COURSE OVERVIEW
Title: Western European History: Renaissance to the Present
Prerequisites: None
Hours: 50
Number of Credits: 5
Type of Course: HIST
Term: Winter, Spring, Summer
Language: English
Instructor: Dr. Stephen Jacobson
Email: albabcn@pdx.edu

Course Description
This course covers the major social, economic, and political trends in western Europe from the Renaissance to the present. Topics covered include: Renaissance, Reformation, the crisis of the seventeenth century, the French Revolution, the industrial revolution, liberalism, the nation state, the world wars of the twentieth century, the Cold War, and the emergence of a new global order. This will not be a “blow-by-blow” narrative history. Rather, the idea is to introduce the student to broad trends taking place over centuries that have served to structure what we now think of the modern west. We will examine critically the claim that such a period can be characterized as the “rise of the west” and analyze what is meant by “modernity.” Along the way, students will be introduced to key historical debates concerning the causes and consequences of major transformations. This is an introductory course that does not require previous knowledge of European history. Students, though, must keep up with the readings in order to be able to follow the lectures and understand the material.

Learning Outcomes
At the end of the course, the student:
- Will have acquired survey knowledge of the history of Europe from the Renaissance to the present.
- Will have become versed in the theoretical skills necessary for analyzing modern historical problems.
- Will have developed strategies for understanding contemporary Europe in its historical context.

Assessment Criteria
The class meets during 10 sessions, nine of which will be dedicated to content while the last will consist of the final exam. During each 3-hour session, the class will be divided into one
lecture (1 hour, 30 minutes), a ten-minute break, and a seminar
discussion (1 hour, 20 minutes).

For each class session, students will have “background reading” (chapters from the textbook)
and “discussion reading” (chapters from the sourcebook). Students have to read both
assignments in advance for class.

Seminars and Class Presentations:
For each one-hour seminar, a number of students will deliver short presentations, outlining
the major themes in discussion readings and suggestion a series of questions for discussion.
The length and frequency of class presentations will be dependent on class size.

Final Paper
The final paper should run between six and eight pages (double spaces; standard margins).
Students will be required to pick a memoir, novel, or historical text and write a paper critically
evaluating how the text portrays a given moment in history. The instructor will provide a list of
suggested texts (available in the library) during the initial weeks of class.

Evaluation
Class Participation: 25 percent
Presentations: 10 percent
Final Paper: 25 percent
Final Exam: 40 percent

Attendance

Attendance to all ALBA classes is mandatory. A maximum of 2 class sessions
can be missed without penalty. For every additional absence 3 points will be
deducted from the final grade.

Sessions

Session 1
1. Lecture: Europe and the World
2. Background Reading: None
3. Discussion Reading: None

Session 2
Lecture: Renaissance and Scientific Revolution.
Background Reading: “Crisis and Renaissance,” and “A Clash of Worldviews,” in Making of the
West, 393-433, 468-478.”
Discussion Reading: “Galileo, Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina (1615),” “Adam Smith, An
Descent of Man (1871),” in Sources, 31-35, 81-85, 142-148.

Session 3
2
Lecture: Reformation, Counter-Reformation, and Religious Wars.

Background Reading: “Struggles over Beliefs, 1500-1648” in Making of the West, 435-463.

Discussion Reading: “John Calvin, Articles Concerning Predestination and the Necessity of Reforming the Church (c. 1560 and 1543),” “Martin Luther, Letter to Three Nuns at Wittenberg (1524)” and “St. Ignatius of Loyola, A New Kind of Catholicism (1546, 1549, 1553),” in Sources, 24-26, 13-15, 20-23.

Session 4
Lecture: The Seventeenth-Century Crisis and Its Political Outcomes.


Session 5
Lecture: Absolutism, Constitutionalism, and Atlantic Expansion.


Session 6
Lecture: Enlightenment.


Session 7

Background Reading: “The French Revolution and Napoleon, 1789-1815” in Making of the West, 599-637.


Session 8

Background Reading: “Industrialization and Social Ferment,” in Making of the West, 639-681.


Session 9
Lecture: The Violent Twentieth Century: Nationalism, Imperialism and Two World Wars.

Background Reading: “Empire, Modernity, and the Road to War, c. 1880-1914,” “An Age of Catastrophes,” in Making of the West, 729-77, 825-68.

**Session 10**

Final Exam.

**Texts**

**Readings**

All readings will be contained in a textbook and sourcebook. Multiple copies are available in the library, though students are encouraged to purchase their own volumes.
