

HUMANITIES 4530/5541

History and the Future

Spring 2026
Thurs. 3:00–5:50pm
LG3008

INSTRUCTOR

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Living, as we do, at a time when major economic and political changes occur with startling frequency, students may wonder what the study of history can contribute to understanding the world around them. This course addresses such concerns by addressing perennial questions that have been asked about the study of history: What kinds of lessons can we learn from history? Can our knowledge of the past help us predict the future? Does history have a logic or meaning? What is the value of history, anyway? The topics and assigned readings investigate the history of asking and answering such questions, while at the same time considering, in practical terms, how one might go about using the past to prepare for the future. The course adopts an interdisciplinary perspective and draws from history, philosophy, political science, psychology, economics, and sociology.

The course will be conducted in seminar format. There are no formal lectures, though the instructor will begin class meetings with a context-setting introduction. Students will be responsible for analyzing and debating the assigned readings through group discussion, guided by the instructor.

Both UG and PG students are eligible to enroll in the course. The course designation is HUMA 4530 for UG students and HUMA 5541 for PG students. While all students will meet together, the assessments and grading expectations for UG and PG students differ.

Intended Learning Outcomes:

1. Understand canonical arguments about the value of history
2. Gain competence in reading theoretical and philosophical texts
3. Write a well-organized exegetical paper
4. Develop proficiency in oral debate and discussion of texts

UG ASSESSMENTS

1. Participation: 15%

This assessment engages CILO-4. Students are assessed on their preparation and ability to participate in group discussion about primary sources.

- Students will be assessed on their willingness to participate and engage in group discussion. Participation can take the form of making a comment, asking a question, or responding to other students.
- Attendance is mandatory. Repeated absences will lead to a sharp reduction in the participation score.

2. 2 Quizzes (March 26 and April 30): 20%

This assessment engages CILOs-1 and 2. Students are assessed on their understanding of the key themes and arguments in the assigned readings.

- Two quizzes will be given for UG students during the final 25 minutes of class. Each is worth 10% of the total course grade. Both quizzes test students' comprehension of the course reading.
- The quizzes will contain multiple-choice and short-answer questions.

3. Essay (due April 9): 30%

This assessment engages CILO-3. Students are assessed on their understanding of the assigned readings and their ability to write analytical about primary sources.

- Students will write a paper on a pre-circulated topic that addresses the themes from Part I of the course.
- The paper must fill 6 A4-size pages formatted in Times New Roman, 12 pt. font, double-spaced, with 1 inch margins.

4. Final examination (date TBA): 35%

This assessment engages CILOs-1 and 2. Students are assessed on their understanding of the key themes and arguments in the assigned readings.

- Students will answer essay questions in a 3hr final examination that addresses the themes from Parts II and III of the course.

PG ASSESSMENTS

1. Participation: 15%

This assessment engages CILO-4. Students are assessed on their preparation and ability to participate in group discussion about primary sources.

- Students will be assessed on their willingness to participate and engage in group discussion. Participation can take the form of making a comment, asking a question, or responding to other students.
- Attendance is mandatory. Repeated absences will lead to sharp reduction in the participation score.

2. Presentation: 15%

This assessment engages CILOs-1, 2, and 4. Students are assessed on their ability to analyze primary sources and communicate their understanding to their peers.

- Students are required to make one short presentation, possibly in a group setting (depending on final enrollment figures), on a single week's assigned readings. Each student's contribution should last no more than 5 minutes. Presenters should assume that everyone has done the reading; detailed summary or recapitulation of facts is unnecessary. Presentations should focus on providing an overview of the argument of the assigned readings, ideally comparing and contrasting with other readings from the course. PowerPoint presentations are welcome but not required.
- Presentations will be assigned after the end of add/drop period.

3. Midterm essay (due April 9): 30%
This assessment engages CILO-3. Students are assessed on their understanding of the assigned readings and their ability to write analytical about primary sources.

- Students will write a paper on a pre-circulated topic that addresses the themes from Part I of the course.
- The paper must fill 7 A4-size pages formatted in Times New Roman, 12 pt. font, double-spaced, with 1 inch margins.

4. Final essay (due May 14): 40%
This assessment engages CILO-3. Students are assessed on their understanding of the assigned readings and their ability to write analytical about primary sources.

- Students will write a paper on a pre-circulated topic that addresses the themes from Parts II and III of the course.
- The paper must fill 7 A4-size pages formatted in Times New Roman, 12 pt. font, double-spaced, with 1 inch margins.

ASSIGNED READINGS

All readings are available as PDFs on the course's Canvas website. Students are highly encouraged to print out the readings to facilitate annotation and careful study. Swiping through longer texts on a computer screen, tablet, or phone is not conducive to close reading or remembering.

EXPECTATIONS

Students who are forced to miss an assessment due to illness or other emergency must provide a doctor's note or equivalent; otherwise a make-up quiz or extension cannot be arranged. Without a legitimate excuse, late assignments will be docked 5 points (out of a total 100) per day they are late. This course enforces a zero-tolerance policy on cheating and plagiarism. If a student is found to have cheated on an exam or committed plagiarism on a paper, the case will be immediately referred to the head of the Humanities Division for further investigation. The use of ChatGPT or similar generative AI tools is NOT permitted for researching, outlining, or writing papers. Violations of this policy will be treated as acts of plagiarism. Students should, of course, spell-check your work, but besides that, they should not use any corrective software.

WRITING PAPERS

Class time will be used to discuss proper techniques for quoting and paraphrasing sources, framing thesis statements, organizing the exposition of a paper, and citation styles. Papers will be graded primarily on the basis of their argument, uses of sources, organization, and clarity. English prose style is a secondary consideration.

- An A-range paper features a clear and persuasive thesis statement and utilizes all the assigned readings that are pertinent to the topic. It provides thoughtful analysis of the assigned readings and makes specific references to the texts through quotation and paraphrase. It exhibits clarity of thought and good organization of evidence.
- A B-range paper fulfills the paper assignment but lacks some combination of a clear thesis statement, adequate breadth of source material, in-depth analysis, organization, and accuracy of citation.
- A C-range paper does not properly fulfill the paper assignment by failing to answer the question, properly engage with the assigned readings and course material, or provide coherent analysis.

CLASS MEETINGS

February 5:

Introduction to the course

I. What Can the Past Teach Us About the Future?

February 12:

Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (London: Penguin, 1972).

- §1.20–1.88 (pp. 35–87)
- §3.69–3.85 (pp. 236–245)
- §5.84–5.116 (pp. 400–408)

February 19:

Chinese New Year — No class meeting

February 26:

Han Feizi, “The Five Vermin,” in *Basic Writings*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), pp. 1–14, 97–118.

March 5:

Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Fritz Rosenthal, ed. N. J. Dawood (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

- Foreword (pp. 5–9)
- Introduction (pp. 24–26)
- Book One: Preliminary Remarks (pp. 42–43)
- Chapter 2: §1–8 (pp. 91–98), §15–17 (pp. 107–109), §26–28 (pp. 120–122)
- Chapter 3: §1–6 (pp. 123–128), §10–15 (pp. 132–142), §36–49 (pp. 230–256)

March 12:

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), prefaces, sections I, II, IV.

March 19:

Max Weber, “‘Objectivity’ in Social Science and Social Policy” (1904), in *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, trans. and ed. Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1949), pp. 68–106, 110–12.

Max Weber, *Economy and Society: A New Translation*, ed. and trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), pp. 374–389.

II. Where Do Predictions Go Wrong?

March 26:

Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 217–282.

April 2:

Timur Kuran, “Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989,” *World Politics* 44, no. 1 (1991): pp. 7–48.

April 9:

Hannah Arendt, “Social Science Techniques and the Study of Concentration Camps” (1950), in *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken, 1994), pp. 232–47.

Hannah Arendt, “Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government,” *Review of Politics* 15, no. 3 (1953): pp. 303–327.

III. What Are the Correct Lessons of History?

April 16:

Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Guns of August* (New York: Bantam, 1962), pp. 15–87.

April 23:

Tuchman, *The Guns of August*, pp. 91–157, 363–380.

April 30:

Ronald H. Carpenter, *Rhetoric in Martial Deliberations and Decision Making: Cases and Consequences* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), pp. 63–109.

May 7:

Mark Trachtenberg, “The Meaning of Mobilization in 1914,” *International Security* 15, no. 3 (1990–1991): pp. 120–50.