Course Description

The early modern period in European history is often referred to as the “Age of Discovery” because of European encounters with the New World. In fact, the period can be characterized as one of multiple discoveries: not just of different parts of the globe (east as well as west), but of ancient texts and learning; of the laws of the physical universe; of the science of politics; of nations, both as objects of knowledge and as political actors; and of the idea of secular progress. This course will provide an introduction to the study this period, from the Renaissance to the eve of the French Revolution, by focusing on these different forms of “discovery.” Proceeding in roughly chronological order, it will introduce students to key texts of the period (including those of Machiavelli, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Bacon, Hobbes, Newton, Voltaire, and Montesquieu), and explore how historians think about its major themes.

Readings

This course has both a textbook and a Pequod packet; there are no other required readings. The textbook, by Anthony Grafton and David Bell, is available for free download on the course’s Blackboard site. The Pequod reader is available for sale at the Pequod store on University Place. In addition, nearly all of the Pequod readings are also available for download on Blackboard.

Schedule of Meetings and Readings

Unit 1. Ancient Texts

31 Jan. On Discovery
2 Feb. Print and Humanism

Polydore Vergil, On Discovery (1499; rev. 1521).

7 Feb. Visualizing the Past
9 Feb. Religious Reformations

Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, Preface to the *Paraphrase on John* (1523).
Martin Luther, *Open Letter to Leo X* and *On Christian Liberty* (1521).

**Unit 2. New Worlds**

14 Feb. The Prehistory of Exploration
16 Feb. First Encounters

Christopher Columbus, *The Journal of Christopher Columbus* (1492–1493).

21 Feb. The First Globalization (NB: First paper due in class)
23 Feb. Empire Building

Ogier Ghislain de Busbecq, *The Turkish Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, Imperial Ambassador at Constantinople 1554–1562* (1581).
A selection of Jesuit Relations from seventeenth-century North America.

**Unit 3. The Laws of Politics**

28 Feb. The State as a Work of Art
2 Mar. The War of All Against All

Grafton and Bell textbook, chapter 2 (1600–1640)

7 Mar. Towards a Laws of Politics
9 Mar. Midterm Exam

Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (????).

14–16 Mar. Spring Break

**Unit 4. The Physical Universe**
21 Mar.  Artisanal Science
23 Mar.  Empiricism and Experimentation

Grafton and Bell textbook, chapter 3 (1640–1680)
Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis* (1626).

28 Mar.  Things in Motion
30 Mar.  The Organic World

William Harvey, *On The Motion of the Heart and Blood in Animals* (1628).
Carolus Linnaeus, *The Families of Plants, with their Natural Characters* (1737).

**Unit 5. Nations**

4 Apr.  Myths of Origins
6 Apr.  The Information State

Grafton and Bell textbook, chapter 4 (1680–1740)
Antonio de Nebrija, Preface to the *Gramática castellana* (1492).
Gregory King, *Natural and Political Observations and Conclusions upon the State and Condition of England* (1696).

11 Apr.  National Pride, National Prejudice (NB: Second paper due in class)
13 Apr.  The Idea of the Nation

James Thomson, “Rule Britannia” and other eighteenth-century British patriotic poems.

**Unit 6. The Future**

18 Apr.  The Birth of Utopia
20 Apr.  History and Progress

Grafton and Bell textbook, chapter 5 (1740–1789)

Louis-Sébastien Mercier, The Year 2440 (1771).

25 Apr. Civilization’s Discontents
27 Apr. The Road to Revolution

Immanuel Kant, What is Enlightenment? (1784).

Nicolas de Condorcet, Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind (1795).

11–21 May Final Exam Period

**Expectations**

Attendance and participation: Lectures are the primary way for you to receive necessary background to the materials you will be reading; precepts are the main venue in which you will discuss your readings. Attendance—and informed participation—are both are, therefore, crucial to this course. Altogether, class participation will count for 20% of the final grade.

Examinations: There will be a midterm as well as a final exam. The midterm, which will take place in-class on Thursday, 9 March, will count for 15% of the final grade. The final exam, which will take place during the regular final exam period in May, will count for 30% of the final grade.

Written assignments: There are two papers required, each of approximately 5–7 pages. The first paper will be due in class on 21 February, and will count for 15% of the final grade. The second paper will be due in class on 11 April, and will count for 20% of the final grade.

*Specific details regarding the examinations and written assignments will be distributed in class throughout the semester.*