HIST 200: The Past in the Present

Sample Syllabus

Note: Supplemental information regarding course requirements is posted on the course WebCampus site. Students should read the material on WebCampus as well as this syllabus in the first week of class and check the site at least once a week for new information and announcements that will be added during the semester.

Instructor Information

Name:
Office location:
Mailbox:
Office hours:
Phone:
E-mail:

Course Description and Core Objectives

This course introduces students to the ways studying history helps us to understand current conditions that affect our daily lives. From debates over immigration and health care to global capitalism and terrorism, everything has a history, and learning about the ideas, people, and events that created the structures of modern societies enables us to make sense of the world and our place in it. The course draws on the expertise of multiple faculty members in the History department to examine a broad range of topics of local, national, and international concern, including the management of public lands, racial and ethnic conflicts, LGBT struggles for equality, the impact of the tech revolution, threats to the environment, and the legacies of colonialism and decolonization. Through readings, lectures, discussions, class activities, and their own research, students will develop an awareness of the historically contingent nature of things they previously took for granted. They will also learn how to investigate the historical origins of contemporary phenomena themselves in order to understand how the past remains present in modern life.

Historical scholarship involves systematic enquiry into the lives of individuals, communities, regions, and nations through finding, interpreting, and analyzing written and cultural sources. These sources help us to theorize and reach reasoned conclusions about why people acted as they did and how their actions affected historical developments. Researching past events and the lives of people who lived through them thus generates important insights that can help us to understand the world we live in today. Historians employ a process based on the scientific method that involves carefully collecting and analyzing information, identifying patterns, making logical arguments supported by evidence, and documenting sources so that their research can be replicated and checked by other scholars. At the same time, the complex and occasionally ambiguous meanings that can be attached to historical sources may generate competing theories, interpretations, and methodologies for understanding the past. Students in this course will be exposed to a variety of approaches, evaluate their uses, and learn how to identify appropriate analytical tools for their own research.
This course satisfies Core Objective 11 of the Silver Core Curriculum:

**CO11. Global Contexts:** Students will apply and evaluate modes of academic inquiry, creative expression, or results of research to problems in historical and contemporary global contexts. Students will articulate connections among local, national, and international contexts and evaluate the ways that historical and contemporary global influences affect their current situations.

In addition, HIST 200 helps students to develop the skills described in Core Objective 1 (Effective Composition and Communication), Core Objective 2 (Quantitative Reasoning), and Core Objective 3 (Critical Analysis and Use of Information). These objectives are reinforced throughout the curriculum in other courses students take to fulfill core and major requirements. Through the assigned readings, essays, class discussions, group activities, and research projects, students will practice critical thinking and communication skills that can be applied in other academic and professional contexts. Students will also have opportunities to apply mathematical skills by finding, interpreting, and making appropriate use of quantitative sources such as census data, graphs, and statistics.

**Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) and Correlation to Core Objectives (COs)**

Students successfully completing this course will be able to:

1. explain the origins and historical development of current social conditions in a variety of local, national, and international contexts (CO11)
2. find and use historical scholarship and sources to investigate and make sense of contemporary human societies and behavior (CO2, CO3, CO11)
3. interpret, analyze, and synthesize various types of primary and secondary sources, including cultural artifacts and quantitative data (CO2, CO3)
4. present ideas in a clear and persuasive manner both orally and in writing, in accordance with the ethical principles governing scholarly inquiry (CO1, CO3)
5. compare and evaluate different theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of history (CO3)

You may notice that the abbreviation SLO followed by a series of numbers appears on some course materials. This simply means that the lecture, discussion, assignment, or other activity offers opportunities for students to practice skills related to the learning outcomes listed above (e.g., “SLO 1, 4” means the activity builds your knowledge of historical developments that shaped current social conditions (SLO 1) and requires you to present ideas orally or in writing (SLO 4)).

**Required Reading**

*Books to be purchased:*
Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001)

*Articles and selected chapters from other books posted on course WebCampus site:*
PBS, *Mystery of a Masterpiece* (video)

**Assessment**

Students will receive grades according to how well they complete the following tasks:

- **Class participation**:
  - 20 percent
- **Assignments (due in class on dates noted in the schedule)**:
  - 20 percent
- **Reading quizzes (submitted through WebCampus before each class)**:
  - 20 percent
- **Student research forum**:
  - 20 percent
- **Individual research project**:
  - 20 percent

**Class participation**

This course will be taught in a lecture/discussion format. We will spend some time discussing the reading assignments in each class period. It is therefore very important that you complete these before the days they are assigned. Students who have not done the reading will find it hard to contribute to discussions, and this makes up a significant part of your grade.
I will post guidelines and questions to consider for each week’s material in the Class Guides folder on the course WebCampus site to help you prepare for discussions. Students are also welcome to raise questions of their own regarding the reading assignments and lectures.

You may miss two class periods during the semester without penalty. After that, failure to attend class will result in zero participation points for the day. **Excessive absences from class can significantly affect your participation grade.** See “Participating in Discussions” in the Course Mentor folder on WebCampus for more information about how class participation will be graded and how to participate effectively.

**Assignments**

The four short assignments are designed to guide you through the process of developing a topic, locating and analyzing sources, and synthesizing information that you will complete as part of your individual research project. You will also use these skills to prepare for the student research forum scheduled in Week 8. The short assignments should be 1–2 pages long, typed and double spaced, and written in clear, scholarly prose. Details for each assignment are provided below in the Weekly Schedule.

It is very important to **complete all of the assignments.** Failure to do so will result in 3 percentage points being deducted from your final research project grade for each assignment missed. Assignments are due during the class period of the date they appear on the class schedule. No late assignments will be accepted unless you can demonstrate, with specific evidence, extenuating circumstances.

**Reading quizzes**

Beginning in Week 5, I will post a short quiz to WebCampus for students to complete before each class (one or two questions relating to the assigned readings for that day). These will be based on the reading guidelines and questions to consider that I will give you in the Class Guides for each week. Each quiz will be graded out of 2 points.

**Student research forum**

The research forum is a collaborative investigation of a topic that students will choose themselves at the start of the semester. Each student will locate, read, and analyze one primary source and one secondary source on the topic, then share the results of their research with the rest of the class during the forum. We will then discuss students’ findings, critically analyze competing theories and interpretations, and synthesize what we have learned.

**Individual research project**

Throughout the semester you will work on a research project investigating the history of an aspect of contemporary society that you would like to better understand. You may present the results of your research in the form of an essay or in an alternative format such as a website, documentary film, news report, artwork, or performance. However you choose to present it, you must demonstrate both your knowledge of the topic and mastery of the historical research skills you learned in the first few weeks of the course.
Grading Criteria

Grading criteria for written work are set out below. Students should also read and follow the guidelines set out in “Advice for Writing Assignments and Essays” and “Common Problems in Student Essays” in the Course Mentor folder on WebCampus to ensure they meet the highest standard possible in their written work.

A– (90–94%), A (95–100%)
A is for work of exceptional quality. This grade is for essays that present a clear thesis supported by persuasive evidence and analysis, logically organized, and free from typing or grammatical errors. The A essay does more than just competently summarize material from the readings or lectures. It shows the student has thought things through on a deeper level and offers his or her own perspective on the topics under consideration.

B– (80–82%), B (83–86%), B+ (87–89%)
B denotes work that is above average in quality. It demonstrates that the student knows and understands the material covered in class, and that s/he is capable of synthesizing it into a competent essay. It is accurate, detailed, and well organized, with an introduction, a thesis, and a conclusion.

C– (70–72%), C (73–76%), C+ (77–79%)
C is given for work that is average. The student shows familiarity with the material and is mostly accurate, but the paper lacks detail or effective organization. The C essay might make general points but fail to support them with specific evidence, or it might be merely a collection of facts, with no coherent theme or thesis. You can pass the course with this kind of work, but you should aim higher.

D– (60–62%), D (63–66%), D+ (67–69%)
D is given for work that is inadequate. It omits important points, contains more than a few inaccuracies, and is badly organized. It suggests that the student has not been paying much attention to the course or is having problems understanding the material. If you receive a D grade for a writing assignment, please come and see me for help. I will do everything I can to assist students who want to work to improve their grades.

F (less than 60%)
F is for work that is not acceptable. It demonstrates that the student has no idea what the course material is about, suggesting a lack of interest or effort and possibly some absences from class. Students who do the reading and come to class regularly rarely receive an F. If you think you have been trying hard and you get an F on an assignment, I encourage you to come to me for help.

Deadlines and Policies Regarding Missed Work

Writing assignments and essays are due in class on the dates indicated in the Weekly Schedule below. Late assignments and papers will be penalized (3 points deducted from your grade for the late work) unless you have contacted me before or on the due date to arrange an extension. There are ways to make up for points lost for late work or absences and to earn extra credit points to improve your grade—see “Policies Regarding Missed Work” in the Course Mentor folder on WebCampus for more information.
Academic Dishonesty

I expect all students to do their own work in this course unless I have specifically assigned a group activity or project. Copying someone else's work, or allowing your own work to be copied, is dishonest and unfair to other students who are striving to complete assignments and essays on their own.

The university’s Academic Standards policy states:

Academic dishonesty is against university as well as the system community standards. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following:

Plagiarism: defined as submitting the language, ideas, thoughts or work of another as one's own; or assisting in the act of plagiarism by allowing one's work to be used in this fashion.

Cheating: defined as (1) obtaining or providing unauthorized information during an examination through verbal, visual or unauthorized use of books, notes, text and other materials; (2) obtaining or providing information concerning all or part of an examination prior to that examination; (3) taking an examination for another student, or arranging for another person to take an exam in one's place; (4) altering or changing test answers after submittal for grading, grades after grades have been awarded, or other academic records once these are official. . . .

Sanctions for violations of university academic standards may include the following:

(1) filing a final grade of “F”; (2) reducing the student’s final course grade one or two full grade points; (3) awarding a failing mark on the test or paper in question; (4) requiring the student to retake the test or resubmit the paper.

Copying someone else’s entire paper or article is a clear example of academic dishonesty, but note that plagiarism can take other, less obvious forms as well. “Language, ideas, thoughts or work of another” includes any material used in your assignments and essays that was written or produced by others. Using brief phrases or sentences from books, articles, internet sites, documents, or other sources without letting your reader know where they came from is a form of plagiarism. You must properly acknowledge your use of other people’s words by placing them in quotation marks and citing all sources used in your paper. Even if you paraphrase someone else’s ideas and do not quote them directly, you must still indicate where those ideas came from. Citations should also be given for little-known facts and statistics.

Any student found violating academic standards in this course will receive a zero for the assignment in question. A second offense will result in an F in the course. In addition, all cases of academic dishonesty are reported to the Office of Student Conduct and become part of the student’s academic record. Potential employers as well as the directors of graduate and professional programs to which students may apply can request copies of these records, in which case the academic dishonesty charge will be disclosed.

Academic Success Services

Your student fees cover use of the Tutoring Center, the University Writing Center, and the Math Center. Students are encouraged to take advantage of these services as needed.
Students with Disabilities

The University of Nevada, Reno is committed to equal opportunity in education for all students, including those with documented physical disabilities or documented learning disabilities. If you have a documented disability and will be requiring assistance, please contact the instructor or the Disability Resource Center (Thompson Building Suite 101) as soon as possible to arrange for appropriate accommodations.

Audio and Video Recording

Surreptitious or covert video-taping of class or unauthorized audio recording of class is prohibited by law and by Board of Regents policy. This class may be videotaped or audio recorded only with the written permission of the instructor. In order to accommodate students with disabilities, some students may be given permission to record class lectures and discussions. Therefore, students should understand that their comments during class may be recorded.

Submissions to The Montag

The Montag is a student-edited undergraduate research journal that publishes essays, art, creative writing, and other work by students taking courses in the College of Liberal Arts. Submissions to The Montag are accepted any time and may be e-mailed to themontag@unr.edu.

Weekly Topics and Reading Schedule

Part I—The Historian’s Craft

Week 1
SLOs: 3, 4, 5
August 27  Introduction: What do historians do?
August 29  Versatile minds: Thinking like a historian
☐  Howell and Prevenier, From Reliable Sources, 1–42

Week 2
SLOs: 3, 4
September 3  Witnesses to the past: Analyzing primary sources
☐  Howell and Prevenier, From Reliable Sources, 43–68
September 5  Narrators and interpreters of the past (and present): Evaluating secondary sources
☐  Howell and Prevenier, From Reliable Sources, 69–87
☐  Assignment 1: Think of a history book or article that you particularly enjoyed reading and write a 1–2 page essay explaining why you liked it and analyzing its value as a
piece of historical scholarship. If you can’t think of a scholarly book you liked, you may use a historical film, novel, documentary, website, or other secondary source for this assignment.

**Week 3**  
SLOs: 3, 4, 5  
September 10  
Link responsibly: Making sense of quantitative data  
September 12  
Rap and research: What historians can learn from popular culture  
☐ Davidson and Lytle, *After the Fact*, Ch 17

**Week 4**  
SLOs: 2, 4, 5  
September 17  
Historiography (because even history has a history)  
☐ Howell and Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*, 87–118  
September 19  
Resources for historical research in the UNR library  
☐ Howell and Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*, 119–150  
☐ **Assignment 2:** Think of a current issue or aspect of contemporary life that you would like to investigate through historical research. Write a 1–2 page paper summarizing what you already know about this topic and what more you would like to find out.

**Part II—Close to Home: Families and Communities in Historical Context**

**Week 5**  
SLOs: 2, 5  
September 24  
Local history resources at UNR  

September 26  
Finding your roots through oral history  
Presenter: Dr. Anita Watson

**Week 6**  
SLOs: 1, 2, 3, 4  
October 1  
The myth of the traditional family  
☐ Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 23–41  

October 3  
Gender and sexuality in Latin America  
Presenter: Dr. Linda Curcio  
☐ **Assignment 3:** Prepare an annotated bibliography of primary and secondary sources (at least three of each) that could help you to understand the contemporary issue you have chosen to investigate through historical research. List each source in accordance with the conventions for citing sources set out in the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Include a brief description of each source and explain why you think it will be useful for your project. (Note: You do not need to read every source before this assignment is due—you only need to identify some sources that seem likely to contain information related to your project.)

**Week 7**  

8
SLOs: 1, 3, 4, 5

October 8    Why Visit the Grave(s)?
             Presenter: Dr. Elizabeth Raymond
             Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 61–101

October 10   U.S. Public Lands: Origins and Problems
             Presenter: Dr. William Rowley

Part III—Law and Society: Making (and Breaking) Boundaries

*Week 8*
SLOs: 1, 3, 4

October 15   The Italian Renaissance through the Mind of Leonardo Da Vinci
             Presenter: Dr. Kevin Stevens
             PBS, *Mystery of a Masterpiece* (video)

October 17   Fakes, Frauds, and Forgers: The Galileo Affair
             Presenter: Dr. Bruce Moran
             Schmidle, “A Very Rare Book”

*Week 9*
SLOs: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

October 22   A Short History of Hacking
             Presenter: Dr. Christopher Church
             Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 17–29

October 24   Student research forum

Part IV—Born This Way?: Historical Perspectives on Difference, Inequality, and Oppression

*Week 10*
SLOs: 1, 3, 4

October 29   Where does racism come from?

October 31   Making illegal immigrants: The criminalization of Asian and Latino migration
             Presenter: Dr. Meredith Oda

*Week 11*
SLOs: 1, 3, 4

November 5   Beyond Same-Sex Marriage: LGBT Radicalism from the 1960s to Today
             Presenter: Dr. Emily Hobson

November 7   Class warfare: The two Americas of Reagan and *Roseanne*
             Ehrenreich, “The Wretched of the Hearth,” 28–31
Assignment 4: Submit an outline of your research project along with a one-paragraph summary of your findings and thesis. Include a bibliography of all sources you have consulted for your project so far.

Part V—Legacies: Global pasts and contemporary problems

Week 12
SLOs: 1, 3, 4
November 12 Medieval Roots of Modern Conflict
Presenter: Dr. Ned Schoolman
☐ Medieval Sourcebook, “Urban II, Speech at Council of Clermont”
☐ Al Jazeera America, “The Enduring Influence of the Crusades”

November 14 What Irish History can Teach Us about Terrorism
Presenter: Dr. Dennis Dworkin
☐ English, Terrorism, 56–118

Week 13
SLOs: 1, 3, 4
November 19 AIDS: a Legacy of Imperialism and Stigma
Presenter: Dr. Martha Hildreth
☐ Aberth, Plagues in World History, 135–178

November 21 Nelson Mandela and the New South Africa
Presenter: Dr. Charles Tshimanga-Kashama
☐ Thompson, History of South Africa, 265–296

Week 14
SLOs: 1, 3, 4
November 26 Will China Destroy the World, or Save the World? (Presenter: Dr. Hugh Shapiro
☐ Elvin, Retreat of the Elephants, 9-39

November 28 Thanksgiving—No class

Week 15
SLOs: 1, 3, 4
December 3 Why Won’t Putin Go Away? The Historical Conundrum of Russian Leadership Succession
Presenter: Dr. Barbara Walker
☐ “The Twelve Labors of Putin”
☐ Gessen, Man Without a Face, 11–42
☐ Individual research project due

December 5 Slavery and its Resurgence
Presenter: Dr. Cameron Strang
☐ Gould, “Slavery’s Global Comeback”

Week 16
SLOs: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

December 10  Student research presentations

December 17  Student research presentations
Note: This class takes place in the final exam period, 5:00–7:00 pm