

History 5800: The Historian as Public Intellectual

Spring 2025 Professor Chris Endy
Tuesdays, 6:00 to 8:45 pm in KH C3015

Contact Your Professor

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Drop-In Hours (also known as Office Hours): Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:00 to 3:30 and 5:00 to 5:55 pm on Zoom or in my office (King Hall C4076A). You never need an appointment for drop-in hours. Just stop by unannounced. My Zoom link for office hours is posted on Canvas. If I am meeting with another student, please remain in the Zoom waiting room and I will let you in when I'm free. If you can't make my drop-in hours, let me know and we can arrange another time to connect.

Office Phone: 323-343-2046. Email is usually a better option, but you can sometimes reach me via phone on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and you can leave a voicemail message at any time. Please note that I let my phone go to voicemail when I am already meeting with someone in my office.

More Info: See the [Syllabus Appendix](#) on Canvas for tips, resources, and definitions of key phrases such as "class participation," "good writing," and "plagiarism." See my [personal faculty webpage](#) with advice on surviving college and links to some of my favorite things:

Course Overview

HIST 5800 revolves around a few broad questions:

- *What is the relationship between academic history and the wider world?*
- *How does academic history contribute to (or detract from) historical thinking among non-academic communities?*
- *How can academic historians learn from and serve broader society?*

HIST 5800 also has a practical element:

- *How can you translate the work you have done in your MA program to professional and civic opportunities after you graduate?*

This practical element of the course will include career-building activities such as practice interviews, application letters, and statements of purpose. We will develop authentic and meaningful ways to highlight the relevance of graduate study in history to businesses, non-profits, government agencies, K-12 schools, and other groups.

HIST 5800 is a project-based seminar. We will start the semester with some common readings, and then you will propose and undertake your own project for the seminar.

For the second part of the semester, we will meet regularly to provide each other with support and feedback on our projects.

Grades and Assignments

- Students will receive an automatic failing grade for the course if they miss six or more class sessions or fail to complete five or more required assignments.
- We will use a “+/-” system: A (93-100), A- (90-92), B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82), C+ (77-79), C (73-76), C- (70-72), D+ (67-69), D (60-66), F (0-59).
- If you don’t understand the basis of the grade you received or if you disagree with the assessment, speak to the instructor—but only after letting twenty-four hours pass for you to absorb and reflect on the evaluation.

Class Participation	15%	
Your Project		
Proposal	2%	
Check-In #1	4%	
Check-In #2	4%	
Final Submission	25%	
Final Reflection Essay	3%	
Feedback on Classmates’ Check-Ins	3%	
Responses (x4)	20%	(5% each)
History News Network Presentation	3%	
Op-Ed Essays (x2)	10%	(5% each)
Resumé/CV and Mock Cover Letter	5%	
History Elevator Pitch	3%	
Mock Interview (easy perfect score)	3%	

Late Policy:

The Free Lates: For four assignments, you may turn in your work up to seven days late with no penalty. To activate a Free Late, simply go to the assignment page on Canvas and type “Free Late #1” (or #2 or #3) in the Assignment Comment section. Canvas will still label your assignment as “late” but I will know not to give it a late penalty. You do not need to give a reason for the delay. Exceptions: You cannot use Free Lates for the following: History Elevator Pitch Round Two; the Mock Interviews; the Final Project.

Late Penalty: Without a Free Late, assignments will lose 5% of their value per week late, maxing out at a 15% reduction if completed before the start of finals week.

What should I do if I start to really fall behind?: Sometimes work, health, or family can make it hard to attend class or meet deadlines. If you see a problem approaching, please stop by office hours or send me an email to keep me posted. When an unexpected problem arises, please let me know as soon as possible. If a real hardship arises and you let me know what’s going on at an early stage, I will do my best to work with you and help you do well in the class.

Required Readings

There are no books to purchase for this seminar, but you may need to obtain books for your project. We will have numerous articles and chapters and other readings available via Canvas, campus databases, and the open internet. Please make sure that you have those readings accessible (in paper or digital form) during the relevant class sessions.

Responses

Each week's set of responses will contain a set of book chapters, articles, and/or websites for you to read and analyze. Details for each response will appear on Canvas. To submit, share your response on the appropriate Canvas discussion thread before class on the Thursday evening when we will discuss those readings. Once you post your response, you will be able to see other students' responses to that same reading. We will use these responses as a springboard for class discussions.

Plagiarism, ChatGPT, and Text-Generating AI:

As a professor, I've noticed that students often resort to plagiarism when they run out of time or don't understand how to do an assignment. If you find yourself drifting toward plagiarism, visit my office hours or send me an email. I can help you get through the assignment or calculate the (modest) late penalty. You will be much better off taking a small late penalty than committing plagiarism. For a definition of plagiarism, and for resources on avoiding it, see my Syllabus Appendix on Canvas. The Syllabus Appendix also contains advice and class policy related to ChatGPT and other kinds of text-generating AI.

Disabilities: As your professor, I want all students to succeed in class. If you have a disability or any other issue that affects your learning, please let me know at any time. Also take note of the resources at the [Office for Students with Disabilities](#) (Student Services Building Room 1320).

Change: I may make reasonable changes to the syllabus when needed.

CLASS SCHEDULE

All assignments due via Canvas by the start of class, unless otherwise noted.

Week 1: January 21st

Class Introduction—No Assignments

Week 2: January 28th—Community Ties: Historians and the “Public”

Response #1 due. See Canvas for details.

Readings/Websites (listed in suggested order):

Jacqueline Jones, “Historians and Their Publics, Then and Now,” *American Historical Review* 127 (March 2022): 1-30.

Jennifer Dickey, “Public History and The Big Tent Theory.” *The Public Historian* 40 (November 2018): 37-41.

Leisy J. Abrego, “On Silences: Salvadoran Refugees Then and Now,” *Latino Studies*, 15 (April 2017): 73-85.

Lendol Calder, “Uncoverage: Toward a Signature Pedagogy for the History Survey,” *Journal of American History* (March 2006): 1358-1370.

Karin Roffman, *John Ashbery’s Nest* (<http://vr.ashberyhouse.yale.edu>). Spend about 15 minutes exploring this website, including the “About” section (see top-right menu). For your summary of the author’s thesis, focus on project director Karin Roffman. What do you think her main purpose was with this project?

The Cynical Historian (Joseph Hall-Patton), “How to Apply History to the Present on YouTube,” (17 minute video), posted 26 September 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7uvvfAgp17k>

Week 3: February 4th—Topic(s) to be determined based on student interests

Response #2 due by 6:00pm. Expect to read about five articles or book chapters.

Week 4: February 9th (SUNDAY)

Project Proposal due by 11:59pm

Week 4: February 11th—Developing your Project

Workshop on Project Proposals

Week 5: February 18th—Topic(s) to be determined based on student interests

Response #3 due by 6:00pm. Expect to read about five articles or book chapters.

Week 6: February 25th —The Op-Ed Genre

Please read the short pieces listed below. They will help you prepare for the op-ed essay assignment. You are welcome to post comments and questions about them on our [HIST 5800 Open Discussion Thread](#) on Canvas.

Joyce Appleby & James Banner, "Op-Ed Style Guidelines," *History News Service* (last update 25 July 2002; accessed 25 May 2004; available via the Wayback Machine at <https://web.archive.org/web/20040615212635/http://www.h-net.org/~hns/opedstyle.html>)

Duke University Communications, "Writing Effective Op-Eds" <https://commskit.duke.edu/writing-media/writing-effective-op-eds/>

Moshik Temkin, "How to Interpret Historical Analogies," *Psyche*, 22 July 2020, <https://psyche.co/guides/how-should-you-interpret-historical-analogies-in-the-popular-press>

Julian E. Zelizer, "The Mistakes Historians Make on Television," *The Atlantic* (3 January 2023), <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/01/historians-media-commentary-current-affairs/672605/>

I have also posted some classic guides to powerful prose on Canvas. Check them out!

Week 7: March 4th— Social Media & the Internet // Community Research

Response #4 due by 6:00pm. Expect the unexpected! We'll design this activity together earlier in the semester. The time required will be similar to the earlier responses.

Week 8: March 8th (SATURDAY)

Check-In #1 due by 11:59pm – Upload your work-in-progress and add a few sentences telling us where you are in the project and how you are feeling about it. If appropriate, modify the goals that you set for your second check-in when writing the original proposal.

Week 8: March 11th—Improving our Projects

Feedback on Classmates' Check-Ins due by 6:00pm

History Elevator Pitch Round One Reflection due by 6:00

Week 9: March 18th—Op-Ed Revisions // Developing your Project

Op-Ed Essay #1 due by 6:00pm

Week 10: March 25th—Topic(s) TBD

Short readings on cover letters, cv's, and interviews (see Canvas for details)

SPRING BREAK: No class on April 1st

Week 11: April 8th—Improving our Projects // Career Building

Workshop in Classroom on Your Project

Mock Interviews, Round 1 of 2

Resumé, CV, and Mock Cover Letter due by 6:00pm

Note: Half the class will show up in King Hall for project workshops and mock interviews tonight. The other half of class will have an independent work day and can stay at home. Then each half will switch roles on April 22nd. Details to be arranged in March.

Week 12: April 12th (SATURDAY)

Check-In #2 due by 6:00pm -- Upload your work-in-progress and add a few sentences telling us where you are in the project and how you are feeling about it.

Week 12: April 15th—Improving our Projects

Feedback on Classmates' Check-Ins due by 6:00pm

Op-Ed Essay #2 (or revised version of first op-ed if you are submitting it) due by 6:00pm

Week 13: April 22nd—Improving our Projects // Career Building

Workshop in Classroom on Your Project

Mock Interviews, Round 2 of 2

Note: Students who did their mock interviews on April 8th will have an independent work day and can stay at home. The other half of class will show up tonight in King Hall for project workshops and mock interviews tonight. Details to be arranged in March.

Week 14: April 29th—Improving our Projects

Workshop in Classroom on Your Project

Note: Be prepared to provide an informal update on your project in class tonight. What's going well? What are your challenges?

Week 15: May 6th—Improving our Projects // Class Conclusion

Workshop in Classroom on Your Project

Closing Celebration! This will be our last evening together in King Hall.

Finals Week: May 16th (Friday)

Final Project due by 11:59pm

Final Project Reflection Essay due by 11:59pm

Your HIST 5800 Project

You are welcome to propose and develop any project that fits with our course themes. Because the scope and nature of each project will differ, this syllabus does not provide specific assignment guidelines. To ensure consistency and fairness, here is a basic guideline: a good project should require the same time and intellectual energy required for researching and writing a graduate-level 10-12 page primary-source research paper. When we work on your specific project proposal (due February 9th), we can work together to establish expectations for the length or scope of your project. You may also work together in a small team on a shared project if you want.

Here is a list of possible topics for projects:

- creation of a teaching portfolio: syllabus plus an overview of course themes, sample lesson plans and assignments, and a statement of teaching philosophy
- theoretical exploration of history education issues (e.g. What is historical thinking? How do we promote it? How do we measure it?)
- theoretical and/or practical analysis of historical archives, museums, oral history programs, websites, documentaries, and historical parks or sites
- analysis of specific historians whose work engages in extra-academic political or community issues (e.g. historians as expert witnesses in court cases, historians' role in truth and reconciliation processes, historians as social activists, historians as media pundits).
- relationships between academic knowledge and indigenous knowledge or community knowledge
- politics and process of historical preservation (e.g. designating historical landmarks)
- relationship between academic historiography and "best-selling" history (e.g. "great man" biography, Zinn's *People's History* series, Bill O'Reilly's book series, counterfactual history, Hollywood versions of history, video game versions of history, and conspiracy theory history).

Note: This is just a partial list. Feel free to propose any idea that relates to our class themes.

Project Proposal Guidelines

Your Project Proposal should contain the following elements:

- a **very short summary** of what you plan to do (25 words max)

- a more **detailed but still concise plan** for what you plan to do (about 100-150 words). Be sure to convey a clear sense of what you intend to show us at the end of the semester. Note that not every project needs to be "100% complete" by the end of the semester. If you are planning something big, you might just reach a draft milestone by the end of the semester. That is ok, so long as partial completion is part of your original plan that we both approve. Also note that your proposal is not necessarily a binding document. If new ideas emerge during the semester, let's talk together and figure out appropriate changes.

- a **rationale** for why you find this project interesting or important (about 100 words). Here you can focus on how your project might serve a community need, or how it will help you explore career options, or something else.

- inspiration**: Find an existing example that someone else created that captures some of the spirit or purpose that you are trying to accomplish with your own project. Provide a URL of some kind to share. Write a paragraph (about 100 words) explaining what you find inspirational. If you have trouble finding an existing "role model," check with me for help.

- inventory check**: Think of inventory in both tangible and intangible forms. What are the supplies, needs, support, and skills you will need to complete this project? Assume access to the basic student inventory (e.g. internet, computer, caffeine, etc.). Just focus on the needs that are more specific to your proposed project.

- a **tentative timeline**. Include a sense of what you plan to complete by the first check-in date (Saturday, March 8th) and by the second check-in date (Saturday, April 12th).

History in the News Oral Presentations

When it is your turn to present, select a recent news article or op-ed essay that connects history to the present day, or select an article that profiles a historian active as a public intellectual. If you have trouble finding something, please ask me for help.

By 5pm on the Sunday before your class presentation, post the web link for your selected article or essay to our [HIST 5800 Open Discussion Thread](#) on Canvas. All students should read the article before class on Tuesday. When it is your week to present, prepare an informal 3-4 minute presentation on the article. Your presentation should address the following four questions:

1. What is the author's main argument? (summarize BRIEFLY)
2. How persuasive or interesting do you find the author's argument?
3. Did the author do a good job using history to make a point about the present?
 - If yes, how did the author do it so well?
 - If not, what went wrong?
4. How does this article connect to other readings or questions that we've discussed so far in class?

Advice on finding history-related news articles and opinion writing:

History News Network (HNN): In my view, the most robust resource for finding history-related writing on current events comes from HNN. Their best resource is their free "Newsletter," which they share via email once or twice a week. You can subscribe to the Newsletter [here](#). HNN also has website content, but the website doesn't feature as much content as the newsletter. So sign up for the newsletter!

Google News and then search for "historian" ([link](#))

Social media: Many historians are active on sites such as Bluesky and Instagram

The Conversation ([link](#))

Clio and the Contemporary ([link](#))

Not Even Past ([link](#))

National Council on Public History blog ([link](#))

American Historical Association blog ([link](#))

Did you find another good resource? Post a link for us on the discussion thread.

Alternative format for this assignment:

Analyze an example of a non-historian using history in some way. This non-historian could be a politician, a celebrity, or even a talkative family member. Your example should be recent, within the last few weeks. Write a short essay (200-400 words) explaining how this person used history.

- What were they doing or thinking about when they invoked history?
- What argument did they make about the past?
- How did that historical argument advance their present-day concerns?
- What kind of evidence did they provide to support their historical argument?
- How persuasive was their argument?
- If relevant, how did their audience respond?

Op-Ed Essays (Opinion Essays)

Each op-ed essay should be about 800-900 words long. Write using the brisk, clear style that newspaper and website editors prefer. No big words! No academic jargon! Also, avoid long sentences.

To get ready for this assignment, it will help to get in the habit of reading op-ed or opinion essays on a regular basis. The *History News Network*, *LA Times*, and *NY Times* are good sources, but you can also find examples on websites too.

First Op-Ed Essay:

For your first op-ed essay, select a research paper or graduate-level seminar paper that you wrote for another history class (e.g. a big paper of ten or more pages). Then “translate” your paper’s argument in a form and style that will appeal to audiences outside a college classroom. Explain how knowledge of this history can help us think better about the present or future. We will explore general principles of op-ed writing before the first due date.

TIP: Do not start the writing process by trying to shorten your original paper. It’s easier and more effective to start with a blank page and write all new non-academic sentences and paragraphs. Only use a passage from your original paper if that original writing is really and truly engaging.

Second Op-Ed Essay:

Your second op-ed can also derive from a pre-existing paper, or you can start from scratch with a new topic. Just make sure that your essay draws on historical thinking or expertise.

Alternative Assignment for the Second Op-Ed Essay:

You have the option of doing a “rewrite and submit” of your first op-ed to earn credit for this second op-ed essay. With this option, you will do a major rewrite of your first essay and then submit it to a real-life public venue (e.g. a website or newspaper) in hopes of getting it published. Please make sure that you really re-write your first essay. Do not simply make cosmetic changes, and do not merely respond to whatever specific suggestions I provided on your first draft. Give the piece a major reworking. Move around sentences. Eliminate weak sections and replace them with better ideas or examples. Also write down your intended submission venue (e.g. the specific publication or website) when you submit your revised piece. Pay attention to sentence structure so that the essay buzzes with energy. For submission credit, provide me with proof of actual submission within seven days of the due date. You are also welcome to show me in advance your email “sales pitch” and “author bio” that you will probably want to include with your submission. I’m happy to provide feedback on those before you submit your essay to a real-life editor.

The History Elevator Pitch

Purpose:

This activity serves two purposes. First, it will help you reflect on your broad goals in life. Second, it will provide you with an opportunity to connect with other historians (faculty and alumni).

Format/Content:

This assignment is akin to an oral presentation. You will have a maximum of four minutes to explain the following three points:

1. Why did you choose to study history?
2. What are the most important skills you are learning in the program?
3. What do you hope to do with your MA degree?

Ideally, your answers to all three questions should connect to each other. For instance, your motivation for studying history will hopefully complement your goals for after the degree. Also try to show how the skills you are learning in the program connect to your goals. It's ok if your goals for the future aren't the same as your original motivation for studying history. If that's the case, you can tell a story of evolution and growth.

Round One—Faculty:

Find another professor on campus, explain the assignment to them, and deliver your four-minute pitch. Ask the professor for feedback. Then, on our Canvas discussion thread for this activity, write a short reflection (50-100 words) on how you think the pitch went.

Due date: You must do the pitch and share your reflection on Canvas by 6pm on Tuesday, March 11th.

Round Two—Alumni:

Later in the semester (date TBD), we will arrange a class Zoom meeting with alumni who also took HIST 5800. You will present a revised version of your history elevator pitch to a few of those alumni. You will also have an opportunity to hear from them about their experiences after graduation.

Due date: TBD (probably during class time in April)