

COURSE SYLLABUS



European History II

Course code: HIS 122/1

Term and year: Fall 2026

Day and time: Thursdays, 08.00-10.45

Instructor: Dr. Gerald Power

Instructor contact: gerald.power@aauni.edu

Consultation hours: Wednesdays and Thursdays, 14-15.00 (Room 4.02), or by appointment

Credits US/ECTS	3/6	Level	Bachelor
Length	15 weeks	Pre-requisite	
Contact hours	42 hours	Grading	Letter grade

1. Course Description

This course provides an overview of European history from approximately 1500 to 2000. It discusses a broad and rich array of themes in a narrative fashion, including the Renaissance and Reformation; the French Revolution; the Industrial Revolution; the emergence of national identities and states; the First World War; the inter-war period; World War II; the Cold War in Europe and post-Cold War Europe.

Instruction is via reading, class presentations and both teacher- and student-led discussions of primary sources, documentaries and podcasts. The key concerns of these different activities are to facilitate the in-depth exploration of important problems in modern European history and to encourage the intellectual development of each student.

2. Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Identify the outline historical 'facts' that have defined Europe from the Renaissance to the twenty-first century.
- Describe decisive political, economic, social and political forces which have shaped modern Europe.
- Reflect on knowledge gained in terms of alternative interpretations/explanations and students' own experiences/understanding of the world.
- Analyse and contextualise historical developments in European history, identifying patterns and continuities in addition to changes.
- Offer evaluations of European history based on critical thinking and an understanding of historical methodology.

3. Reading Material

Required Materials (Library and/or via MyLearning LMS)

- Merriman, John. *A History of Modern Europe: From Renaissance to the Present*. New York: 2010. This is a textbook to help you through the course. It is on desk-reserve in the library; the library also has multiple copies for loan.

TV and Podcast Material

- *Great Lives*, 'Frederick the Great' (BBC, 2023).
- *What is History?* E.H. Carr, Then & Now (YouTube channel).
- *The Lost World of Communism* (BBC, 2013).
- *All You Need to Know About European History* – <https://shows.acast.com/all-you-need-to-know-about-european-history/episodes>
- *The Rest is History* - <https://therestishistory.com/club>.

Primary Sources

- The Internet History Sourcebook – Primary Sources on Nazism and Fascism

Research Paper Materials (in the Library, on MyLearning LMS or by following links)

Luck or Superiority? Account for 'The Rise of the West'

- Crosby, Alfred. *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*. New edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Diamond, Jared. *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*. New York: Norton, 1997.
- Goldstone, Jack. *Why Europe? The Rise of the West in World History, 1500-1850*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009.
- Parker, Geoffrey. *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

How Can We Explain the End of the European Witch-Hunt?

- Easlea, Brian. *Witch Hunting, Magic and the New Philosophy: An Introduction to the Debates of the Scientific Revolution, 1450-1750*. Brighton: Harvester, 1980, <https://archive.org/details/witchhuntingmagi0000easl/mode/2up>
- Israel, Jonathan. *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750*. Oxford: OUP, 2001.
- Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Europe*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2015.
- Thomas, Keith. *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Penguin 1971).

Account for the Violence of the French Revolution

- Arendt, Hanna. *On Revolution*. London: Penguin, 1963.
- Lefebvre, Georges. *The French Revolution: From its Origins to 1793*. London: Routledge, 1962.
- Popkin, Jeremy. *A New World Begins: The History of the French Revolution*. New York: Basic Books, 2019.

- Schama, Simon. *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989. [In Library]

Was the Irish Famine a Case of Genocide?

- Coogan, T.P. *The Famine Plot: England's Role in Ireland's Greatest Tragedy*. New York: Palgrave, 2012.
- McGowan, Mark G. 'The Famine Plot Revisited: A Reassessment of the Great Irish Famine as Genocide.' *Genocide Studies International* 11, no. 1 (2017): 87-104
- Taylor, A.J.P. *Essays in English History*. London: Penguin, 1976.
- O Gráda, Cormac. *The Great Irish Famine*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989.

Explain the Attraction of the Nazi Movement to German Women

- Koonz, Claudine. *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics*. Abingdon: Routledge, 1986.
- Lower, Wendy. *Hitler's Furies: German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2013.
- Pine, Lisa. *Nazi Family Policy, 1933-1945*. Oxford: Berg, 1997.
- Stephenson, Jill, *Women in Nazi Germany*. London, Routledge, 2001.

Was the Soviet Union an Empire?

- Beissinger, Mark. 'Rethinking Empire in the Wake of the Soviet Collapse' in *Ethnic Politics after Communism*, ed. Zoltan Barany and Robert Moser. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005: 14-45.
- Lieven, Dominic. 'The Russian Empire and the Soviet Union as Imperial Polities,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 30 no. 4 (1995):607-36.
- Martin, Terry. *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Empire*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001.
- Strayer, Robert. 'Decolonization, Democratization, and Communism Reform: The Soviet Collapse in Comparative Perspective,' *Journal of World History* 12, no. 2 (2001): 375-406.

4. Teaching methodology

The course combines lectures and discussion. Lectures are delivered by the instructor and students are expected to take notes, ask questions and respond to the instructor's calls for ideas and answers. Discussions focus on sharing our understanding of assigned material – ensure that you are ready for discussion sessions by doing the required reading, listening or viewing.

Two classes are reserved for individual feedback on assignments.

A note on technology: I will ask students to put away computers, phones and other devices during discussion sessions. Please bring paper and pens for any notetaking.

A note on attendance: This class is not delivered in hybrid mode. Students cannot join online without formal prior approval from the dean of their school or the vice president for student affairs.

5. Course Schedule

Date	Class Agenda
Session 1 3 Sept. 2026	Topic: Introduction Description: Students will receive an introduction to the course aims, structure and methods of evaluation. We will also try to work out what 'history' means in a university setting: what's the nature of historical knowledge and how can we contribute to it? Reading: Syllabus. Assignments/deadlines: None.
Session 2 10 Sept. 2026	Topic: The Late-Medieval World and Renaissance Description: The Renaissance is explored based on our study of the assigned podcast. We look at the wider European world, particularly the development of overseas empires and the rise of the Ottoman presence in the East. Reading: All You Need to Know podcast, episode 'Renaissance'. Assignments/deadlines: None
Session 3 17 Sept. 2026	Topic: Reformation Description: We explore how Europe became split into Catholic and Protestant blocs. We will also look at society, in particular the phenomenon of peasant uprisings. How did religious radicalism spill over into social, economic and political radicalism – and how did people decide what could and could not be challenged? Reading: Merriman, ch. 3 to p. 103. Assignments/deadlines: None.
Session 4 24 Sept. 2026	Topic: Counter-Reformation and Wars of Religion Description: This session is devoted to discussing the era of religious wars which rocked Europe from the later sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth centuries. We try to comprehend Calvinism and the nature of the Catholic response: Catholic Reformation or Counter-Reformation? Reading: Merriman, ch. 3, pp 114-25. Assignments/deadlines: None.
Session 5 1 Oct. 2026	Topic: Absolutism & Enlightenment Description: The unit looks at the rise of the absolutist state in much of Europe including Russia, contrasting this form of polity with the liberal constitutions of Poland-Lithuania, the Dutch Republic and Britain. The intellectual revolution known as the Enlightenment is introduced. Reading: None. Assignments/deadlines: Class Participation 1/3 points awarded.
Session 6	Topic: Exam 1.

8 Oct. 2026	Description: 60-minute exam: bring pens! Reading: None. Assignments/deadlines: None.
Session 7 15 Oct. 2026	Topic: The French Revolution and Revolutionary Europe Description: This module looks at how a political reform movement in France turned that country into idealistic and bloody turmoil, and before long influenced the rest of the continent with passionate ideas of liberalism, nationalism, socialism and conservatism. In the discussion section, we look at a case study of an absolutist ruler, and consider the surprising and impactful life of Frederick the Great of Prussia. Reading: <i>Great Lives</i>, 'Frederick the Great' BBC Radio 4, 11 April 2023, https://www.bbc.com/audio/play/m001kx69. Assignments/deadlines: None
Session 8 22 Oct. 2026	Topic: The Industrial Revolution Description: We explore the second great revolutionary process in modern European history, with a particular emphasis on the political and social impacts – most importantly the advent of class politics. We then consider the question of why the French Revolution did so little for women's rights. Listen to the podcast as part of your preparation. Reading: The Rest is History podcast, episode 'The French Revolution: The First Feminist' (Apple podcasts) / here via Spotify. Assignments/deadlines: Research Paper Outline
29 Oct. 2026	Mid-term break
Session 9 5 Nov. 2026	Topic: Progress and Reaction in 19th-century Europe Description: The unit examines the 19th century in the context of the struggle between progressive/revolutionary and conservative/reactionary forces and social groups. The central, dramatic focus of attention is the 1848 'spring of nations'. We will also consider the strange hybrid of authoritarianism (including so-called patriarchy) and liberalism that characterized European states in the second half of the 19th century. Assignments/deadlines: Class Participation 2/3 points awarded.
Session 10 12 Nov. 2026	Topic: Exam 2 Description: 60-minute exam: bring pens! For students doing essays: come to class from 9.30 for individual consultations. Reading: None. Assignments/deadlines: None.
Session 11 19 Nov. 2026	Topic: From Belle Époque to Great War Description: We will chart the descent of Europe into total war, and consider why the First World War took the catastrophic course it did. Reading: Merriman, ch. 17, 685-93. Assignments/deadlines: None.
Session 12	Topic: The Era of World War II

26 Nov. 2026	Description: We begin by looking at Merriman's chapter and consider the question of German responsibility for World War I. Then we turn to era of World War II, surveying the causes, course and consequences of the most devastating conflict in human history, including a consideration of the Holocaust and the morality of Allied victory. Reading: Merriman, ch. 22, pp 863-88. Assignments/deadlines: Research Paper.
Session 13 3 Dec. 2026	Topic: Cold War Europe, 1945-1989: From Division to Unity Description: The Cold War was the single greatest fact of life in Europe after World War II. This session looks at the establishment of Communist regimes and on contrasting conditions between East and West Europe. Yet we should not be blind to some commonalities between both sides of the Iron Curtain, such as youth movements and a culture of protest and dissent. Eventually, dissent helped to bring down Communist rule in the East. Reading: View the BBC <i>Lost World of Communism</i> documentary episode 'The Kingdom of Forgetting' Assignments/deadlines: None.
Session 14 10 Dec. 2026	Topic: Review + Exam 3 Description: A final session will explore the major themes addressed in the course, and suggest ways of approaching contemporary European history. After the break we will have the final exam. Bring pens! Reading: None Assignments/deadlines: 1) Final Exam 2) Class Participation 3/3 points awarded

6. Course Requirements and Assessment (with estimated workloads)

Assignment	Workload (hours)	Weight in Final Grade	Evaluated Course Specific Learning Outcomes	Evaluated Institutional Learning Outcomes*
Class Participation	42	15% (3 x 5%)	Demonstrate awareness of the major processes and developments of European history, based on a close reading of assigned materials. Reflect on knowledge gained in terms of alternative interpretations/explanations and students' own experiences/understanding of the world.	1, 3
Exam 1	30	15%	Identify the outline historical 'facts' that have defined Europe	1, 2

			from the Renaissance to the twenty-first century. Describe decisive political, economic, social and political forces which have shaped modern Europe. Offer evaluations of European history based on critical thinking and an understanding of historical methodology.	
Exam 2 OR Research Paper Outline	30	20%	Identify the outline historical 'facts' that have defined Europe from the Renaissance to the twenty-first century. Describe decisive political, economic, social and political forces which have shaped modern Europe. Offer evaluations of European history based on critical thinking and an understanding of historical methodology and the critical use of sources.	1, 3
Exam 3 OR Research Paper	48	30%	Identify the outline historical 'facts' that have defined Europe from the Renaissance to the twenty-first century. Describe decisive political, economic, social and political forces which have shaped modern Europe. Offer evaluations of European history based on critical thinking and an understanding of historical methodology and the critical use of sources.	1, 3
One-Question	0 (part of class time)	10%	Describe decisive political, economic, social and political	2

			forces which have shaped modern Europe. Identify the outline historical 'facts' that have defined Europe from the Renaissance to the twenty-first century.	
In-Class Response Papers	0 (in class time)	10%	Reflect on knowledge gained in terms of alternative interpretations/explanations and students' own experiences/understanding of the world.	1, 2
TOTAL	150	100%		

*1 = Critical Thinking; 2 = Effective Communication; 3 = Effective and Responsible Action

7. Detailed description of the assignments

Assignment 1: Participation

Consistent preparation and participation are all essential for those wishing to pass the course and to score high grades. The instructor will monitor levels of participation of each student in each class. Points are awarded for making regular contributions throughout the semester. The grade is split into three parts. 5% is awarded by the end of Week 5, 5% by the end of Week 9 and the final 5% at the end of Week 14. Points are gained by offering oral contributions (questions, answers or comments) and for the levels of originality, collegiality and depth.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Offering three separate contributions in each phase of the semester	90%
Quality of contributions (depth, originality, relevance, collegiality)	10%

Assignment 2: Exams 1-3

The exams take 60 minutes each. Each exam features 10 x multiple choice questions, 5 x fill-in-the-blank questions and 1 paragraph question.

Exam 1 takes place in Session 6 and is based on material covered in Sessions 2-5. This assignment is for everyone. **After this, students can choose whether to continue with the exam format for the rest of the course, or instead to attempt the Research Paper.**

Exam 2 takes place in Session 10 and is based on material covered in Sessions 7-9. Exam 3 takes place in Session 14 and is based on material covered in Sessions 11-13.

The paragraph answer is to be about 1 page and tests knowledge of one the major issues addressed in the discussions. Attending classes consistently, working through assigned materials and contributing to in-class discussions are the best of ways of preparing for the exams.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Factual knowledge (short-answers)	20%
Depth and comprehension (paragraph)	80%

Assignment 3: *Research Paper Outline* (only for students electing to do the Research Paper)

This assignment is designed to help offer direction and support for those students who intend to complete a Research Paper. Students are required to:

1) Choose one of the essay titles from the list given in this syllabus/course page and take notes on **two** of the assigned sources. Think about how what you have read can give you ideas for dealing with the question posed in the essay title.

2) Write up a short report consisting of the following elements:

- the essay title.
- the sources you have read so far
- 3-4 key points from your notes that you can use in your argument
- 3-4 key questions that you would like to find out before completing your research.

Print this and give it to me in class during Session 8 (i.e. 22 October) or leave it in my mailbox at Reception. You should also email me a copy for your own records.

3) Email me or speak with me after class to arrange a consultation. The consultation must take place between 19 and 30 October, so approach me well before the closing date. The consultation is a vital aspect and you cannot pass the assignment without completing it. Enquiries to meet after the deadline of 30 October will not be accepted.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Basic elements presented	50%
Consultation	50%

Assignment 4: *Research Paper*

Deadline

In print by 18.00 on the day of Session 12. It can be handed to me during class or left in my mailbox at Reception. You should also send a copy by email for your records.

Research Paper Topics

CHOOSE ONE OF THE FOLLOWING TITLES

- 1) Luck or superiority? Account for 'The Rise of the West'
- 2) How can we explain the end of the European Witch-Hunt?

- 3) Account for the violence of the French Revolution
- 4) Was the Irish Famine a case of genocide?
- 5) Explain the attraction of the Nazi movement to German women
- 6) Was the Soviet Union an empire?

Preparation Advice

My advice for those preparing for the essay is to begin by reading the essay titles above to get a sense of what appeals the most. Then, come and talk to me, either at the end of class or during my office hour, to get a better sense of the issues in play. This might be the moment to reconsider your choice and look into doing one of the other topics. Once you have settled – at least provisionally – on your chosen question, start looking through the assigned materials – at this stage this means especially introductions and conclusions – and try and get a sense of what themes are relevant and which interpretations are the subject of discussion among historians. Note that most of the materials are available in PDF but others are to be found in print in the Library. Some require that you register to Archive.org; some are in e-reader format. Finally, start digging a little deeper in the assigned material with a view to understanding these topics in more depth. Having completed this process, you ought to be able to draw up the **Outline**, which is the preliminary assignment described above.

Essay Submission Details

The essay is to be 4-6 pages of double-spaced Times New Roman (excluding cover page and bibliography).

The Criteria

1) Constructing an argument: The essay ought to have a major idea, revealed in the introduction and followed through in the main body. The argument (or interpretation) is not to be arbitrary, but the result of careful consideration of relevant secondary literature (the historiography). Making direct references to the historiography and how your own argument relates to it will enhance the sophistication and persuasiveness of your essay. Avoid presenting a main argument followed by a counter-argument. Instead, absorb any valid objections into a more robust main argument.

2) Data use: The essay needs a reliable foundation. But working out what sources are good and which are not can be very difficult. To simplify matters, the policy is very simple: **use the assigned material described above**. Should you find other sources that you think are valid and helpful, just get in touch with me and send me the details.

You must substantiate the various points offered in your essay by providing **references**. You can use MLA or Chicago referencing systems, but ensure that you provide page numbers where appropriate. I recommend Chicago-style footnotes (see this website for a guide:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/chicago_manual_17th_edition/cmos_for_matting_and_style_guide/chicago_manual_of_style_17th_edition.html

Knowing when to give a citation or reference is sometimes difficult, but the rule of thumb is that every substantial idea or piece of data or quote requires a footnote. NB: no references will mean your essay can be construed as plagiarism.

3) Structure: The essay must have three sections: introduction, main body and conclusion. Please note that in this short essay there is no need for section headings. Instead, simply using paragraphing effectively will indicate the divisions between intro, main body and conclusion, as well as the divisions within the main body. Within the main body the rule is quite simple: each major point deserves its own paragraph (possibly, depending on the essay, you might devote more than a single paragraph to a main body point; but it is almost certainly going to be bad practice if you put more than one major point in the same paragraph). Good structure also involves consistency. Contradictory points which are not properly flagged and explained, or sudden changes of emphasis or direction are evidence of structural weaknesses and will lose points.

4) Technical: Keep to the page count and present the essay as specified above. Spelling mistakes and inaccurate or clichéd language will lose points. Aim for prose that is concise and clear, avoiding prose which is repetitious or unnecessarily complex or florid.

5) The discussion session. Students need to arrange a 15-minute discussion session with me to dig deeper into the research process and argument, and to offer constructive feedback. Arrange a time with when you submit the essay. Do this either in person with me during class time or write me an email. But the meeting must take place before the end of the teaching period (15 December), and you must give reasonable time to set up the meeting at a mutually convenient time (so don't email me on 14 December!).

Use of AI

You may use AI tools for preliminary work but not with generating the final text. I will scrutinize all essays for this. Detecting AI usage with 100% confidence is unfortunately rather difficult. To avoid unpleasant discussions and bad grades, I recommend that students keep all their drafts and use facilities like Google Docs to keep track of the evolution of their manuscripts.

I adopt this policy on AI usage because I am interested in your own intellectual process – the generation of ideas and the art of expressing those ideas in your own fashion. I am assuming that anyone taking on this assignment will understand this and will work in the spirit that I suggest. If you are not comfortable or willing to write an essay without AI assistance, then don't sign up for this assignment.

If you are ever unsure whether a particular AI use is acceptable, ask me first.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Argument construction	20%
Data use	20%
Structure	20%
Technical (spelling, grammar, punctuation and syntax)	10%
Discussion	30%

Assignment 5: One Question

A simple exercise. All you need to do is be attentive and thoughtful during lectures and discussions and write me one question that occurs to as interesting and relevant within the context of that particular class session.

To do the assignment you take one of the index cards that I take to each class. Write your name and question and hand it back to me.

Do 10 of these throughout the semester at the conclusion of any class except for the exam sessions. A point is given for each submission, with ten points being the maximum.

Assessed area	Percentage
Completing and submitting the question	100%

Important note regarding attendance: this is an in-class assignment. It cannot be replicated later. Therefore it is essential that you come to all classes if you want to maximise your chances of scoring top marks.

Assignment 6: In-Class Response Papers

This is designed to cultivate comprehension and critical thinking skills. It involves taking 5 minutes to write a short response to a critical question relating to the theme of the session. Critical questions are not questions of fact, but of viewpoint. Successful answers will show an awareness of the nature of historical knowledge (that it is contingent and provisional but also grounded in data uncovered in the primary sources). Five response papers are given across the semester, each one being worth 2%.

Important note regarding attendance: this is an in-class assignment. It cannot be replicated later. Therefore it is essential that you come to all classes if you want to maximise your chances of scoring top marks. Should you miss classes for genuine reasons and have a concern regarding your grade for this assignment, you should consult me during my office hour.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Engagement with the question	20%
Discussing at least one concrete notion, interpretation or piece of evidence.	40%
Expressing a claim or viewpoint, however brief	40%

8. General Requirements and School Policies

General requirements

All coursework is governed by AAU's academic rules. Students are expected to be familiar with the academic rules in the Academic Codex and Student Handbook and to maintain the highest standards of honesty and academic integrity in their work. Please see the AAU intranet for a [summary of key policies](#) regarding coursework.

Course specific requirements

1) Attendance for this course is voluntary and there is no penalty for missing class. However, missing classes in which course work is due without a valid excuse will mean losing the points for that assignment. If you have any doubt about your ability to attend a class at which work is due you ought to contact me **as early as is reasonable**. Attendance will be recorded in MyLearning and many absences may have implications for students on a student visa. Missing multiple classes also sends a clear message about a student's commitment to learning.

Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Percentage*	Description
A	95–100	Excellent performance. The student has shown originality and displayed an exceptional grasp of the material and a deep analytical understanding of the subject.
A–	90–94	
B+	87–89	Good performance. The student has mastered the material, understands the subject well and has shown some originality of thought and/or considerable effort.
B	83–86	
B–	80–82	
C+	77–79	Fair performance. The student has acquired an acceptable understanding of the material and essential subject matter of the course, but has not succeeded in translating this understanding into consistently creative or original work.
C	73–76	
C–	70–72	
D+	65–69	Poor. The student has shown some understanding of the material and subject matter covered during the course. The student's work, however, has not shown enough effort or understanding to allow for a passing grade in School Required Courses. It does qualify as a passing mark for the General College Courses and Electives.
D	60–64	
F	0–59	Fail. The student has not succeeded in mastering the subject matter covered in the course.

* Decimals should be rounded to the nearest whole number.