

HIST 382: Modern Classics of Historical Writing

Grinnell College, Spring 2023

Meeting times TBD according to student and instructor schedules

Syllabus subject to change

Assistant Professor Catherine Chou (choucath@grinnell.edu)

Office Hours: TTh 2:30-4:30 p.m. and by appointment. [Sign up here](#)

Course Description¹

This course will introduce students to some of the most important themes, debates, and scholars in the field of history from the late nineteenth through the twenty-first centuries. We move chronologically and thematically through the evolution of historiographical trends and paradigms, *and* through specific historical content. We start with French social history in the late medieval era; then cover the English, French, and Scientific Revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; then examine ways of writing global history of the early modern era; and finish off with a discussion of the new field of 'big history'.

The class will follow a tutorial method, based on the system of graduate education at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, to provide students with advanced work in critical reading, analytical writing, and the cogent expression of ideas. We will meet every week in small groups of two or three to discuss our readings and review papers. (You will write review papers every other week, and comment on your classmates' papers in the intervening weeks.)

Attendance and Participation Policy (15% of total grade)

As this is a tutorial-style class, attendance is critical. By signing up for the course, you are committing to attending class each session with your partner(s). If you must miss a day for illness, a school-approved trip, etc., we will work together to meet at another time in the week, subject to your partner's or partners' schedules. Online sessions are also an option due to the pandemic. [Please prepare for every class by checking the class Google Doc for announcements, reminders, and specific reading assignments.](#) So that we can stay nimble, I will post guiding questions on the Google Doc to help you through the reading.

Required Readings

We will read 13 or 14 books over the course of the semester - not always in their entirety, but enough of each that I would like us to have hard copies. These books are all classics of modern

¹ The language of the course description and structure of the assignments are adapted from syllabi by my colleagues Professors Ed Cohn and Pablo Silva, who taught this class in previous years. I am in their debt.

historiography and are generally available in used copies; if it is feasible, I urge you to consider purchasing hard copies of all of them to keep on your bookshelves.

Cost is of course a factor, however. Thus:

1. If Burling has a hard copy (or two), I have requested it to be put on course reserve. We are a small group, so I ask you to share the copies with one another.
2. Most of the books are also available in online versions via JSTOR or ACLS.
3. **Still, there are a few books that either Burling does not have a copy of and/or that are not available in any sharable digital format. These are highlighted in yellow and include our earliest readings. As soon as possible, please purchase hard copies of these books for yourself and/or make copies of the books by borrowing them from Course Reserves at Burling. This is very important and will ensure you will be ready to go for the start of the semester.**

Accommodations

If you have any documented needs that require accommodation, please do not hesitate to let me know. [More details are available here.](#)

Honor Code

Please familiarize yourself with the Grinnell Student Handbook honesty policies and abide by them.

Written Assignments

Review Papers – 50% of total grade (10% x 6 papers, but lowest grade is dropped)

You will be asked to submit *six review essays* (~1200 words each) and *one revised essay* this semester. Each review essay must have a title, footnotes, and a bibliography. The bibliography is not included in the word count. This means that after the first week you will be writing an essay every second week. (I will drop your lowest grade when determining your overall score. Thus, in practice, you can complete five essays instead of six.) **Please submit your essay to your tutorial partner and to me at least 24 hours before your tutorial. During the semester, you can have one “grace period” for submitting your essay late *and* finding an alternate time for meeting with your partner, if necessary.** Beyond that, late assignments will be docked one third of a grade for every two hours they are late.

Each review essay should:

1. Identify and unpack the historiographical and methodological aims of the author. What *new* objective are they trying to achieve with their book? How does their book fit within or challenge the existing scholarship and scholarly approach to a topic?

2. Summarize and explain the main *arguments* of the book
3. Identify and explain how the author builds their arguments (What do their case studies prove? What is their evidence base – and how are they interpreting this evidence, and why?)
4. Connect this week’s reading to previous ones (this may be more or less applicable depending on the week)

Peer Review – 25% of total grade

During the weeks when you are not writing an essay, you will provide feedback to your tutorial partner on their paper. This feedback will take the following form:

1. Give the professor and the student an annotated copy of the essay. Please line edit for spelling and grammar, as well as suggesting alternate ways of phrasing awkward passages. **Photocopy or print your annotations, bring them to your tutorial, and give copies to both your partner and professor.**
2. Separately, please
 - Briefly describe what your tutorial partner argued in the essay
 - Note one thing that they did successfully
 - Does the paper do an accurate and effective job of describing the ideas of the historians you read this week?
 - Take note of one part of the essay that could be clearer, more convincing, or more effective in some other way, along with a suggestion for what they should do next time.
3. Write down **two questions** about the class session’s reading material. At least one of those queries should be a direct question to your partner about her or his essay. The other(s) could be general questions about the historical writing we will be examining.

Your feedback will be evaluated according to the following Yes/No rubric. Each “Yes” will get you one point out of a possible five for the assignment.

- Did the feedback make **accurate** corrections with respect to the paper’s prose?
- Did the feedback **identify** the argument of the essay?
- Did the feedback offer at least **one positive comment**?
- Did the feedback offer at least **one (constructively) critical comment and helpful suggestion** for implementation in future essays?
- Did the feedback include a **pertinent question**?

Schedule of Readings

Week One

Introduction

Week Two

[Novick, *That Noble Dream*](#) (online access also available)

Week Three

[Ladurie, *Peasants of Languedoc*](#) (the John Day translation)

Week Four

[Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*](#) (used copies available from Amazon and AbeBooks)

Week Five

Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (please purchase the [Penguin edition](#))

Week Six

[Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*](#) (online access also available)

Week Seven

[Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*](#) (Burling has two copies; online access also available)

Week Eight

[Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*](#) (online access also available)

Spring Break

Week Nine

[Hunt, *Family Romance of the French Revolution*](#) (online access also available)

Week Ten

[White, *Metahistory*](#) (used copies available from Amazon and AbeBooks)

Week Eleven

[Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*](#) (Kistler has three copies; online access also available)

Week Twelve

[Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*](#) (online access also available)

Week Thirteen

[Richards, *The Unending Frontier*](#) (online access also available)

Week Fourteen

[Lewis and Wigen, *Myth of Continents*](#) (online access also available)