

USU 1300: American Civilization - Fall 2007

Dr. Denise Conover

Office Hrs. Tues. 10-12 or by appointment

Office: Old Main 321 J; email address: denise.conover@usu.edu

Office Phone: 797-0870

USU 1300 meets the University's requirement for a **Breadth American Institutions (BAI)**, according to the USU *General Catalog*, 2005-2006. As quoted in the General Catalog, USU 1300 "Provides basic understanding of the history, principles, form of government, and economic system of the United States." Please note that the Catalog also specifies that the course should emphasize "ideas and critical thinking, rather than dates, names, and places...." Such a mandate provides the opportunity to learn about US history without the necessity of memorizing endless amounts of "facts."

Course Scope:

Given the incredible scope of this course, colonial to present, one has to be **selective**. Therefore, **one theme** which I have selected for this course, **war**, has been a very persistent feature of US history. **Another theme, trade and economic development**, have formed very important facets of US history. Today, America's trade deficit and rampant consumerism have made the US a different society from the one which forged national identity out of the American revolutionary war. Not surprisingly, **a third significant theme** in US history is the **role of technology**, in communication and transportation especially. The ramifications are endless. For instance, the automobile and airplanes in the early 20th century, like television and computers in the latter half of the 20th century, have affected warfare tremendously. **A fourth theme** centers on the incredible **constitutional/political development** of the United States. While the overall aim is to enhance the student's understanding of all the participants in these conflicts, the focus still will be on the US and how these wars affected Americans; the time frame will be predominantly the 20th century.

Course Objectives:

1. To enhance the student's educational skills by providing reading and library assignments, involving a wide range of primary sources such as speeches, letters, oral histories, diplomatic dispatches, and photographs, and by requiring students to analyze such sources in context
2. To stimulate the student's communication skills (both written and oral).
2. To promote the students awareness of the unique features of US society, including the role of war, technology, religion, and other cultural aspects in the development of American life.
3. To advance the student's understanding of the American political system, including the office of presidency, and its evolution over time.
4. To appreciate the cultural differences of each region of the country

Textbooks:

Gaddis, *Cold War*

McInerney, *A Traveller's History of the USA* (main text)

Course Description: This course will cover US history from the Revolutionary era (roughly 1770) to the present. In trying to ascertain the main features of American Civilization, the instructor will place a heavy emphasis on war, the presidency, and technology.

Classroom Pedagogy: My primary interest is the 20th century. Hence, I will not spend as much

time on earlier periods as the student might desire. Remember, this course is, in some ways, an advertisement for upper-division history courses (we have upper-division courses on women's history, black history, colonial history, Civil War, WWII, Native American history, history of the West, financial history, etc.). With the events of the late 19th and 20th centuries, we are blessed with an abundance of primary sources, in the form of visual documentaries. Hence, every class (or almost every class) will consist of a mixture of the following: a brief topical overview, video clips, class discussion or written response to material viewed or material assigned to read. Faithfully reading your textbooks and attending classes remain the best means for extracting the most knowledge from this course. While I expect you to attend class, I also expect everyone to behave properly (which means: no sleeping, no reading newspapers, no studying for another class, and—above all else—no talking to your class neighbor!!) The classroom is not a place for students to socialize. Every student has the right to hear the professor, film, class discussion, etc. Those who cannot follow these simple rules of courtesy will be asked to leave. We must cooperate and be considerate of each other. (Or you will be removed from class at worst or have your grade lowered at best)

Requirements:

1. **Five-six page, typed essay** (100 pts) on the Cold War, utilizing the Gaddis book and class material (due the last class, Dec. 7). More information on this assignment will be provided later.
2. **Class-designated assignments** (100 points or more)
 - (a) These are assignments, given in class (hence, attendance is desirable) which vary:
 - (b) Some may be, simply, a brief written response to a video clip observed in class or a document read in class; others may be a written response to a textbook reading assignment or a short quiz. Sometimes, I may assign a primary-source exercise (e.g., read an excerpt from a journal, newspaper, congressional report, etc. from a certain year).
3. **Final Exam** on class material, McInerney's book (100 points) (week of Dec. 10-14)

Tentative Topic Class Schedule

- First Week: Revolutionary Period
Second Week: New Republic
Third Week: Antebellum Period
Fourth Week: Civil War
Fifth Week: Post-Civil War: Development of West, Economy
Sixth Week: Imperialism, Industrialization, Reform (Progressive)
Seventh Week: Development of Modern President; World War I
Eighth Week: Twenties; Great Depression of Thirties
Ninth Week: World War II; Beginning of Cold War
Tenth Week: American Century (1945-65): Cold War, Consumerism, Counterculture
Eleventh//Twelfth: America's Time of Trouble (1965-80)
Thirteenth Week: Reagan-Bush: American Revival; Cold War's End
Fourteenth Week: Clinton-Bush: Conservative America
Fifteenth Week: America after 9/11
Sixteenth Week: Final Exam Week

Reading Schedule: start reading McInerney, chapters 2-3.