

Leadership 2225
Honors History Seminar: “A History of Public Opinion”
Spring 2009 (T-312) – M,W 8:00 to 9:15 a.m.

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Course Description:

Since the publication of Jürgen Habermas’ *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* in the early 1960s, the problem of the emergence of “public opinion” has taken on greater urgency for eighteenth-century historians. This course explores that problem through a series of secondary readings in Euro-American intellectual history; considerable emphasis will be placed on the scholarship of the “High” European Enlightenment, but with the understanding that the “American” example was heavily informed by continental culture. Students will produce a research essay concerning “public opinion,” “the public sphere,” and/or “publicity” that is drawn from colonial American newsprint and the intellectual history of the early Americas.

Course Goals:

The goals of this course are threefold. First, students will gain an understanding of the concepts of “public opinion,” “the public sphere,” and “publicity” in their early modern Euro-American context. Second, students are expected to develop their reading, analytical, and critical thinking skills when working with primary and secondary sources. Last, students are expected to attain a high level of synthesis by bringing together both primary and secondary evidence in coherent arguments within the research essay.

Pedagogy and Methods:

This class will proceed as an undergraduate seminar. We will begin by carefully analyzing a series of secondary readings and wrestling with a limited range of scholarly questions. The readings plough a narrow historiographical field, and thus it will be essential for you to gain a sense of the nuances of our various authors. One fifth of your overall grade will derive from participation in these daily discussions. Moreover, each student will take responsibility for a given set of texts or chapters from a monograph – defining terms, initiating discussion questions, or otherwise being the “go to” person during discussion.

Although the remainder of your grade will derive from the three writing assignments (detailed below), the research process is as important as the finished written product. Students will thus provide regular updates on their research for both the newspaper analysis and the final seminar paper, while fellow students will offer critiques and analyses of those updates. In these, it is just as important to offer helpful criticism as it is to gain a sense of scholarly civility.

Required Reading:

Daily reading assignments will be given in class and on Blackboard. It is thus necessary that you attend every class and complete the assigned reading *before* you come to the next class. The assigned texts are:

- James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe*. Cambridge, 2001.
- Blackboard Articles (by Ozouf, Gordon, Goodman, Maza, Bell, Merritt, Leonard, et al.)
- Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment*. Cornell, 1994.

Course Requirements and Grading Scale:

		95-100	4.0	A
Melton Book Review	20%	92-94	3.7	A-
Newspaper Analysis	20%	89-91	3.5	A-/B+
Research Paper	40%	86-88	3.3	B+
Class Discussion and Presentation	20%	83-85	3.0	B
		80-82	2.7	B-
Each student is responsible for completing all course requirements and for keeping up with the assigned readings. Attendance is mandatory.		77-79	2.5	B-/C+
		74-76	2.3	C+
		71-73	2.0	C
		69-70	1.7	C-
N.B.: Fitchburg State College has a uniform grading policy. Please be advised that the following grade scale applies to all courses at the College, including this one.		67-68	1.5	C-/D+
		64-66	1.3	D+
		60-63	1.0	D
		0-59	0.0	F

Writing Assignments:

Students will write three essays: a book review, a newspaper analysis, and a research paper. For the first, students are to read James Van Horn Melton's *Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe*, discuss its various dimensions, and write a brief book review. Professional book reviews typically offer an analysis of the author's answer(s) to the research question(s) (i.e., the "argument"), a critique of the research methods used to advance that argument, and then speculate on how the book fits into the given scholarly field. (For examples of reviews of Melton's book, see the Blackboard site, under "Course Documents" and "Melton Reviews.") This paper assignment, however, will demand only the first two: an analysis of the author's argument and a critique of his methods. The book review will be no more than three pages, double-spaced, and typewritten in MLA, Chicago (Turabian), or a similar scholarly style guide. The due date is the evening of Monday, 9 February.

For the newspaper analysis, each student will select a single eighteenth-century American newspaper from the "Early American Newspapers" collection. Examining the microfilm reproductions of the original papers, the Worcester area Union List (on reserve), and "WorldCat" (the OCLC database also known as "First Search"), students will compile the following information: a comprehensive list of the newspaper's printers and/or editors, its provenance, and the length of its publication under various titles, as well as the nearest local archives it can be found in, and an analysis of the paper's contents. It is this last that will likely require the most time, for you will need to read successive issues and incarnations (and therefore years) of the given paper in order to determine its audience, its regular "features," and its political, social, and/or cultural leanings; thus, you are asked to account for change over time. This material, complete with all necessary photo-reproductions of original documents and reference materials, should be summarized in a *narrative* of no more than two pages, double-spaced, typewritten in one of the above styles. Grades will be assessed based upon content, style, thoroughness, and complexity of analysis. The due date is the evening of Monday, 30 March.

Research essays should be developed in close consultation with the instructor and, in an effort at transparency, with your fellow students. All papers will treat "public opinion," the "public sphere," and/or "publicity" and each student will use of the "Early American Newspapers" microfilm collection as the basis for primary research. Each student will develop a clear and concise research question and a correspondingly clear argument. This argument will be discussed in class and "virtually" throughout the term, and thus students should keep a running "journal" within Blackboard's "discussion board" feature. (Assessment of the journal will be folded into your overall research essay grade.) A running discussion of newsprint sources and bibliographies will also follow. The research essays should be no longer than twenty pages, double-spaced, typewritten, and again in a scholarly style. Grades will be assessed based upon your argument, organization, and mechanics. The due date is Wednesday, 6 May.

Special Needs:

Any student requiring special accommodations due to disabilities for taking notes or tests should make arrangements, as early in the semester as possible, to discuss his or her needs. Moreover, I advise students requiring these accommodations to contact the Disabilities Support Services at 978.665.4020 or 978.665.3575. See also the Disability Services website at <http://www.fsc.edu/disability/>.

Academic Integrity:

The College has adopted a new “Academic Integrity” policy. Please take a few moments to review this new policy both online (at <http://www.fsc.edu/judicial/AcademicIntegrity.html>) and in your AY08/09 Student Handbook. Students are expected to do their own work. Plagiarism and cheating are inexcusable in a university or college environment. Just so we are clear, plagiarism is the use of another’s words without attribution and/or without enclosing the words within quotation marks; plagiarism may also be defined as the act of taking the ideas or expression of another person and representing them as one’s own. Cheating amounts to giving or receiving information or using prepared materials on an examination or quiz. Any instances of plagiarism or cheating will result in an automatic F for the assignment. If the instance is egregious enough, the instructor may pursue further punitive measures, including a failing grade for the course. All instances of plagiarism and cheating will be reported to the Director of Student Conduct.

Electronic and Other Etiquette:

No portion of this class – whether lectures, discussions, handouts, or notes – may be reproduced without the express permission of the instructor. Cell phones must be turned off during class time throughout the entire semester unless you have prior approval. Laptops may be used to take class notes or access online course materials, but you may not check email, use instant messaging or other non-course-related software, or access inappropriate (i.e., unrelated) websites during class time. If you are asked to close your laptop, please do so immediately. Only one warning will be issued for inappropriate use of laptops. Moreover, you are expected to be on time for class, actively engaged, and respectful of your classmates. You may rest assured that I will reciprocate.