

Familiarizing Students with Library Research: Official U.S. Government Records

Course: The Early Cold War: The Truman Presidency, 1945-53

Taught at the U.S. Naval Academy, spring semesters

Instructor: Richard Hume Werking

Meeting Pattern: Two 75-minute sessions per week for 15 weeks

Level, etc.: Sophomore research seminar, one of the approximately eight sections offered annually of “Perspectives on History”, a required course for History majors, intended to help students develop skills in critical analysis, synthesis, and written and oral communication. Sections are offered on a wide variety of subjects. The principal requirement for all sections is the researching and writing of a research paper (typically 15-20 pages) using both primary and secondary sources. In addition, I give several additional assignments designed to introduce students to various aspects of “doing History”, as William Appleman Williams put it in his entertaining OAH *Newsletter* article of 1985.

Enrollment: 12-14 students

Prerequisites: Sophomore standing, for History majors only.

HH262C
Dr. Werking

February 8, 2010

Fourth Research Assignment: Official U.S. Government Records

Your fourth research assignment, and the last one in this series, requires you to use certain official U.S. Government records.

Foreign Relations of the United States is a series of more than 400 volumes; the set constitutes the “official record of the foreign policy of the United States” and presently covers from 1861 until sometime in the presidency of Richard M. Nixon.

The volumes are shelved on the Library’s second deck at JX/A233/A3 (Alumni Hall side, only a few feet away from some seminar rooms). They are arranged chronologically. For the 1940s and 1950s, the arrangement is usually by a region of the world within a given year

Find a document in this series that interests you. It should be at least two pages long and dated sometime between 1945 and 1953. In a paragraph, summarize the document,

or a portion of it, and explain how you think it might relate to one or more important topics during the early Cold War.

Also compare your use of the paper version with using the electronic version by finding either the same document or another document on a related topic. Which format do you prefer? What are the pluses and minuses you observe inherent in the two formats? You do not need to summarize the document that is delivered electronically.

The online version is available at <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/FRUS/Browse.html>, courtesy of the University of Wisconsin library, which has digitized almost all the volumes (375 of them) that pertain to U.S. foreign policy from 1861 to 1960.

One very interesting and short document (about a page and a half) from the *Foreign Relations* series is currently the featured “classroom document” on the website of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations, at <http://www.shafr.org/>. Take a look at it.

Located nearby on the shelves, at J/80/A283, are the *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*. Published in one volume per year, these contain “the public messages, speeches, and statements of the President.” Perhaps with the help of the table of contents, find a document, or a portion of a news conference, that interests you – on any topic of your choosing for the years 1945 to 1953. In a paragraph, summarize the document, or a portion of it, and provide some commentary of your own.

An electronic version is also available for this publication. (See <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/>.) Please make the same comparison of the paper and electronic versions as you did with the *Foreign Relations* documents.

On the Library’s ground deck are the volumes of the *Congressional Record*, the day-to-day “proceedings and debates” of Congress, both House and Senate. They are shelved by the Superintendent of Documents classification system, in chronological order and with a “call number” of simply “X.” There are multiple volumes for each legislative session. (For example, “Vol. 96” for the 2d session of the 81st Congress, has 18 “parts” plus an index volume as “part 19.”) Find a set of remarks (or article or other material that has been inserted “into the record” by a senator or congressman), either by browsing or by using the index, and in a paragraph summarize it or a portion of it, and provide some commentary of your own. (See attached **example of how to use a Congressional Record index.**)

For your summaries, please focus on the content of the material and any implications you see, and also compare electronic and paper versions for the first two titles, although if you want to comment about the organization of a given volume or set, feel free to do so. In the *Public Papers*, note especially the variety of issues with which a president must deal.

Your summaries and comments for all sources should take no more than two pages. Append a short and simple set of endnotes, which can go onto a third page if necessary. Please use the following examples as guides for citing these works. Note that the only source for which I'm asking you to provide the title of the piece within the larger work is the *Public Papers*. Examples:

Foreign Relations of the United States, 1949, Vol. VIII, The Far East: China (Washington, 1978), 190-192.

"The President's News Conference of November 30, 1950", *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Harry S. Truman, 1950* (Washington, 1965), 724-728.

Congressional Record, January 5, 1951, 54-61.

For the electronic versions of *FRUS* and *PPPUS*, use the same format and add "available at" and the url, as in this example: *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1949, Vol. VIII, The Far East: China* (Washington, 1978), 190-192 [available at <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/FRUS/Browse.html>]

Your assignment is due at the beginning of class on Tuesday, February 16. Let me know if you have any questions along the way.