

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
HISTORY 600/HIST SCI 555
Spring 2027 SEMINAR TOPICS

Instructions & Guidelines

The History 600/Hist Sci 555 seminars offered by the Department of History in Spring 2027 are listed below. All of them 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 receive permission from multiple instructors at the same time, so please make your first 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 Seminar" (or "Hist Sci 555 Seminar," if appropriate)-** Emails titled in this way are more likely to receive a timely response.
- 2) **10-Digit Campus ID# with no spaces-** 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: These 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 600-001
The Supernatural in Early Modern Europe
Professor Eric Carlsson
Wednesdays 8:50-10:45am

The historical record of early modern Europe (c. 1500-1800) is replete with accounts of the supernatural. Stories abound of healing miracles, apparitions, demonic possession, levitations, bilocations, and more. This was also an age of religious reformations, scientific revolution, and Enlightenment, marked by intense debates about the nature and reality of supernatural activity, whether diabolical or divine. In recent years, historians have renewed their focus on the place of the supernatural in early modern culture. They are re-examining long-held narratives about “disenchantment” and secularization in the period, while also rethinking how we make sense of past experiences that people claimed went beyond the ordinary.

In this seminar, we will delve into this fascinating world together, engaging contemporary scholarship that focuses on case studies from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. You will explore key historiographical debates, make oral presentations, and contribute actively to class discussions. The central project of the course is a substantial research paper of about twenty pages on a topic of your choice. The seminar’s goal is to help you think historically about the place of the supernatural in early modern culture while building your skills as a researcher and writer.

Students interested in enrolling should email Professor Carlsson (eric.carlsson@wisc.edu) with their campus ID number, whether History Major or Certificate student, year in college, and a brief description of their interest in the course accompanied by a list of related courses they have taken.

HISTORY 600-002
U.S. Cold War Culture
Professor Cindy I-Fen Cheng
Tuesdays 1:20-3:15pm

What does the Godzilla, Spider-Man, atomic bomb shelters, jazz diplomacy, and the Montgomery Bus Boycott reveal about the beliefs and ideas of U.S. society during the Cold War? In our study of U.S. Cold War culture, we look at the activities of everyday people and highlight how the music, art, and stories they created, including the daily choices they made such as where to sit on a bus, shaped and transformed U.S. society during the 1950s and 60s. We also investigate how elected officials utilized the cultural production of everyday people to promote U.S. foreign policy goals and showcase before an international audience the superiority of U.S. democracy over communism. Far from being an era of cultural conformity, we develop U.S. society during the Cold War as an era of transformation and contested notions of social belonging. Ultimately, the goal is to inspire you to design your own research topic using the culture of everyday people and examine what it reveals about the values and beliefs of a society.

Students interested in this course should contact Professor Cheng via email (cicheng@wisc.edu) with their campus ID number, whether History Major or Certificate student, year in college, and a brief description of their interest in the course.

HISTORY 600-003
Migration and Me: Researching Family Stories
Professor Kathryn Ciania
Tuesdays 11:00am-12:55pm

Many of us have heard stories about the movement of our parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents from place to place – and even from continent to continent. Such histories of migration, whether within or across international borders, are always personally dramatic: people flee persecution or move for economic advancement; they leave behind loved ones and attempt to make a new life in a new place; they miss home and then ask themselves what “home” even means. Stories of migration become lodged into family lore; they frequently act as myths about what families mean to their members, even if we are not entirely sure exactly how, why, or even if these events happened.

While genealogical research is often the work of non-professional historians, this class allows students to situate characters from their own families within the broader historical contexts to which those people belong. During the first half of the semester, students will read examples of this genre of history; learn how to work with internet-based genealogical search engines, such as ancestry.com, Ellis Island records, and national censuses; practice scouring local and national newspapers; explore the best practices for conducting oral histories with family members; and discuss how they might analyze treasured family objects. In the second half of the class, students will write a research paper, reconstructing the experiences of family members – living or dead – and using those people’s stories as a lens through which to explore larger issues linked to migration, such as class, nationalism, racism, war, gender, borders, and citizenship. Along the way, we will discuss the excitements and challenges of this kind of historical detective work, the ways in which it affects our personal sense of identity, and how revelations about family history might inform contemporary debates about migration in the United States and beyond.

Students interested in this course should contact Professor Ciania via email (ciancia@wisc.edu) with their campus ID number, whether History Major or Certificate student, year in college, and a brief description of their interest in the course.

HISTORY 600-004
US Labor and Working-Class History
Professor April Haynes
Tuesdays 11:00am-12:55pm

Over the past five decades, the transition from an industrial economy to one rooted in the exchange of information and services has changed the conditions of daily life for millions of Americans – the work they do, their physical surroundings, and above all, their sense of identity, purpose, and community. While many have lost hope for the future and embraced a “politics of resentment,” others have turned to revitalizing and diversifying labor movements from within the service and tech sectors. This shifting context has in turn prompted historians to rethink the composition of the working class, what counts as “labor” as a subject of historical study, and how working people have constituted and reconstituted American capitalism.

Of course, deindustrialization is by no means the first economic transformation to occur in US-American history; nor will it be the last. This research seminar invites advanced students to find evidence-based answers to key questions in labor and working-class history. How did today’s economic polarization develop over time? For whom is precarity “the new normal”? When have working people collectively challenged exploitation and impoverishment? What explains the successes and failures of US labor movements? To discover answers, History 600 students will apply and deepen the research skills gained in History 201. You will independently choose a relevant subtopic about **any period** (from early colonization to the recent past). Your research will culminate in an original contribution to current understandings of working people’s history. You’ll have opportunities to share your findings with scholarly and popular audiences; you’ll also learn how to compose a stand-out writing sample for graduate school applications.

Expectations: 20-page research paper, zero AI policy, tech use restricted in class meetings, active engagement with other students’ research throughout the semester.

Students interested in this course should contact Professor Haynes via email (april.haynes@wisc.edu) with their campus ID number, whether History Major or Certificate student, year in college, and a brief description of their interest in the course.

HISTORY 600-005
Soviet History Through Memoirs
Professor Francine Hirsch
Wednesdays 1:20-3:15pm

In this course we will explore Soviet history from the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 to the collapse of the USSR in 1991 through memoirs, diaries, autobiographical fiction, letters, and other primary sources. The course will examine memoirs written by Soviet citizens, Soviet leaders, and American visitors, with on focus on everyday life during the Stalin era. We will discuss questions of belief, agency, and fear. Most of all, we will investigate the benefits and possible pitfalls of using memoirs, on their own and combined with other kinds of sources, to gain a greater understanding of key historical moments. Students will write weekly reflection papers based on the readings as well as a 12-page research paper based on memoirs and other sources.

Students interested in this course should email Professor Hirsch (fhirsch@wisc.edu) with their campus ID number, whether History Major or Certificate student, year in college, and a brief description of their interest in the course, accompanied by a list of related courses they have taken. Some familiarity with Russian or Soviet history will be helpful for the class but is not required. Everyone interested in reading and thinking about memoirs is welcome.

HISTORY 600-006
Empire & Revolution in Southeast Asia
Professor Alfred McCoy
Tuesdays 11:00am - 12:55pm

Course Description: The course explores the nature of “empire” in an age of America’s global dominion, starting with the rise of European empires during the “high colonialism” of the late 19th century and ending with U.S. global hegemony in the early 21st century. After reviewing the literature on the rise of modern empires, the course will explore both the expansion of European colonialism into Southeast Asia and the region’s response. With the world’s most diverse array of imperial powers and a history of intense colonization, Southeast Asia is the ideal region for a close, comparative study of imperialism. The course concludes by applying insights gained from exploring the end of European empires to the ongoing decline of U.S. global power.

In this survey of European empires, the seminar will focus closely on U.S. colonial rule in the Philippines from 1898-1946, an important but forgotten chapter in American history. Indeed, in two centuries of American history, the U.S. conquest and colonization of the Philippines is the only experience comparable to our recent involvement in Afghanistan. By exploring this juxtaposition of past and present in the history of America’s foreign adventures, the seminar will, in its opening and closing sessions, explore the way the past bears upon the present.

More broadly, the course will explore issues central to the character of global empires – including, the causes of imperial expansion, the drive for military security, the psychology of colonial dominion, ecological and economic transformations, construction of race and gender, the rise of nationalist resistance, and the dynamics of imperial decline.

Instead of transferring a fund of facts about European empires and anti-colonial revolutions, the seminar seeks to understand the dynamics of global dominion. Hopefully, students will emerge from the course with a better understanding of the nature of empire, the lasting legacy of colonialism, and the dynamics driving the decline of U.S. global power.

Grading: Students shall be marked on their weekly participation, writing assignments, and oral presentations. Each student shall serve as the lead “discussant” twice during the semester by presenting a 10-minute summary of the readings. Students are also responsible for reviewing and discussing the weekly reading assignments, usually totaling about 100 pages. In the last weeks of the semester, students shall submit a 15-page paper based on one of the topics they presented during the semester.

This History 600 seminar will meet with the graduate seminar, History 755.

Students interested in this course should contact Professor Alfred McCoy via email (awmccoy@wisc.edu) with (a.) campus ID (for registration); (b.) student status (senior/junior/grad student); (c.) major/discipline; (d.) GPA; and; (e.) reasons for their interest in the class.

HISTORY 600-007

Law & Religion in the Middle Ages

Professor Karl Shoemaker

Tuesdays 3:30 -5:25pm

Both law and religion penetrated every part of medieval European life. Could a soldier also be a Christian? When were military invasions justified? Could prisoners of war be enslaved? Could refugees be expelled from a church? Could a priest who committed crimes be prosecuted? Could you marry your second cousin? The answers, which in many cases are rather surprising, constituted a legal landscape that was complex and affected nearly every part of life in European society. In some cases, the answers to these questions continued to shape modern American law in surprising ways.

Students interested in this course should contact Professor Shoemaker via email (kbschoemaker@wisc.edu) with their campus ID number, whether History Major or Certificate student, year in college, and a brief description of their interest in the course accompanied by a list of related courses they have taken.

HISTORY 600-010/HISTORY of SCIENCE 555-001

Technology and Decolonization

Professor Daniel Williford

Tuesdays 1:20-3:15pm

This seminar considers the relationship between science, technology, and historical struggles for decolonization. Examining cases from Latin America, Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and the Middle East from the 19th to the 21st centuries, we will explore how contests over the meanings and outcomes of decolonization became intertwined with science and technology. The first half of the semester will be devoted to an overview of recent scholarship on topics such as: the role of science and technology in settler colonial projects; the importance of industrial sabotage and technological innovation to anticolonial movements; the endeavors of postcolonial states to develop scientific and technical capacities in the aftermath of empire; the turn toward technologically mediated decision-making in efforts to contain struggles for decolonization.

In the second half of the semester, students will pursue their own historical research on topics connected to the history of technology and decolonization. Using a combination of digital archives, online databases, and published materials, students will produce a research paper that engages with the arguments and approaches of scholarship surveyed in the first half of the course.

Students interested in this course should contact Professor Williford via email (daniel.williford@wisc.edu) with their campus ID number, whether History Major or Certificate student, year in college, and a brief description of their interest in the course accompanied by a list of related courses they have taken. In your email, please indicate whether you want to take the course as History 600 or History of Science 555.

HISTORY 600-011

Law & Authority

Dr. Charlotte Whatley

Mondays 3:30 -5:25pm

What makes a king a king? Moreover, what makes a king a legitimate king? How did kings use the law to legitimize themselves and their governance, and how does legal authority help a king stay a king? In this course, we explore the complex relationship between law, authority, and kingship. From Medieval Europe to modern America, we will examine how kings and king-like figures used law to their advantage, either to shore up a weak rulership or to strengthen and centralize an already strong one. We will analyze how royal decisions – like going to war or handling a catastrophic pandemic – have transformative effects on legal traditions and the societies that build them.

Students interested in enrolling should email Dr. Whatley (cwhatley@wisc.edu) with the following information: 1. Your name, student ID number, and email address; 2. Your expected graduation date; 3. Your Major(s)/Certificate(s); 4. 1-2 sentences explaining your interest in the course topic.