Appendix 2

Article Review Assignment, Grading Rubric, Assessment

This assignment permits assessment of student abilities to identify an argument in a piece of historical writing (1d), among other things

Your article review should be around 500 words. The heading of the review should be the bibliographic citation, done in the Chicago Manual format (this is the format used by historians). I have created a link to the on-line Chicago Manual from our web site. Your review should cover these points.

1. What is the subject matter of the article? Be specific about the place and time covered by the author. If the article is about heresy in southern France between 1208 and 1226, don’t say the article is “about heresy.”

2. What is the argument presented by the author or the author’s point? Remember that scholars don’t write articles just to tell you “all about” something. Van Engen tells you many things in his article, but his purpose is to argue that although some scholars have argued that Benedictine monasticism entered a period of crisis after 1050, as new orders arose and there was considerable criticism of the Black Monks, using recruitment, revenue, the quality of personnel and leadership as measures there is reason to believe that there was not a “crisis,” although after 1150, the position of the Black Monks did slowly decline, not because of “decadence,” but because the services they had been developed to provide and their administrative techniques did not keep up with contemporary visions of what the religious life ought to look like.

3. What counter-arguments does the author acknowledge? This is tricky, because authors don’t always jump up and down to show what they are arguing against, but Van Engen does mention the work of Norman Cantor, who argued that Benedictine monasticism could no longer satisfy people searching for a rich religious experience. In your review you should summarize the opposing viewpoint, and name the people who have written in support of that viewpoint. So in the case of the Van Engen article, you might write something like “Scholars such as Jean Leclercq, Norman Cantor, Dominique-Marie Chenu and Charles Dereine have argued that there was a crisis in Benedictine monasticism from about 1050 on, which led to people establishing and entering new religious orders and criticizing Benedictine monasticism for its wealth and decadence.” Please be sure to mention the scholars who are on the “other side.”

4. What evidence does the author use in support of his or her position? You don’t need to list the individual pieces of evidence, but the types. Van Engen nicely tells you that for the first part of his study he is working with secondary sources (so the work of other scholars). For the second part of his study, he uses primary sources, the biographies of Benedictine abbots and saints, monastic chronicles, and monastic cartularies (collections of charters) from Italy, France, England and Germany.

Materials for Further Research

5. One question that the article raises in your mind.

Two works from the footnotes of the article that might be worth reading. Don’t list any works in a language that you don’t read. However, in the case of primary sources, you may find that the authors cite works in the original that are available in translation. For instance, Van Engen (n. 81) makes
reference to Radulph Glaber’s *Vita Willelmi* (*The Life of William of Volpiano*), which is available in an English translation. Please include the note number (n. #) and give the full citation. The first time a work is mentioned in the footnotes, the author will give the full bibliographic information, so you may have to go back through the footnotes to find the first citation.

**Rubric for Article Reviews**

**Subject (1 point for meeting goal)**

**Goal:** You clearly and specifically explain the subject of the essay, with explicit reference to time and geography

**Problems:** Your description is not clear
- You are not explicit about the time period covered in the article
- You are not explicit about the geographic area covered in the article
- You are not explicit about the content of the article
- You don’t do this part.

**Argument (2 points for meeting goal)**

**Goal:** You clearly explain the argument in the article, whatever its nature (analytic or descriptive) or if the article does not have a clear argument, explain what the article does do.

**Problems:** You don’t identify the argument in the article correctly.
- You don’t explain the argument in the article clearly.
- You don’t explain the argument in the article fully.
- You don’t do this part.

**Counter-argument (2 points for meeting goal)**

**Goal:** You recognize and present at least one of the positions the article argues against, mentioning at least one specific author or you correctly explain that the author of the article has not engaged the secondary literature and demonstrate this to be the case.

**Problems:** You do not recognize counter-arguments.
- You do not explain the counter-arguments well.
- You do not explain to whom these counter-arguments belong.
- You don’t do this part.

**Evidence (2 points for meeting goal)**

**Goal:** You correctly identify the types of sources that the author uses and where (the balance of primary to secondary sources is good to pay attention to: an author who uses almost exclusively primary sources is making a different sort of argument from one who engages a lot with secondary sources).

**Problems:** You have difficulty distinguishing the different types of sources.
- You are not thorough in noting the sources.
- You don’t do this part.

**Research Question (1 point for meeting goal)**

**Goal:** You present a good research question that arises from the material. Good research questions are analytic (that is, they ask why things happened in a particular way, what the relationship between things is, what the significance of particular events is, rather than calling for simple description).
Appendix 2

Problems: Your research question doesn’t require analysis.
Your research question makes unwarranted assumptions.
Your research question isn’t historical or can’t be pursued in an historical framework.
You don’t do this part.

Bibliography (2 points for meeting goal)
Goal: You select two appropriate items from the footnotes that might be useful to read.
Problems: You select an item or items that is (are) tangential to the Middle Ages.
You provide only one item.
You can’t read one or more of the items (language).
You don’t provide complete bibliographic information.
You don’t do this part.

Selection (loss of 5 points for failing to meet goal)
Goal: You have selected a scholarly article or a chapter from a scholarly book.

Score:

Student Performance on Article Reviews across the semester

Each of the lines represents the number of students who achieved each goal on each article review. This assessment does not show what the students did when they didn’t achieve the goal, but the rubric allows access to that information. The assessment reveals that students are having great difficulty with the notion of the "research question" and that these difficulties were more or less unbudgging across the semester. The dip on the fourth assignment is interesting: students were beginning a new paper. It was also mid-semester. This group of (300-level) students did not have much difficulty identifying the argument of an article anyway--200-level students have much more difficulty--but more students got it by the end of the semester than had it at the beginning.