

History of American Thought

America: What's the Big Idea?

An introduction to the field of American intellectual history, engaging with ideas, intellectual movements and thinkers in the American past. The course will consider key questions about American identity and concepts in national thought, including democracy, equality, racial and gender justice, the American dream, American character, and national unity. How do ideas inform the American experience? Can ideas even have a history? Which ideas have particular traction in American thought? What is the role of "thought" in American history? What thinkers have made an indelible contribution to American intellectual life?

In This Syllabus

Course Information

The basics of this course, including description, scope and the seminar approach
Page 1

Required Reading

What books you'll need, and how to access other course readings to prepare for discussion
Page 1

Student Learning Outcomes

What you should know, or be able to do, by the end of the course
Page 2



Things to Know About this Course

Where to find the course website, course credits and prerequisites, LASC categories, etcetera
Page 2

The Fine Print

Course policies regarding communication, technology use, academic integrity and disability accommodations
Page 2

Course Syllabus

A detailed list of what's due, the assigned readings for each class session, and the discussion topics for each day.
Page 3

Course Requirements

The components of your grade and expectations for course work.
Page 4



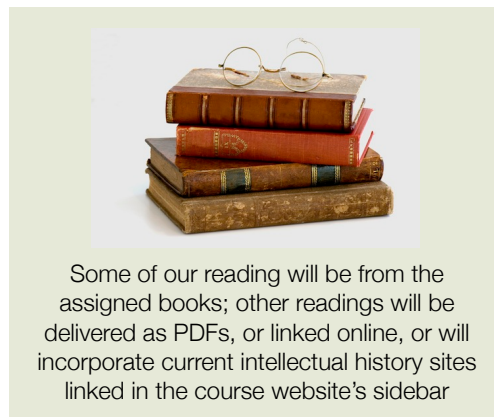
Meeting Time: TR 10:00 - 11:15 am

Meeting Place: Sullivan 108

Course Information

The course is designed as challenging seminar for students with some prior history background, and will have a substantial cohort of honors students in the course. You should expect a very demanding reading load and a strong emphasis on writing and seminar-style discussion. I will point you towards important thinkers and ideas, and will guide you through major intellectual movements, but you will need to own your own learning in the course, much of which must necessarily take place outside the classroom. You will conduct one group project with an oral and visual presentation component and write two well-conceived research papers correctly using standard Chicago Style, in addition to weekly journal entries and other informal writing.

If you want a refresher on the basic outlines of US history or need assistance with writing, **please be proactive** in seeking out the university's resources in these areas, including my office hours, the Writing Center, the library reference desk, and departmental or campus tutoring services as appropriate.



Some of our reading will be from the assigned books; other readings will be delivered as PDFs, or linked online, or will incorporate current intellectual history sites linked in the course website's sidebar

Required Reading

Sheila L. Skemp, *Judith Sargent Murray: A Brief Biography with Documents* (Bedford St Martins) ISBN 0312-115067

David Howard-Pitney, *Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and the Civil Rights Struggle of the 1950s and 1960s* (Bedford St Martins) ISBN 978-0312395056

(Note: if buying from the university bookstore, they have bundled the two above books in a single package for a better price)

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (Signet Classics Reissue Ed 2012) ISBN 978-0451532169

Howard Fineman, *The Thirteen American Arguments: Enduring Debates that Define and Inspire Our Country* (Random House, 2009) ISBN 978-0812976359

Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (Farrar Strauss Giroux, 2001) ISBN 978-0374528492 (Required for the Honors section, recommended for all students)

A Note on Readings: Additional readings are online in the public domain, while others will be posted to the course website or Blackboard as PDFs. You should be very comfortable with opening, reading and annotating these kinds of electronic files. Please come to class prepared with good notes, thoughtful discussion questions, and access to the assigned readings in print or electronic copy. Failure to do so constitutes an absence for the day, since you cannot contribute meaningfully to discussion.



Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, you should be able to....

- Explain the development of, connections among and change over time of distinctive American intellectual movements and groups, thereby cultivating a more critical understanding of the United States experience
- Apply critical thinking and historical thinking skills to the study of American thought, using original works as the primary object of that study
- Explore the dynamic origins of intellectual diversity in American history, including ideological approaches to social problems and “big ideas” in American identity
- Develop and strengthen one’s own appreciation for the ideas of diverse groups and thinkers
- Demonstrate the ability to interpret cultural texts and identify their relevant intellectual contributions in historical context
- Employ effective oral and written communication, critical thinking skills, and teamwork to enhance your own learning and that of your peers in the seminar

Things to Know About This Course

Prerequisites:

HI 111 or HI 112 (US History I or II)
EN 102 or EN 250

LASC:

You receive “triple credit” for this course

- Diversity Across the Curriculum - DAC
- Writing Across the Curriculum - WAC
- Either the TLC ~or~ USW content area

College Credits:

This is a 3-credit course. See the course website for an explanation of the university’s definition of credit hours.

History Majors:

This course counts as one of your United States electives in the major.

Honors Students:

This class counts as one of your Honors courses, if you earn a B or above. Honors students must participate in the “Metaphysical Club” book group, and may have enhanced team leadership or research expectations for course assignments.

Course Website:

www.tonahangen.com/wsc/hi215/

Course information and material is available online in TWO places: on Blackboard, and on the course website. That way, if Blackboard is down, our work goes on. You should bookmark the course website or subscribe to its RSS feed. Please check it before each class for any course updates, news, or instructions.

The Fine Print

Technology is delightful and useful.

However, its misuse can detract from our learning environment. Silence your cell phones before entering class. No texting in class. Laptops are welcome but only for taking notes or accessing course materials – not for checking Facebook, email, or surfing the web. Seminar learning requires everyone’s enthusiastic preparation and participation.

Historical writing involves meticulous citation and careful sourcing. Plagiarism is totally unacceptable and results in an automatic fail for the course. All writing assignments *must* cite the sources of any information, quotations or ideas which are not your own work using Chicago Style footnote citations. Please familiarize yourself with and follow the college policy on Academic Honesty in the Student Handbook.

If you have a documented **disability** (learning or otherwise), and you need a reasonable accommodation made for you in this course, please consult with me as the semester begins so we can design a solution that will help you be successful in the class.

My **office hours** are listed on the course website under the “Prof Info” tab; if none of the reserved times work for you, please contact me for an appointment. My office is Sullivan 327-D and my phone extension is x8688. Email (thangen@worcester.edu) is my preferred mode of contact, though be patient on nights/weekends if I don’t reply immediately.

Course Syllabus

Note: Class sessions marked with an asterisk* are student-led discussion days

#	Date	Topic or Task	What to Read Before Class	What's Due
1	Tues 1/21	Course Intro	Guelzo, "Is There an American Mind?" PDF	
Unit 1: A New Nation, Conceived in Liberty				(Metaphysical Club Part One)
2	Thurs 1/23	Making America Anew	Wills + NYT "The Other Gettysburg Address"	Journal #1
3*	Tues 1/28	Antecedents and Influences	Iroquois Confederacy, Puritans, Paine	
4*	Thurs 1/30	Founding Fathers	Federalist 10, 51, Locke, Wood	Journal #2
5*	Tues 2/4	Founding Mothers	JSM 1-60 + 133-138, Kerber	
6	Thurs 2/6	Library Day & Group Assignments Meeting place: LRC 319-B UTS	Scott, "Popular Lecture & Creation of Public" PDF	Journal #3
Unit 2: The Race Problem and the Color Line				(Metaphysical Club Part Two)
7*	Tues 2/11	Firebell in the Night	Garrison, Walker, Grimke, Douglass, Pro-S	
8*	Thurs 2/13	Race in the Progressive Era	Wells, DuBois, Washington	Journal #4 - Choose your speech
9*	Tues 2/18	American Dilemma	Hughes, Jones, Myrdal	
10*	Thurs 2/20	Civil Rights Movement(s)	King + Malcolm X I	Speech Bibliography
11*	Tues 2/25	Racial Justice	King + Malcolm X II	
12*	Thurs 2/27	PostRacial America?	Morrison, bell hooks	Speech Paper
Unit 3: All Men are Created Equal: Gender Equity				(Metaphysical Club Part Three)
13*	Tues 3/4	Female Emancipation	JSM "On the Equality of Sexes" 176-189 + Ch5	
14*	Thurs 3/6	Seneca Falls to 19th Amendment	Seneca Falls, Stanton, Gilman	Journal #5
15*	Tues 3/11	Justice and Gender in the c20	Friedan, Chodorow	
16	Thurs 3/13	Presentation Day	no assigned reading	Thinkers Group Project
<i>Spring Break March 15 - 23</i>				
Unit 4: Intellectual Currents and Major Turning Points in American Thought				(Metaphysical Club Part Four)
17*	Tues 3/25	Transcendentalism, Romanticism	Thoreau: Walden (entire)	
18*	Thurs 3/27	Pragmatism	Dewey, James	Journal #6
19*	Tues 4/1	The Modern Temper	Holmes, Krutch	Choose "Big Idea"
20*	Thurs 4/3	The Self and Society	Thoreau, Civil Disobedience + MLK LetterBJ	Journal #7
21*	Tues 4/8	Am Thought from the Bench	Whitney v. CA 1927 or Korematsu 1944	<i>This wk: meet in office hours</i>
22*	Thurs 4/10	The 1960s Watershed	Niebuhr, Sharon Statement, SDS statements	<i>This wk: meet in office hours</i>
Unit 5: Mother of Exiles				(Metaphysical Club Part Five)
23*	Tues 4/15	Confronting the Other in c19 City	Addams, Veblen	Research Precis
24*	Thurs 4/17	Democracy v. the Melting Pot	Kallen, Bourne	Journal #8
25*	Tues 4/22	Cultural Pluralism	Gates, Aleinikoff	
26	Thurs 4/24	Film Day: <i>People's History</i>	no assigned reading	Big Idea Paper
Conversations, Integration, and Reconciliation: Class Conferences				
27	Tues 4/29	Conference I	no assigned reading	
28	Thurs 5/1	Conference II	no assigned reading	
29	Tues 5/6	Conference III	no assigned reading	Course Reflection (Journal #9)

Course Requirements

This course involves extensive reading, writing and discussion, in keeping with its content focus on America's notable thinkers and writers. You will be expected to read and digest 50-75 pages a week (often more), and to write approximately 20 pages over the course of the term, in addition to maintaining an ongoing learning journal on Blackboard. You will need to put in consistent effort during the whole semester and keep up with attendance and written work. To take advantage of multiple learning styles, I will assess your learning in several different ways. Half your grade comes from absorbing and discussing existing knowledge (attendance, discussion, and reflecting on assigned readings) and the other half from making your own understanding through research, writing papers, and the group project.



Attendance and Participation (20%)

I take attendance in each class session. You should be prompt, present and ready for discussion on the assigned readings each day. Since all share a stake in the quality of class discussion, I expect that class participation will be lively, respectful and substantive.

the course. It is found in Blackboard as "My Learning Journal." There are a total of 8 required journal entries (minimum 350 words). Ideally, learning journal entries do not simply summarize class reading, but demonstrate original thinking and connect to currents in intellectual history today (see below).

Learning Journal (25%)

You'll keep an ongoing response journal charting your learning and reflecting on the ideas and themes of

In addition, honors students will be part of an online book group discussing *The Metaphysical Club*, which is open to all other class participants for extra credit.

Discussion Qs (5%)

Each member of the class will take a turn, probably in pairs, developing the day's discussion questions and moderating group discussion.

Speech Analysis (10%)

You will write a rhetorical analysis of a major speech which explores American ideals. Choose the speech by Feb 13. Bibliography due Feb 20. Paper due Feb 27.

Current Thinkers Group Project (15%)

In groups, you'll explore one of the "Thirteen Arguments" from Fineman's book, present orally to the rest of the class, and create a permanent digital artifact of your project (Powerpoint, Prezi, video, or podcast). Due March 13. All members of the group receive the same grade.

different time periods. Your final paper can be a conventional 8-10p research paper, or it could take a creatively structured format (such as a dialogue, drama, or imaginary roundtable interview). Part of the paper's grade comes from meeting the proposal and early draft deadlines (April 1 and April 15) and part from the final version, which is due April 24, followed by presenting your findings in a class Academic Conference during the last three course meetings.

"Big Idea" Research Paper (25%)

Each class member will tackle one "big idea" in American thought and trace it through at least 4 different thinkers in



American Thought Today

In the sidebar to the course website, I have put some links to places where American writers and scholars today are exploring "big ideas" and participating in ongoing conversations about many of the same themes that thinkers in the past have tackled: enduring arguments, American identity, democracy, equality, justice, freedom, and so forth. Some are academic journals, while some are web version of popular print periodicals or online zines.

I would like you to **choose at least one** of these recommended resources, and **follow it consistently throughout the semester.** If

you have a suggestion not listed, consult with me. This already assumes you are keeping up with national and/or world news on a daily or weekly basis from a responsible news source. If morning drivetime radio, *Fox News*, *The Daily Show*, or *The Colbert Report* are the entire extent of your news gathering, it's time to broaden your horizons for one semester.

Incorporate ideas and quotations (properly cited, of course) from your chosen forums into your learning journals throughout the term. Look for connections, argue back, and think critically. **Engage with the ideas actively.** Consider writing an online comment, letter to the editor, personal blog post, or in some other way being a **responsive reader** of these sources and a **vocal citizen** of the intellectual community of which you are already a part. The best way to model the kind of reasoned, thoughtful, historically-informed debate that we so clearly need more of in this nation is for you to do it for yourself. **Keep America thinking, one brain at a time.**

Course Grading

Your grade will be determined this way:

Required Element	Weight
Attendance and Participation	20%
Learning Journal / Metaphysical Club	25%
Discussion Questions & Leading	5%
Speech Analysis Paper (Feb 13-27)	10%
Current Thinkers Group Project (Feb 2 - March 13)	15%
"Big Idea" Research Paper (Apr 1 - 24)	25%
	100%