

Questions for Professors Welsh and McKinney

1. What is the specific assignment for this essay?

Here is the assignment (please note: the full assignment can be viewed at the end of the complete interview):

Choose a natural resource or an environmental issue in Russia and write a paper in which you discuss this issue in terms of the basic question shaping the course. That is, you must examine how geography, history, culture, and the economic and political systems have shaped the way Russians interact with this aspect of their environment, making comparisons as appropriate with the American experience.

2. How does this assignment fit with the goals of your course?

This assignment was ambitious and deliberately broad. Because we were teaching a bidisciplinary course, and because our students came from so many different disciplines, we were asking them to synthesize concepts they probably hadn't encountered in other courses. By leaving a lot of wiggle room in the topic (and by having a series of assignments leading up to the due date—paper proposal, submission of working bibliography, optional first draft), we hoped that our students would find subjects that would focus their research and inspire them to integrate the different aspects of Russia and the environment that we'd studied.

3. Why does this student's essay stand out for you as strong writing?

Julia is an excellent writer, but this paper surpassed her usual high standard. She researched her topic using a good number and variety of sources; she documented her sources carefully; she synthesized the different historical periods and disciplines covered by our course. Her argument develops beautifully: while Julia chose to structure the paper chronologically, she built each segment on the last and made sure to link each new section of her discussion to her thesis.

Above all, we were impressed by the way Julia brought a scholar's eye to a subject about which she has strong personal views. In an earlier paper for BIDS 120, Julia had written passionately about the cruelty of the fur trade, but considered only the current-day luxury-goods market. We pointed out that fur goods had not always been luxury items, and when she chose the fur trade as her final research topic, we asked her to discuss the cultural role of fur in Russia, as well as the origins of the fur trade. Reading Julia's paper, we both saw that she had learned a lot from her research. Her position on animal rights has not changed, but it has gained power. Julia presents one of the most sophisticated discussions of a complex topic we have seen from an undergraduate, and we're pleased that she has the opportunity to be recognized through "One Essay."

Questions for Julia Gibson

1. How did you go about completing this essay? What steps did you follow?

The most important step for completing this essay was making sure all my research was thorough and well organized. For my topic, research took a long time due to the interdisciplinary nature of my thesis and the amount of digging I had to do to find out information on the Russian fur trade. After I completed my research, I shifted the focus of my thesis based upon what I had learned. Most of the information I gathered was

new territory for me and this made the process more exciting. Finally, I constructed a really detailed outline of my paper complete with specific footnotes and paragraph outlines. I don't always make such involved outlines, but for this paper it was necessary due to the sheer amount of information I was attempting to include.

2. What was the most challenging aspect of this essay assignment?

For me, the most challenging aspect of any essay is actually writing it. When it comes to writing, I am a perfectionist, so I spend a lot of time on each sentence. As a result, the process of writing a good paper takes a long time. Sometimes I jump around the paper outline, upon which I graft my words, and write a few sentences or a paragraph when I feel inspired to do so. I don't limit myself to a strictly linear format, so to speak, but rather go where I think my ideas are taking me; however, I always write the conclusion last.

3. How does this essay connect to your work in the course as a whole?

My paper connects to the course because it combines Russian/Soviet cultural, historical, and economic elements in order to formulate ideas about the relationship between Russians and their environment. In addition, I greatly enjoyed incorporating the literature we used in class into my analysis of Russian culture.

4. What is the most important thing you learned from doing this essay?

The most important thing I learned from this essay is that it is so much easier to write a paper (even a long and arduous research paper) if you are interested in the subject you are exploring. The topic of the Russian fur trade might not be everyone's cup of tea; but for me, researching an industry I am so vehemently against was fascinating (even if saddening at times). I learned so much about the history of furs and was exposed to many different points of view. In my research process, I utilized information put forward by animal rights activists as well as fur industry auction houses. I am still committed to helping to end the slaughter of animals for their furs and pelts, but in order to do this I think it is important for me to learn more about the culture and history of fur. This paper helped to strengthen the foundation upon which I hope to build a lifetime of activism and scholarship.

ASSIGNMENT FROM PROFESSORS MCKINNEY/WELSH

**BIDS 120/Russia and the Environment
Professor J. McKinney/Professor K. Welsh
FINAL PAPER GUIDELINES**

Assignment

Choose a natural resource or an environmental issue in Russia and write a paper in which you discuss this issue in terms of the basic question shaping the course. That is, you must examine how geography, history, culture, and the economic and political systems have shaped the way Russians interact with this aspect of their environment, making comparisons as appropriate with the American experience.

The paper makes up 25% of your grade for the course. It should be 10-15 pages long, and should incorporate sources that we have used in class, as well as sources that you've found in your own research. You will have the option of submitting a draft of your paper for comments, then revising and resubmitting that draft. The final version of your paper will be due on Tuesday, May 9, at 11:30 a.m. in Smith Hall (Prof. Welsh's mailbox in Smith 211, the department office), though you may submit it earlier. *Graduating seniors will need to submit their papers by 4:00 pm on Saturday, May 6, outside Prof. McKinney's office in STERN HALL (Room 311)—again, early submissions are welcome!*

Timeline

- April 3 (M) Assignment and requirements given out in class
- April 5 (W) TOPIC due at the beginning of class for those who want focused library help: bring in a statement of your topic and three to five sentences that describe the questions or ideas you want to investigate.
- April 7 (F) TOPIC due at the beginning of class for those who did not submit a topic on Wednesday; we will meet in the bibliographic instruction classroom *inside the library* on the first floor. If you're not sure where this room is, ask us or ask at the information desk.
- April 14 (F) SOURCE LIST (working bibliography) due at the beginning of class. Your list should include sources from class work and *at least three sources* you've found independently. Of these three independent sources, *at least two* must be non-website sources (that is, they should be scholarly books, journals, or other periodicals).
- April 24 (M) DRAFTS due at the beginning of class for those who wish to submit them. We will make every effort to return everyone's draft, with comments, by Monday, May 1.
- May 6 (Sat.) SENIORS' DUE DATE: Submit the final version of your paper, along with your rough draft if you submitted one, by 4:00 p.m. to Stern Hall 311. NO EXTENSIONS.
- May 9 (T) EVERYONE ELSE'S DUE DATE: Submit the final version of your paper, along with your rough draft if you submitted one, by 11:30 a.m. to Smith Hall 211. NO EXTENSIONS.