Readings in Early American History

Assigned Readings. (Unless otherwise noted, all titles are available at the University Bookstore and the Durham Book Exchange.)


Course Description.

This colloquium provides an introduction to the scholarly literature on American history from the colonial period to the age of Jacksonian democracy. Over the course of the semester, we will explore a number of the major interpretive conventions that historians have used to understand the social, political, economic and cultural development of the societies that eventually became the United States. As part of our discussions, we will consider both the Britons and other Europeans who established English-speaking colonies on the North American mainland, and the indigenous and African peoples whose experiences have bulked so large in academic writing over the last two generations. Throughout, our goal will be to gain a better understanding of how the historiography of early America has evolved in recent years and where it seems to be headed.

Organization and Requirements.

Class Participation.

Class participation is an essential part of the course, and the first of the colloquium’s requirements is to come to each meeting having completed all the required reading and prepared to engage constructively in group discussions. In addition, you will each have the opportunity to help set the agenda for several weekly discussions. You will do this, first, by making a presentation based on a five-page review essay of the week’s assigned reading (discussed below). That presentation should lay out questions that the other members of the colloquium can discuss. In addition, each member of the class will make brief presentations (during different weeks) of two of the Recommended books from the course syllabus, each of which should be based on a two-page book review (also discussed below). Finally, each member of the class will make a brief report of one of the chapters from the Greene and Morgan volume on Atlantic history that we will be reading on September 8. I will circulate a sign-up sheet during our first meeting for the Review Essay, Book Review, and Greene and Morgan presentations. Taken together, your participation in class, including your oral presentations, will account for 10% of your total grade. I will evaluate each on a system of “checks,” with a “check” signifying full credit, a “check plus” outstanding work, and “check minus” work that is substandard, carelessly prepared or late.
Review Essay.

In advance of the class when you make your presentation, you are each expected to write a review essay on the assigned reading for that week of approximately 5 double-spaced typed pages. These essays can follow a number of formats. In addition to summarizing the arguments of the weekly reading, you may use your essay to respond to questions that the books and articles seem to raise, relate the assigned readings to issues and topics from other weeks, or even draw on insights from adjacent fields. You may also discover that your response to the readings occasionally changes as a result of our discussions in the colloquium, in which case I welcome you to revise them with marginal notes. The important thing is to write a coherent, well-organized essay that engages with the readings in a lively and analytical fashion. I will assign each essay a letter grade, and that grade will count for 20% of your total grade.

Book Reviews.

On two separate weeks, you will write a two-page review of one of the Recommended books for that week. The format of your review should follow the standard form used by reviewers in major journals such as the William and Mary Quarterly, the Journal of the Early Republic, and the American Historical Review. If you are unfamiliar with how to write a book review, I would encourage you to consult one or more of those journals. Book reviews will be due on the day of the class where you are making your presentation. Each review will count for 10% of your total grade.

Historiographical Essay.

The colloquium’s final requirement involves writing an essay of approximately 15 pages that discusses a particular issue or problem in the historiography of Atlantic studies in Britain and/or America. Although you may make liberal use of the assigned readings, your essays should also reflect a substantial amount of outside reading. In choosing your topic, you are free to write on anything within the broad parameters set by the colloquium. The final draft of this paper will count for 50% of the final grade.

Incompletes.

As a rule, it is in your own best interest to complete all written assignments on time. Under unusual (and rare) circumstances, I will consider awarding an Incomplete, provided the student speaks with me in advance. But please note that the granting of Incompletes is entirely at the instructor’s discretion. Also, the University Registrar will automatically award an “F” for any Incomplete that has not been converted to a letter grade by a specified deadline during the following semester. If you receive an Incomplete, the responsibility for keeping track of this deadline and finishing all the course requirements on time is yours. You should also bear in mind that if you turn in a paper late, you may have to wait a considerable period of time before you get it back with your grade, and my comments will be brief.

Course Outline

Abbreviations:  [B] — readings are in the Reading folder on the course Blackboard site.
[JSTOR] — readings are in the JSTOR database on the UNH Library portal.
[Project Muse] — readings are in the Project Muse database on the UNH Library portal.

Sep 1  Introduction

Sep 8  Atlantic History and Beyond


Reports:  Sign up during class on Sep 1 for a short presentation on one of the following chapters in Greene and Morgan, eds. Atlantic History:  Greene and Morgan (introduction), Bushnell, Morgan, Wood, Greene, Canny, and Coclanis.

Recommended:  Jo Guldi and David Armitage, The History Manifesto (2014), [B].
Sep 15  
**The Ecology of Settlement**

Recommended:

Sep 22  
**The Rise of Slavery**

Recommended:

Sep 29  
**Religion**

Recommended:

Oct 6  
**Refinement**

Recommended:

Oct 13  
**Indians and The West**

Recommended:

Oct 20  
**Prologue to Revolution**
Required: Edmund and Helen Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*; “Still a Prologue?” Ask the Author Forum, *Commonplace*, vol. 16, no. 1 (Fall 2015), [LINK].

Recommended:

Oct 27  
**Republicanism**

Recommended:
Nov 3  **American Empire**

**Recommended:**

Nov 10  **NO CLASS — UNH FOLLOWS WEDNESDAY SCHEDULE**

Nov 17  **Women in the Early Republic**

**Recommended:**

Nov 24  **The Market Economy**

**Recommended:**

Dec 1  **Slavery and Disunion**

**Recommended:**

Dec 8  **The Civil War**

**Recommended:**

Dec. 15  **HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY DUE BY NOON, TUESDAY, DEC 15**