HSTA 501.01: Readings in Early American History

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Approaches and Methods to Early American History

HSTA 501 | Spring 2017
Tuesday 3:00-5:50pm | Liberal Arts (LA) 250

Professor Claire Arcenas | claire.arcenas@umontana.edu | office: LA 261
office hours: Mondays 1:30 pm – 3:30 pm and by appointment

Course Description:
This course will introduce you to some of the major historiographical questions and problems in early American history, spanning roughly the period between 1500 and 1860. Each week we will read a book that approaches a major historical theme, topic, or question from a particular vantage point, employing a particular methodology. The emphasis will be on learning how to analyze historical arguments, both in class discussion and in written work. The course will proceed chronologically, but is organized thematically, with each week’s main reading illustrating a particular methodological approach to the topic at hand. Therefore, each week, students should come to class prepared not only to discuss the content and argument of the reading, but also to analyze the author’s methodological approaches and source base, as well as the persuasiveness of the author’s argument(s).

Required Texts:
Please note that all texts are available for purchase at the UM bookstore. You may find, however, that Amazon or other options have cheaper copies or used copies for sale. The books are also on a 4-hour (unrestricted) course reserve at the Mansfield Library.
**Assignments, Expectations, and Grading:**
You will be evaluated on these five equally weighted components.

1. **Discussion and weekly discussion questions:**
   Your attendance and thoughtful, engaged participation are mandatory. In addition to your attendance and participation, for all classes for which you are not leading the discussion (see #2), you need to distribute via email (or Google Docs link TBD) to the class (including me) a list of **three to five discussion questions** on the reading, by 3 pm the Monday before class. Please read those of your classmates before class; they will help form the basis for that day’s discussion. You should still circulate discussion questions on the main reading when you are presenting on a book from the further reading section (see #3).

2. **Discussion leader (x 2 for graduate students, x 1 for undergraduates)**
   On the first day we meet, you will each choose one or two weeks to lead or co-lead our discussion. Before you lead discussion for the first time, please arrange to meet with me to go over your plans for the day. Your goal as discussion leader is to facilitate our conversation about the book we are reading. In my meeting with you, we can discuss particular strategies for doing so.

3. **Oral presentation and 1000-word book review (x 2) on book from further reading:**
   On the first day we meet, you will each choose TWO weeks in which to give an approximately 15-minute oral report on a book in the “further reading” section. When it is your day to give your presentation, you will also write an approximately 1000-word paper (double-spaced, 12-point font, with 1-inch margins) that reviews your chosen book. (If you are looking for a model, you might find it helpful to consult the featured reviews section of *The American Historical Review*, for example. You may also consider putting your book in conversation with the main reading for the week.) This book review will be due in class on the day you present. Even if it is your day to give the presentation, you should also have done at least some of the main reading for that day and will submit at least a few discussion questions.

4. **State of the field overview essay **Due in Class on Tuesday, March 28**
   Select a peer-reviewed academic journal in your field that you’d like to spend some time reading. Once you have chosen the journal, familiarize yourself with the articles that have been published in it in the last 5 years. Based on your reading of these articles, in an approximately 5-page (double-spaced, 12-point font, with 1-inch margins) paper, offer your assessment of the state of your field. What general trends do you notice? Are certain topics appearing with great frequency/infrequency? You should cite at least 5 articles in your assessment. We will talk more about this assignment in class.

5. **Final historiographical essay **Due Date TBD**
   For your final paper, you will write a 6-8-page historiographical review essay (double spaced, 12-point font, 1 inch margins) of three to four related books on a topic of your choosing. The books do not have to appear on this syllabus, nor do they have to concern topics we’ve covered in class; the only limitation is that the books be on North American/Atlantic history from roughly 1500 to 1860. Your essay should place all of the books you choose into a single analytical conversation and advance a historiographical argument.
You should consult with me by April 25th about what books you will be using. On the first day of class we'll choose partners. Please make arrangements outside of class to exchange a draft with your partner to get comments. We will talk more about this assignment in class.

**General Assignment/Attendance Policy**

If you must miss a class meeting, please speak with me in advance of the day you will be absent. Any unexcused absence will negatively impact your grade. Please respect deadlines for assignments and papers. I cannot accept late papers without a doctor's note or another verified emergency.

**Academic Honesty:** Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with UM’s Student Conduct Code and conducting themselves accordingly. Academic dishonesty, including plagiarism and cheating, will result in appropriate disciplinary action and possibly a failing grade. An easy rule to follow is that all work you produce for this class should be your own.

**Students with Disabilities:** As per university policies, appropriate accommodations will be made. To ensure that the proper steps can be taken, please speak with me as early in the semester as possible. It is your responsibility to speak with the professor and to provide the proper documentation from Disability Services for Students (DSS). You can visit [www.umt.edu/dss](http://www.umt.edu/dss) for additional details and information.

**Weekly Reading and Discussion Topics:**

**Week 1 (January 24): Webs of Empire**

**Discussion Leader: Claire**

Everyone reads:

**Please complete this week’s reading ahead of our first meeting.**
**No further reading this week.**
**In class today, we will also do three things:**
1. Assign presentation days;
2. Determine partners for review of your final essays;
3. Discuss general guidelines for book reviews and in-class presentations.

**Week 2 (January 31): New England Religions**

**Discussion Leader: Claire**

**Presentation: Liz**

Everyone reads:
Further reading:

**Week 3 (February 7): Evaluating Non-Humans as Historical Actors**

**Discussion Leader: Bob**
**Presentation: Joel**

**Everyone reads:**

Further reading:

**Week 4 (February 14): Histories of Slavery**

**Discussion Leader: Kylie**
**Presentation: Johnny (on Morgan) & Molly (on Brown)**

**Everyone reads:**

Further reading:

**Week 5 (February 21): Native and Middle Grounds**

**Discussion Leader:** Liz  
**Presentation:** Kylie

**Everyone reads:**

**You might also find it useful to glance at “Forum: The Middle Ground Revisited,” William and Mary Quarterly 63:1 (2006): 3-96.**

**Further reading:**

**Week 6 (February 28): Revolutions in (Legal and Intellectual) Authority**

**Discussion Leader:** Molly  
**Presentation:** [open, if anyone wants to change]

**Everyone reads:**

**Further reading:**

**Week 7 (March 7): How Revolutionary Was the American Revolution?**
Discussion Leader: Kylie  
Presentation: Liz (on Bailyn) & Bob (on Nelson)

Everyone reads:  


Further reading:  

**Week 8 (March 14): What is Economic History? Is this it?**

Discussion Leader: Claire  
Presentation: Joel

Everyone reads:  

Further reading:  

**Spring Break: Work on State-of-the-Field Journal Review**

**Week 9 (March 28): Writing (about) the Constitution**

Discussion Leader: Joel  
Presentation: [Open, if anyone wants to change.]
Everyone reads:

Further reading:

**Week 10 (April 4): Women's Histories and Microhistories**

Discussion Leader: Johnny
Presentation: Molly

Everyone reads:

Further reading:

**Week 11 (April 11): Biographies of Early America(ns)**

Discussion Leader: Johnny & Joel
Presentation: [open, if anyone wants to change]

Everyone reads:

Further reading:
**If you are presenting this week, or would like to write about biography and its relationship to our study of the past, I would recommend you take a look at the following as well:

- *Becoming Historians*, eds. James M. Banner, Jr. and John R. Gillis (2009)

**Week 12 (April 18): Rethinking the History of Empires**

**Discussion Leader: Bob**

**Everyone reads:**

**No presentations:**
We'll spend a few minutes talking about your final historiographical essays and reflections on the state of the field.

**Week 13 (April 25): Agency and Institutions in Antebellum America**

**Discussion Leader: Molly**
**Presentation: Johnny (Stansell) & Bob (Rockman)**

**Everyone reads:**

**Further reading:**

**Week 14 (May 2): Making Sense of Reconstruction**

**Discussion Leader: Liz**

**Presentation (on West): Kylie**

**Everyone reads:**

**Further reading:**