

**COMPREHENSIVE COURSE SYLLABUS**

**AMERICAN STUDIES**

**FALL**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course examines American History from the arrival of the first Europeans to the late nineteenth century. It presents the origins and evolution of American government, economic life, and society in an interdisciplinary context and emphasizes the critical analysis of quantitative, textual and visual primary sources, as well as the construction of valid arguments, written and oral. In this way, it prepares students for the academic challenges of university and the civic responsibilities of maintaining the republic.

**INSTRUCTOR(S):**

- Name(s): P.Kearney, C. Skinner, E. Smith
- Email address(es): pkearney skinner, esmith,

**COMMON TEXTS AND MATERIALS**

Online materials (e.g. *Digital History Reader*, *History Sourcebook*, *ABC-Clio*).

Ver Steeg and Hofstadter, *Great Issues in American History*, Vols. 1 and 2.

Gary Nash, *American Odyssey*.

**ESSENTIAL COMMON CONTENT**

The units will address the following four themes:

- I. The Coming of the American Revolution
- II. The Revolutionary War and the Constitution
- III. The Coming of the Civil War

**The skills common to this course are:**

1. Reading for meaning
2. Expository writing
3. Oral communication
4. Research
5. Appropriate technology use
6. Responsible citizenship

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## **The common habits of mind derived from the core competencies will be:**

1. Approach questions from an interdisciplinary perspective.
2. Study problems, not eras.
3. Recognize the existence of multiple perspectives.
4. Construct graceful generalizations.
5. Engage in public discourse in an atmosphere of ethical pluralism and mutual respect.
6. Evaluate the quality of evidence drawn from varied media.
7. Respect the integrity of the academic behavior.
8. Define ethical behavior in theory and in context.

## **Outcomes:**

In this course students will:

### I.

A. Develop automaticity in skills, concepts, and processes that support and enable complex thought by:

Synthesizing and assessing information and ideas into a cogent argument in papers, presentations, maps, and discussions.

B. Construct questions which further understanding, forge connections, and deepen meaning by:

Collaborating with peers, and discussing material in class, in order to build an understanding of history and to synthesize data into logical assertions.

C. Precisely observe phenomena and accurately record findings by:

Evaluating historical and contemporary interpretations of event, by compiling data, and by analyzing primary sources.

D. Evaluate the soundness and relevance of information and reasoning by:

Critically evaluating and synthesizing information used to form arguments in research papers; Drawing conclusions from primary sources; Evaluating the reasonableness of ideas presented in literature and discussions; Evaluating underlying assumptions of documents.

### II.

A. Identify unexamined cultural, historical, and personal assumptions and misconceptions that impede and skew inquiry by:

Discussing ideas in class and reflecting upon instructor comments on papers or in class in an attempt to resolve differing conceptions involved in the production of a research paper or in conclusions drawn from documents in class discussions.

B. Find and analyze ambiguities inherent within any set of textual, social, physical, or theoretical circumstances by:

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Evaluating the underlying claims of historians, commentators, cartographers, and others as well as the sources for those claims.

## III.

A. Use appropriate technologies as extensions of the mind by:

Using computers for completing work, finding materials, collaborating, constructing maps, websites, and/or data sets.

B. Recognize, pursue, and explain substantive connections within and among areas of knowledge by:

Connecting concepts between disciplines; Drawing upon earlier learning experiences in a new context.

## IV.

A. Construct and support judgments based on evidence by:

Drawing appropriate conclusions and making generalizations based on reliable information in both discussions and writing.

B Write and speak with power, economy, and elegance by:

Communicating effectively in formal written work; Asking questions and explaining answers during discussions.

## V.

A. Identify, understand, and accept the rights and responsibilities of belonging to a diverse community by:

Working with all students in the class and contributing fairly to group projects, and overtly reflecting upon one's place in the larger society.

B. Make reasoned decisions which reflect ethical standards, and act in accordance with those decisions by:

When appropriate, submitting work representing individual student effort and giving due credit where it is necessary.

## **INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN AND ASSESSMENT**

Group projects, library research, reading, and discussion will accompany each of these themes. Each quarter there will be at least two short formative assessments (e.g. reading quizzes, map activities,) and two longer assessments papers, reenactments and an in-class examination. American Studies has traditionally required about 3 ½ hours of homework a week.

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## **STUDENT EXPECTATIONS**

**Attendance:** Attendance policy in this class is consistent with that contained in your Student Handbook.

**Tablet Use:** In-class tablet use for anything other than assigned class work will result in a loss of participation points for the day. This includes viewing Facebook or other social networking sites, checking PowerSchool or e-mail, IM-ing, taking phone calls, or *viewing any other material not pertinent to current classroom discussion*.

**Respect Accorded Students and Faculty:** Courtesy and respect to each other and to the instructor should be maintained at all times in both e-mail correspondence and in class. The right to dissent shall not be stifled, but the need to reflect and articulate intelligently is also demanded. Questions should be directed toward the instructor. Class debates should address the issue at hand and its supporting evidence, not differences in student personalities.

## **GRADING**

**Assessments:** Assessments in the class fall into four basic categories: quizzes, papers, plays, and in-class examinations. Papers and examinations are weighted equally. Student participation in discussion and collaborative work forms the final part of the students' grade.

## **LATE WORK**

Be on time and turn in assignments on time. Back up your files! Use a USB drive. There are no extensions except in the most unusual of circumstances (and with the explicit instruction of Student Life).

## **COLLABORATION**

Every member of a group is responsible for collaborative assignments. This means that not only is each member responsible for knowing what the other members have found in their research but the resulting final assignment is expected to be turned in on time and with all necessary parts. Each individual grade is affected by the collective effort.

## **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND PLAGIARISM**

If you complete written work at the last moment, the temptation to pass off other people's work as your own is great. All of the work you turn in should be your own. Claiming as your own the work of others, in whole *or in part*, will result in an immediate F for the assignment and referral to Keith McInstosh for disciplinary action.

See the IMSA Student Handbook for specific details and be sure to refer to the IMSA [Chicago Style](#) website for written assignments.

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## COMMON ASSESSMENTS

### 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter **The Origins of the American Revolution**

The American Revolution is an event of global historical importance. Everyone knows it matters. Just why it happened, however, is less well understood. Dark legends about cruel taxation and oppression tend to obscure the complex tangle of motives which drove events: Was it a religious war? Was it a conflict over British Indian policy? Or was it, ironically, a war over the right to be “English?” Students will research and discuss a particular aspect of the Revolution they believe the most important cause. Student performance will be measured by the use of appropriate SSL-based modes of thought, analysis, and communication. The paper will call upon the students to use primary source quotation and specific evidence to argue their case and proper footnotes to document their sources.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter **The Revolutionary War and The Constitution**

In this assessment, students will take an in-class written examination on the Revolutionary War and its impact on the origins and structure of the Constitution. It will consist of identifications and a short essay written against the clock demonstrating their grasp of the conflicts and compromises which went into the drafting of the document and how both shaped the structure and functioning of our government to the present day. The test will also provide an opportunity to learn the skills necessary to survive the dreaded “Blue Book” examinations which they will encounter in college: how to prepare, how to recover from a panic attack, how to circumlocute effectively when an immediate answer doesn’t come to mind.

### **What were the Origins of the Civil War?**

In this assessment, the students will explain the coming of the American Civil War and its consequences. Was the war about the preservation or abolition of slavery? Was it, as Karl Marx thought a “tariff war” fought over America’s commercial relationship to the British Empire? Was it a conflict between Alexander Hamilton’s vision of America vs Thomas Jefferson’s. Was it fought to prevent racial equality? Rather than seeking a “correct” answer, the students will use the question to explore one of these themes. Viewed in this way, the outcomes of the war must be measured differently as well. There is, as above, no “correct” answer to this question. Student performance will be measured by the use of appropriate SSL-based modes of thought, analysis, and communication. It will also depend upon the accuracy and detail of their evidence, appropriate use of primary sources, and correct use of citation.