

Institute for the Humanities
History 790
Winter Term 2010
“Getting the Colonial Documents to Speak”
Credits: 3

Meets:

Room: 2773 Haven Hall
Day: Monday: 4-7 PM

Instructor:

Jean M. Hébrard [jhebrard@umich.edu]
Office: Institute for the Humanities, 202 Thayer Street, Room 1145
Telephone: (734) 936-1680
E-Mail: jhebrard@umich.edu
Office Hours: Wednesday 2-4

Historians depend upon archives, but archives were not written for them. Each archive has an organization, an argument, and a style, which depend on the context and the purposes for which it was produced. In the colonial empires of the Atlantic World, this administrative scribal culture has a specific history of which Columbus’s notaries traveling on the Caravels and formalizing the appropriation of lands and peoples on the beaches of the New World were one of the most famous examples. The different components of colonial administration (juridical, political, religious, military, notarial) are extensions of metropolitan bureaucracies, but they also had to adapt to the specificities of colonization. Working seriously on these archives requires understanding these adaptations as well as the invention of new modalities of administration. New scribes, new written forms, new relationships between administration, population and powers emerged as experiments in colonial situations. This seminar will examine some of the most important types of documents used by historians, the social and cultural positions of those who produced them, and the political context in which they were produced. Each student will select an archive related to her or his research and write a short but intensive case study on it. Graduate students from any appropriate department welcome; advanced undergraduates admitted by permission of the instructor only. (History Department doctoral students taking the course as a “research seminar” will complete a full research paper.)

Writing assignments:

A weekly short paper on the readings (1 p. posted on C-Tools by 5PM Saturday) and a final paper on a document or documents chosen by the student in her or his own field of research.