

HIS 5810: Proseminar in Premodern History

Spring 2024

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Office Hours: TTh 3:00-4:00, W 2:00-4:00 (Central Time), and by appointment

Note: I will be holding office hours on Zoom, using the following link:

<https://eiu.zoom.us/j/98079699121?pwd=OHZsamQxMEtFV2JycDh1RnZZaGxzdz09>

Catalog description: Introduction to major problems and historiographical debates in premodern world history up to 1700. The course offers broad preparation for the MA comprehensive examination in the field of premodern world history.

Texts (from Textbook Rental)

Dunn, Ross E., Laura J. Mitchell, and Kerry Ward, eds. *The New World History: A Field Guide for Teachers and Researchers*. 2nd ed. Oakland: University of California Press, 2016.

Geary, Patrick J. *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.

Scott, James C. *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017.

Additional materials on D2L and the web (see bibliography below).

Course Goals: At the end of this course, you will be able to

1. Identify and explain key political, economic, social, and cultural events and developments in world history up to 1700. (That is, you will develop and demonstrate deep content knowledge, as per Graduate School Learning Goal 1.)
2. Understand, analyze, and evaluate major interpretations and historiographical debates in premodern world history. (You will develop and require critical thinking and problem solving skills, as per Graduate School Learning Goal 2.)
3. Plan and execute a research project relating to a major question in premodern world history and convey your own interpretation of events and/or analyses of historiography. (You will develop and demonstrate advanced scholarship through research, as per Graduate School Learning Goal 3.)
4. Convey various types of historical analysis and interpretation through effective writing and oral communication. (You will develop and demonstrate effective communication skills, as per Graduate School Learning Goal 4.)
5. Demonstrate ethical and professional responsibility in the practice of history, maintaining integrity in scholarship and research practices, cultivating respect for diversity and inclusion, and showing a commitment to respectful and responsible discourse. (Ethical responsibility corresponds to Graduate School Learning Goal 5.)

Grading:

Discussion Posts		Short Papers (2):	20%
Initial Questions (1 per week):	10%	Final Exam:	25%
Follow-up Posts (2 per week):	15%	Final Project:	30%

Grading Scale: 90-100 = A, 80-89 = B, 70-79 = C, 60-69 = D, 0-59 = F

Technology Issues: I'm happy to help you with some technology issues, but in general your best bet is to consult Campus Technology Support: Phone: (217) 581-4357; Email: support@eiu.edu; Twitter: [@EIU ITS](https://twitter.com/EIU_ITS); Web: <https://www.eiu.edu/panthertech/>.

Navigating D2L: The easiest way to find your way in the course is to click on "Content" in the Navbar. Also important will be "Discussions" under "Communication."

Netiquette: Student interaction is essential in an online class, but in the process it is important to maintain the proper tone. First of all, everything you write should be regarded as a formal contribution to class and should be written in proper English. Do not treat your discussion board posts, e-mails to me, and anything else as a text message. Secondly, no doubt there will be ideas on which there is disagreement. That's great when it happens. You have the right to disagree with your fellow students and with me. However, in doing so, it is absolutely essential that you remain respectful. No name calling, insulting language, or derogatory comments will be permitted in any exchanges. If you disagree with someone's assessment, it's fine to point that out in a respectful manner, and preferably by presenting evidence.

Explanations of Assignments

Discussion Posts: There are three posts you'll need to do in Weeks 1-14:

First, after reading the week's assignments, please think of a question that you think will help us better understand the readings. It should not be too broad but respond to the arguments made in the readings. These questions are due every Thursday at the end of the day (midnight). Please try not to ask the same question as others have, meaning you should review the Discussion Board before submitting your question. After all questions have been posted, I may wish to add one or two, which I will do every Friday, as applicable (I will also make some general suggestions about approaching the readings before the start of the week). Please limit yourself to one question per week. You're always welcome to ask me as many as you want outside the Discussion Board.

Second, you will make two more posts, both due on Sunday (e.g., January 14 for Week 1). You have several options. You will answer any two questions posed, other than your own. Or you will respond to two answers, including any to your own question if you wish. Or you will answer one question and respond to one answer. Any combination each week is fine, and you may post additional responses if you wish, which I hope will encourage good dialogue. I will grade what I deem your highest-quality posts.

Under each topic, instead of a written post, you're welcome to post a video. If you choose the latter, follow the procedure described in the "How to Upload Videos" video in the "Start Here" folder. Grading of your entries will be based on the following rubric:

Score (out of 10)	Question	Follow-up Post
9-10 points	This top-level score means that your question is well thought out and shows familiarity with the assigned material. You express yourself clearly, with few or no problems with grammar and mechanics.	This top-level score means that your response is detailed, substantive, well-reasoned, and well-supported by evidence (showing familiarity with assigned texts). You have written (or spoken) several sentences to form at least one full paragraph. You demonstrate excellent understanding of the issues at hand. You have no major factual errors. You express yourself clearly, with few or no problems with grammar and mechanics.
7-8 points	Questions earning this score could be a little more substantive but still demonstrate engagement with the material. There may be minor problems with content (factual errors) and clarity.	Answers earning this score could be somewhat better, in terms of substance and length. There may be minor problems with content (factual errors) and clarity.
5-6 points	Questions earning this score veer toward the superficial, irrelevant, vague, and/or unclear but may still contribute to discussions.	Five or six points are assigned if relatively little effort is made in answering a question. This includes answers that are vague and/or unclear and far short of a full paragraph (or the oral equivalent).
0-4 points	Few or no points are assigned when no question is provided or is completely inadequate in terms of substance or clarity.	Few or no points are assigned when no answer is provided or is completely inadequate in terms of substance, clarity, and/or length.

Short Papers: The specific parameters of the short papers will be determined closer to their due dates, but in general these will potentially involve a closer reading of a few sources than weekly discussion affords or possibly a synthesis of different ideas discussed in recent weeks. The due dates for the two short papers given below are *very* tentative. More details to come.

Student-led Comprehensive Exam: All of you will collaborate to write a number of comprehensive exam questions (the number to be determined), using a common platform such as Google Docs or some such (TBD). Then, during Final Exam week, you will write individual essay answers to two examination questions, which will be emailed to you. This exam exercise is designed to help you prepare for your Response Essays in the capstone course, if you're in the teacher option program, or your MA Exams, if you're in the traditional MA program.

Term Project, a choice between

- 1. Research Proposal:** This is not a research paper per se but rather a mock research proposal for a major paper on a premodern issue or era. What historical question do you want to answer? How will you frame it? What will be its scope? What primary and secondary sources will you need and why? In short, this project will require you to call on the training received in this course for studying the premodern era.

or

- 2. Syllabus:** This option has much of the same endgame as the research proposal. If you choose this one, you will prepare a syllabus on a premodern issue or era. Assume a standard university course with 150 minutes of instruction per week for 15 weeks followed by a final exam. In general this theoretical course should have a strong sense of

narrative, showing cause and effect, chronology of events, etc. It must include a course description, course learning goals, a course outline divided into units/topics, primary source and secondary work readings, and explanations of the assignments. Again, what is the question, how will you frame it, etc.?

Academic Integrity: Students are expected to maintain principles of academic integrity and conduct as defined in EIU's [Code of Conduct](#). Violations will be reported to the Office of Student Accountability & Support. Additionally, serious violations such as plagiarism may result in a course grade of F. All writing assignments are scanned with plagiarism software.

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Tentative Schedule (subject to change):

You are responsible for keeping track of all assignments and due dates. Any changes will be announced ahead of time.

Week 1 (Jan 8-14)

Opening Volley: Questions of Periodization, Global Premodern History, and Eurocentrism

Readings: Bentley 2016; Northrup 2016; Christian 2016; Maza 2017: 1-9; Mac Sweeney et al. 2019; [Kennedy 2017](#)

Due Dates: Questions (Jan 11), Follow-up Posts (Jan 14)

Special Introductions: By this week please post a short video introducing yourself in the "Student Introductions" forum in the Discussion Board. Instructions for uploading videos are provided in the "Start Here" folder on the course page. This is the only required video in this class.

Week 2 (Jan 15-21)

Braudel and the Premodern

Readings: Braudel 1977: 3-35, 39-75; Vries 2012; Allardyce 2016; McNeill 2016

Due Dates: Questions (Jan 18), Follow-up Posts (Jan 21)

Week 3 (Jan 22-28)

Landscaping the State I: The Earliest States and Teleologies

Readings: Scott 2017: 1-115

Due Dates: Questions (Jan 25), Follow-up Posts (Jan 28)

Week 4 (Jan 29 – Feb 4)

Landscaping the State II: Barbarians to the Rescue?

Readings: Scott 2017: 116-49, 183-256; Moyn 2017

Due Dates: Questions (Feb 1), Follow-up Posts (Feb 4)

Week 5 (Feb 5-11)

Ethnicities and Origins I

Readings: Hall 1997: 1-16, 34-66; Geary 2002: 1-119

Due Dates: Questions (Feb 8), Follow-up Posts (Feb 11)

Week 6 (Feb 12-18)

Ethnicities and Origins II

Readings: Geary 2002: 120-74; Bachrach 2003; Davies 2004; [Ramey 2018](#)

Due Dates: Questions (Feb 15), Follow-up Posts (Feb 18)

Week 7 (Feb 19-25)

Technology, Property Law, and Feudalism

Readings: Abels 2009; [Cheyette and Hyams \(online\)](#); Roland 2003; Wickham 2021

Due Dates: Questions (Feb 22), Follow-up Posts (Feb 25); **Short Paper #1 due** (in the Dropbox on D2L, Feb 26)

Week 8 (Feb 26 – Mar 3)

Medieval Islam: Historical Questions

Readings: Donner 2010a; Donner 2010b: 39-89; Amitai 2006; Rapoport 2005: 1-30, 69-88

Due Dates: Questions (Feb 29), Follow-up Posts (Mar 3)

Week 9 (Mar 4-10)

Renaissances

Readings: Melve 2006; Moore 2007: 1-44, 144-71; Rubin 1990; Mignolo 1992

Due Dates: Questions (Mar 7), Follow-up Posts (Mar 10)

Week 10 (Mar 11-17)

Reformations: Community and The Individual

Readings: [Ginzburg 2015a](#); [Ginzburg 2015b](#); [Ginzburg and Gundersen 2003](#); Holt 2003; Shedd 2007

Due Dates: Questions (Mar 14), Follow-up Posts (Mar 17)

Spring Break: March 18-22Week 11 (Mar 25-31)

Imperialism and (De-)Colonization

Readings: Burnard 2007; Restall 2012; Altman and Wheat 2019; MacDonald 2019; Farnsworth 2019; Loomba 2014

Due Dates: Questions (Mar 28), Follow-up Posts (Mar 31)

Week 12 (Apr 1-7)

The Transatlantic Slave Trade

Readings: Harms 2002: xi-xxi, 295-324; Smallwood 2007: 1-8, 101-35; Stone 2019;
<https://www.slavevoyages.org/>

Due Dates: Questions (Apr 4), Follow-up Posts (Apr 7); **Short Paper #2 due** (in the Dropbox on D2L, Apr 8)

Week 13 (Apr 8-14)

War and the Early Modern State

Readings: Ertman 1997: 1-34; Pincus and Robinson 2016; Tilly 1990: 67-95

Due Dates: Questions (Apr 11), Follow-up Posts (Apr 14)

Week 14 (Apr 15-21)

“Revolutions”: En Route to Modernity?

Readings: de Vries 1994; Hacking 2012; Shapin 2018: 1-14, 119-65

Due Dates: Questions (Apr 18), Follow-up Posts (Apr 21)

Week 15 (Apr 22-28)

This week will be devoted to final preparations of your term projects and completion of student-led comprehensive exam questions.

Apr 29: **Term Project due** (in the Dropbox on D2L)

Week 16 (Apr 29 – May 3)

During this week, you will write your final exam, answering two questions selected from those previously developed by you and your fellow students. These questions will be emailed to you by April 29 if not sooner.

May 2: **Final Exam Answers due** (in the Dropbox on D2L)