

Foundations of World Civilization  
History 201, Spring 2009  
Tues & Thurs 1:00-2:15  
Darwin 29

<http://bruceowen.com/foundworld/h201-09s.htm>

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## Foundations of World Civilization

**What this course is about:** This course will introduce you to the “foundations of world civilization” in several different senses.

Most obviously, foundations are what came before. In that sense, this course will survey some of the events and processes that happened prior to 1500 CE (AD) that led into modern world history. For this, we will use parts of a general world history textbook (Bentley & Ziegler 2008, *Traditions & Encounters*, vol. I) to map out some landmarks and currents in the grand flow of ideas and events that brought the world to where it was in 1500.

Foundations also refer to principles, concepts, and theories that we use to explain how and why those events took place. They are the intellectual foundations for understanding the history of world civilizations. After looking into some general theories of how historical events can be understood, we will focus on the provocative and well-presented case for a kind of environmental determinism explained by Jared Diamond in his best-selling *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. His book will also structure much of our discussion of the processes that led to the agricultural economic foundations of world civilizations. We may not always agree with him, but he will give us much to debate.

If we consider “world civilization” to be a field of historical study, then the foundations of world civilization are also the foundations of the writing of history itself. In this sense, we will look at some of the first histories, starting with Herodotus around 425 BCE (BC), and at others as the field of history developed.

Finally, the foundations of a field of study are the methods used to pursue it. So this class will guide you to practice and develop practical skills for reading and interpreting both academic arguments and primary historical sources, and for researching and writing historical and other sorts of papers. You will read many old texts, as well as more recent commentary built on them, to get a taste of the raw material of history and how to handle it.

**Objectives:** This course is designed to meet the learning objectives for GE area D2 courses. Specifically, in this course you will

- 1) Learn about the variety of conditions in which complex social systems have emerged and in which they have transformed.
- 2) Acquire an appreciation for a significant range and diversity of societies across a broad span of time from the Pleistocene to 1500 CE, and across a geographic span covering much of the globe.
- 3) Attain a basic geographical and historical literacy, learning to identify the locations and the basic chronological frameworks of numerous societies.

4) Study the ways in which aspects of these societies function and interact. These aspects include belief systems, social stratification, differential access to resources, gender, exchange, and conflict.

5) Learn current theoretical constructs that explain these phenomena.

6) Study ways in which societies interact with their physical environment. These include adaptations to, and modifications of, the environment as well as reactions to change in the environment.

7) develop your reasoning and writing skills by using evidence to support arguments in brief but properly referenced papers, as well as written exams.

**GE requirement:** This course satisfies the upper division World History and Civilization (D2) General Education requirement. For more information on the Mission, Goals and Objectives of General Education at SSU, see

<http://www.sonoma.edu/aa/ap/generaleducation.shtml>

**Class web page:** You are responsible for checking the class web page regularly. It will change during the semester, and it takes precedence over information in this syllabus. The assigned readings, lecture notes and slides, homework assignments, due dates, and other information will all be posted there. Note that this is *not* a WebCT page. You can click to the class web page from the SSU “Class web pages” list, or go to:

<http://bruceowen.com/foundworld/h201-09s.htm>

**Class User ID and password:** Due to copyright issues, you need a class user ID and password to access some material on the class web page. These are *not* the same ID and password that you use for other SSU functions. I will provide them in class. If you forget them, ask or email me.

**Schedule of readings, assignments, etc:** The schedule of readings, assignments, due dates, and tests is posted on the class web page. Please read the selections *before* the class session. Reading assignments are fairly heavy, ranging up to 50 or 60 pages for a single class meeting. Few of the readings are highly technical, though. Most of the bulk comes from the fairly readable textbook, or from the very readable *Guns, Germs, and Steel*.

**Textbook and online readings:** This course has three required books, plus online readings posted on the class website. I suggest that you print the online items, so you can write notes in the margins, highlight, and refer to them in class. The books are

Diamond, Jared

1999 *Guns, Germs, and Steel, the Fates of Human Societies*. Norton. ISBN 0-393-31755-2

Bentley, Jerry H., and Herbert F. Ziegler

2008 *Traditions & Encounters, A Global Perspective on the Past. Volume I, From the Beginning to 1500*. Fourth edition. McGraw Hill. ISBN 978-0-07-333062-4

Arnold, John H.

2000 *History, A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford. ISBN 0-19-285352-X

While a few copies of these books may be locally available, they have not been ordered by any bookstore for this class. I suggest that you order them online, immediately. All are available new

and used from major book sites, including Amazon.com and cheaper alternatives. Be sure to get the fourth edition of *Traditions & Encounters*, with a ship pictured on the cover. The readings for the first two weeks are all online, through links on the class web page. You will need *Guns, Germs, and Steel* in time to read several chapters by February 10, *Traditions & Encounters* in time to read two sections by March 10, and *History, a Very Short Introduction* in time to read a chapter by April 9.

**Lecture notes and slides:** My lecture notes and Powerpoint slides used in class will be posted on the web page. The notes will generally be posted before the class, while the slides will be posted after the class. Some of the notes may be useful for studying, but they are no substitute for doing the reading, attending class, and participating in discussion.

**Assignments and their weights in grading:**

- 10% **Written assignment 1: Active reading.** An exercise in taking notes and figuring out a slightly complex narrative source. Details will be posted on the class website.
- 15% **Written assignment 2: Outline and abstract.** An exercise in understanding and summarizing an academic argument. Details will be posted on the class website.
- 15% **Written assignment 3: Finding, interpreting, and citing a primary source.** An exercise in library research, primary source analysis, and citation format. Details will be posted on the class website.
- 20% **Written assignment 4: Writing an historical argument.** A brief history paper, based on one or more primary sources, advancing and supporting an argument, with proper citation format. Details will be posted on the class website.
- 20% **In-class midterm.** Short-answer and essay questions, and maps on which you mark important places and regions. Details will be posted on the class website.
- 20% **Final exam.** Similar to the midterm, emphasizing material covered in the second part of the course, but using foundational concepts from the first part. Details will be posted on the class website.

**Grading scheme:** This course is graded on a curve, with the minimum score for a B- set near the median, and the grading ranges adjusted to reflect the performance of the class.

**Submitting assignments:** The written assignments must be submitted BOTH on paper, AND as a file attached to an email message to me. I will return the paper copy with comments and a grade written on it. The paper copy is due in class on the day indicated on the syllabus. The computer file OF THE IDENTICAL PAPER is due by midnight of that day. I must have BOTH versions to give you credit. Details on submitting files will be included in the assignment information.

**Late assignment policy:** I will accept assignments up to one week late with a 15% grading penalty. Because there are sometimes problems with email, I will allow some leeway on the deadline for the emailed version. However, I must eventually receive it in order to give you credit. No file, no credit.

**Drafts:** I encourage you to submit drafts of the assignments so that I can comment on them and suggest directions for the final version. Email is fastest, but I will also look at paper drafts.

**Email:** I usually reply to emails within 24 hours. If you do not hear from me within 48 hours, assume that I did not get your message and try again.

**Invitation:** If you want help, or would just like to talk about history, anthropology, assignments, preparing for tests, archaeology, or anything else, please drop by during my office hours, arrange to see me at some other time, or contact me by email. I am here to help you master the material.

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is using someone else's words, information, or ideas *without giving that person credit*. This includes copying from your peers, websites, or other public sources, even brief phrases, on tests, papers, or any other work. Plagiarism is immoral and dishonest. It is easy to avoid: just indicate all of your sources. Plagiarism results in penalties up to an F for the course. I have failed numerous students for plagiarism. University policy requires me to report plagiarism, and the University may impose sanctions up to expulsion. A more complete explanation, including advice on how to use material without plagiarizing, is posted on the class website. University policies about plagiarism and cheating are available through the University Policies link below. Format guidelines for citations in the essays will also be posted.

**Disability accommodations:** If you have a disability and you think you may require accommodations, please register with the campus office of Disability Services for Students (DSS), located in Salazar Hall - Room 1049, Phone: (707) 664-2677, TTY/TDD: (707) 664-2958. DSS will provide you with written confirmation of your verified disability and authorize recommended accommodations. You must present this authorization to me before I can make any accommodations. If you have a letter from DSS indicating that you are entitled to academic accommodations, please bring it to me so we can discuss arrangements. If you think you may require assistance evacuating a building in the event of a disaster, please let me know what type of assistance you think you may need.

**University policies:** There are important University policies that you should be aware of, such as the add/drop policy; cheating and plagiarism policy, grade appeal procedures, accommodations for students with disabilities and the diversity vision statement. You can see them at:

<http://www.sonoma.edu/uaffairs/policies/studentinfo.shtml>

**Final exam:** Thursday, May 21, 2:00-3:50, in our regular classroom, Darwin 29.