a Gen Ed class, in which most students come in without any prior background in the content.

**c. Have any other tips for future GRGs and instructors? Include them below.**

My biggest tip would pertain to whether the nature of the research project is a good fit for the GRG project. The first pertains to time and the second for the nature of the course.

- 1) Time. I was budgeted 60 hours over the course of the semester. If I were to meet with every student it would mean I would have less than 2 hours per student over the course of the semester, which I don't think is enough time to effectively mentor. Because of this we mainly opted to allow students to contact me individually, which I think only marginally works (students get busy, are fearful of contacting me). I think for effective mentoring to work at this level, some required meetings should be necessary, but seem to me to be impossible to do because of the lack of time allocation. Because of this I tried to meet with students in groups, which didn't work well because each student was working on a separate topic. As a result, I think the GRG model, with the limited allocated hours, would work best with group research projects. This would allow time both for "required meetings" as well as individual meetings.
  
  - 2) Nature of the Course. The Medieval Science course fit a Gen Ed requirement, which I think might have influenced the nature of student interest in research. My impression was that most of the students taking the course were not interested in a future of research in the history of science, but likely something else. As a result, I question whether it is beneficial to their education – in which they are already stretched among a variety of classes with other demands – to place such a big focus on a research project in a Gen Ed class. I'll admit that one misses part of the historical process without some emphasis on an individual project, but I wonder if it should receive such a large emphasis or if there would be other ways to arrive at a similar outcome.
- 7. PERMISSION:** Please indicate in which of the following ways, if any, you would be comfortable with the Office of Undergraduate Research sharing this report with others.
- a.  I am willing to have this report shared strictly with future GRGs and instructors. We would include your name with your report.
  - b.  I am willing to have this report shared with others on a public website (on OUR website, etc.). The Office will contact you and the instructor of the course for final approval before publishing content online. *Note: if you are willing to share this report on our website and have any photos of class activities, please email us those photos along with this report.*