

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY  
**HISTORY 600/HIST SCI 555**  
Fall 2025 SEMINAR TOPICS

## Instructions & Guidelines

The History 600 & History of Science 555 seminars offered by the Department of History in Fall 2025 are listed below. All of these research seminars require instructor permission to enroll. Please read the course descriptions carefully and begin contacting faculty as soon as possible once you have found the seminar that you would like to take. We do not allow students to request permission from multiple instructors at the same time, so please make your choice early and only contact another instructor if you are unable to get a seat in your first-choice course. When an instructor gives their permission to have you in the course, you can be sure that your seat is reserved. Shortly before enrollment begins, you will also receive a confirmation email from Scott Burkhardt letting you know that instructor permission has been entered into the enrollment system. At that point, you should be set to enroll when your appointment arrives. Up-to-date information on the availability of seats in each of these seminars is available on the department's [website](#).

In your emails to professors, please include the following information:

**1) Subject Line: History 600 (or Hist Sci 555) Seminar**

Emails titled in this way are more likely to receive a timely response.

**2) 10-Digit Campus ID#**

This is very important, as permission to enroll cannot be entered without your 10-digit campus ID number, so any delay in getting this information could delay your enrollment in the course.

**3) Why you are interested in the course**

In the course information, some professors have more-specific instructions and ask for additional information, so be sure to address those items as well.

**Important:** History 600/Hist Sci 555 seminars are open to History majors and History certificate students who have completed a History 201/Hist Sci 211 course. If you have not declared the History Major or the History Certificate, you must do so before you will be authorized to enroll in a seminar. See the [History Advising page](#) for information about who to contact to declare the major and certificate.

## HISTORY 600-002

### Genocide, War Crimes Trials, & Human Rights in the 20th Century

Professor Brandon Bloch  
Monday 1:20-3:15pm

**Students interested in this course should contact Professor Brandon Bloch via email ([bjbloch@wisc.edu](mailto:bjbloch@wisc.edu)) with their campus ID number, major(s), year in college, and a brief description of their interest in the course.**

Why do genocides happen, and how should the international community respond? What motivates the states that target minority or indigenous groups for annihilation, and the perpetrators who carry out genocidal policies? What should happen to the perpetrators in the aftermath of genocide—should they be summarily executed? Put on trial (by whom)? Allowed to reintegrate into society? Why are certain acts of state violence defined as “genocide” or “crimes against humanity,” and others as legitimate military operations? How can egregious violations of international law be prosecuted given the unequal distribution of power in the international state system?

This seminar explores these questions, and many others, by examining the international tribunals created in response to five twentieth-century genocides: the Armenian genocide, the Holocaust, the Cambodian Khmer Rouge, the Rwanda genocide, and the mass killings during the Yugoslav wars. We will investigate how these tribunals shaped ideas about human rights and humanitarian intervention, and why they so often proved controversial. The focus of the course is on the trials themselves—their origins, operations, and legacies—but we will also seek to understand the underlying causes of genocide. In addition to analyzing historical works and first-person accounts of war crimes tribunals, there will be numerous chances to work with trial documents. During the second part of the course, students will write an original research paper on one of the cases studied in class (or a different case in consultation with the instructor). We will devote significant class time to discussing possible topics and primary sources, and to practicing the research and writing skills necessary to succeed on the final paper.

**Please note that this History 600 seminar will only be open to junior and senior History majors and History certificate students.**

## **HISTORY 600-003**

### **Creative Historical Writing**

Professor Emily Callaci  
Monday 1:20-3:15pm

**Students interested in this course should contact Professor Emily Callaci via email ([ejcallaci@wisc.edu](mailto:ejcallaci@wisc.edu)) with their campus ID number, major(s), year in college, and a brief description of their interest in the course.**

As historians, we care about getting the facts about the past right; but to what extent is imagination and creativity also part of the historian's craft? Should historians write in the first person, making themselves be part of the story they tell about the past, or should they aim for an impartial "objective" perspective? How do journalists, playwrights, tv writers, or novelists use archives and historical expertise in crafting compelling stories? To what extent can historical fiction be "true?" This class invites students to explore creative writing as a mode of exploring and communicating about the past, and to experiment with different genres in their own historical writing. Together, we will read and compare how writers across various genres write about the past. By the end of the semester, each student will develop and complete their own original historical writing project in a genre of their choice.

# **HISTORY 600-004**

## **Middle Ages in Film**

Professor Elizabeth Lapina  
Wednesday 11:00am-12:55pm

**Students interested in this course should contact Professor Elizabeth Lapina via email ([lapina@wisc.edu](mailto:lapina@wisc.edu)) with their campus ID number, major(s), year in college, and a brief description of their interest in the course.**

In this course we will watch, read about and discuss a series of films on various medieval subjects. Some of these films will be blockbusters, but most will be films that are little known to the general public. Some of them will be recent, but most will date from the middle to late 20th century. Some of them will be American, the rest European and Asian. We will gain an awareness of medieval realities and medieval texts on which these films are based. However, we will move beyond simply noting whether each film is offering a faithful or an unfaithful representation of historical events and will attempt to understand what attracted modern filmmakers to medieval history in the first place and what concerns – be they artistic, political, social, religious, etc. – made them represent it in the ways that they did. Two topics in particular will be at the center of our discussion: violence and gender. The students will have to choose a film, a cluster of films, or a topic that runs across a series of films, which they will analyze in their essays and oral presentations.

## HISTORY 600-008

### Baseball & Society since WWII

Professor David McDonald  
Tuesday 1:20-3:15pm

**Students interested in this course should email Professor David McDonald ([dmmcdon1@wisc.edu](mailto:dmmcdon1@wisc.edu)) with their campus ID number, major, year in college, and a brief description of their interest in the course, accompanied by a list of related courses they have taken. Those interested in the class and seeking more information can also arrange a mutually agreeable meeting time with Prof. McDonald, using the email given above.**

This seminar will involve participants in a semester-long discussion of the ways in which Major League Baseball has both reflected and shaped broader currents of social, cultural, political and economic change in American society since World War II. Thus, rather than understand baseball's history in terms of pennant races, players' statistics or the other considerations that often arise in the daily press, this seminar asks students to understand baseball—and, by extension, sport in general—in the contexts that have shaped it throughout its development. Seminar participants will benefit in particular from the perspectives of Allan H. Selig, whose involvement in these events included his role in his ownership of the Milwaukee Brewers, having brought the team to Milwaukee, and culminating in his becoming the longest-serving Commissioner of Major League Baseball, from the early 1990s until 2015.

The seminar will consist of weekly discussions of pivotal topics or moments in post-war baseball history. These subjects will run a gamut of such likely topics as the role of race/ethnicity, a changing media landscape, the game's geographical expansion, labor relations, baseball's economic footprint on the nation and in localities, shifting relations between the sport and government, as well as prominent controversies over the course of the last seven decades. As preparation for discussion, students will read a set of sources assigned weekly by the instructors. Participation in discussion of the weekly readings accounts for a large part of the final grade. As a *research* seminar, the course's other major component will be a research paper of 20-25 pages on a topic of the student's choice, using the abundant primary and secondary resources available in the Wisconsin Historical Society holdings, as well as other sources that students identify.

## **HISTORY 600-009**

### **The Supernatural in Early Modern Europe**

Professor Eric Carlsson  
Wednesday 8:50-10:45am

**Students interested in this course should contact Professor Eric Carlsson via email ([eric.carlsson@wisc.edu](mailto:eric.carlsson@wisc.edu)) with their campus ID number, major(s), year in college, and a brief description of their interest in the course accompanied by a list of related courses they have taken.**

The historical record of early modern Europe is rife with accounts of the supernatural. Stories abound of healing miracles, apparitions, demonic possession, witchcraft, levitations, bilocations, and more. Yet this period—shaped by the Scientific Revolution, Enlightenment, and rising skepticism—also witnessed intense debates over the relationship between matter and spirit and the possibility of supernatural activity, whether demonic or divine. In recent years, historians have renewed their focus on the role of the supernatural in early modern history and the debates it sparked at the time. In this seminar, we will engage with contemporary scholarship alongside case studies from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Through engagement with primary and secondary sources, students will explore key debates, participate in discussions, and write an original research paper (approximately 20 pages) on a topic of their choosing.

# HISTORY 600-011

## International Law: An Errant History

Professor Allison Powers Useche  
Tuesday 1:20-3:15pm

**Students interested in enrolling should send Professor Powers Useche ([auseche@wisc.edu](mailto:auseche@wisc.edu)) with their campus ID number, major(s), year in college, and a brief description of their interest in the course.**

Is international law dead? It would be understandable to come to such a conclusion. Powerful states violate international legal prohibitions with impunity. Authoritarianisms reign rampant. Corporations carve out special economic zones through which to remain insulated from democratic accountability. But this is not to say that international law plays no meaningful role in shaping global power relations. Tracing theories and practices of supra-national legality from the early modern law of nations to the present day, this seminar investigates how contests over international legal concepts, frameworks, and institutions have shaped global power struggles. Methodologically we will draw on a range of approaches to interrogate international law's entanglements with colonialism and racial capitalism--and to explore how social movements of varying commitments have invoked international law in the service of particular political projects. Along the way we will encounter unexpected legal theorists, confront surprising coalitions of claims-makers, and uncover forgotten alternative visions of international justice. Transiting errant trajectories of international law, we will analyze the historical origins and ongoing implications of contemporary debates over the laws of war, human rights, self-determination, investment law, and more. As participants in the capstone seminar, students will produce an original work of historical scholarship in the form of an article-length essay advancing a historical argument supported by analysis of primary and secondary source evidence.

# HISTORY OF SCIENCE 555

## Green Colonialism in the Middle East

Professor Daniel Williford  
Thursday 1:20-3:15pm

**Students interested in this course should contact Professor Williford via email ([daniel.williford@wisc.edu](mailto:daniel.williford@wisc.edu)) with their campus ID number, major(s), year in college, and a brief description of their interest in the course. Interested students are also welcome to come to Professor Williford's office hours on Zoom, Tuesdays 1-3pm (<https://uwmadison.zoom.us/j/5727060556>)**

This course offers an introduction to the environmental, cultural, and political history of colonialism in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Today the MENA region is experiencing a series of overlapping crises and conflicts. War, climate change, displacement, and new struggles over energy and resources are remaking not only geopolitical relations but also material environments and ecologies. Many scholars and activists from the Middle East and North Africa have recently adopted the term “green colonialism” to make sense of how these intersecting crises are entangled with the long history of European imperial interventions in the region. Today this term is tied to calls for environmental justice and critiques of new forms of resource extraction, but when and where does the history of “green colonialism” begin?

This course will explore a diverse range of topics that connect the environmental history of the region to wider social, political, and cultural changes. How did the trans-Saharan slave trade, for example, produce new understandings of knowledge and nature? How did the colonial encounter with European empires transform local ways of navigating ecologies? How has Islamic jurisprudence approached questions of environmental preservation over time? How did the rise of new infrastructures for resource extraction, especially for fossil fuels, remake state structures and political projects? The goal of this course is to help students develop a deep historical understanding of how knowledge, nature, and the lasting legacies of imperial interventions have shaped North Africa and the Middle East. This will also involve reflecting on the contemporary stakes of this question not only in the region but also in a broad global context.

Students in this course will be given the opportunity to sharpen their analytic skills through close readings of primary and secondary sources. They will also produce a final paper based on original research on a topic related to the themes of the course and will draw upon online archives available through the UW-Madison Library as well as open-source collections.