

History and Social Sciences

History Department Curriculum Overview

The goal of the History Department is to encourage thoughtful reflection and independent thinking about historical events through the study of geography, social conditions, and categorical contexts. Our focus is global and as a result, we emphasize connections more than isolated facts. A continuous effort is made to meaningfully connect the past to the present and the present to the past: thawing frozen history and making sense of the contemporary world.

In accordance with this goal, St. Francis requires students to take four years of history. During the first two years of the curriculum, students are introduced to civilizations, cultures, and socio-religious traditions in the ancient and medieval worlds, respectively. In addition to providing a cultural and geographical base, the Culture and Civilization courses in the freshman and sophomore years stress basic research techniques, primary-source textual analysis, and effective written expression. Most classes are conducted in the discussion format, emphasizing respectful interaction.

In the junior year, students take U.S. History or AP U.S. History. Seniors take AP Comparative Government and Politics, a course that analyzes and compares the governmental structures of six different countries, and/or they choose elective seminars, which focus on relevant current issues such as law, race, gender, and politics both domestic and international. This culminating year prepares students for college academic work by covering a demanding curriculum that stresses independent reading and research as well as lively and informed classroom discussions.

History Department Course Offerings

Culture and Civilization I (Ancient World) (1 credit)

This is the first part of a two-year World History sequence required for all 9th graders. In this course, students begin with an overview of cultural anthropology. Using this as a basis for exploration, students survey world history from its beginnings in Africa and Asia to the advent of the Middle Ages in Europe. Main themes include the borrowings from and blending of cultures, the characteristics of empires, and the reasons for the declines of civilizations. Students will be introduced to several historical tools, including document analysis, religious texts, archeology, and literature. Geography – using many types of maps – is a course component throughout.

Culture and Civilization II (Medieval World) (1 credit)

This course for 10th graders will apply critical thought to the concepts and historical records of cultures and civilizations in medieval global history. Different strands of Vedic theism, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, and other traditions, as well as identities associated with ethnicity and socio-economic groups, will be addressed in context. The object is to provide students with the tools to act and communicate meaningfully in an interdependent world community. Students will also complete a year-long research and writing project in this course.

United States History (1 credit)

This course will use chronological and thematic approaches to examine our nation's past, in order to provide students with a necessary base as they assume the mantle of adult citizenship. The parameters of the instruction will be from European contact up until the present day, and students will examine common themes (government, economics, religion, war, society, and culture) across time to gain an understanding of how the past impacts the present. Skill development will stress coherent written and oral expression, researching in a time of technological change, and clear reasoning and interpretation. Class requirements will include a significant amount of reading and formal writing assignments.

AP United States History (1 credit)

Prerequisites: Permission of the department

Enrollment in this class is contingent upon the successful completion of a summer reading and writing assignment.

AP U.S. History covers the spectrum of American history from pre-Columbian days to the present. Using chronological and thematic approaches to the material, this course exposes students to extensive primary and secondary sources and to the historiographical interpretations of various scholars. Thoughtful class participation and written assignments will be crucial to success in this course. This course may be taken by juniors in lieu of regular U.S. History or by seniors who have already taken the regular U.S. History course.

AP Comparative Government and Politics (1 credit)

Prerequisites: Permission of the department

Enrollment in this class is contingent upon the successful completion of a summer reading and writing assignment.

AP Comparative Government and Politics is an introductory college-level course in comparative government and politics. The course uses a comparative approach to examine the political structures; policies; and political, economic, and social challenges of six selected countries: China, Iran, Mexico, Nigeria, Russia, and the United Kingdom. Students cultivate their understanding of comparative government and politics through analysis of data and text-based sources as they explore topics like power and authority, legitimacy and stability, democratization, internal and external forces, and methods of political analysis. This approach to understanding the world is particularly important in light of recent geo-political events, both in the United States and abroad. The summer reading assignment will help students situate themselves in the context of the United States' system.

Senior Seminars

*Senior Seminars provide students the chance to pursue focused study of selected topics, often in 19th- and 20th-century history as well as the current day, and will include intensive reading, involved discussion, and presentation of papers. Proficiency in world geography is a requirement of the courses. **Seniors not enrolled in an AP History course must take one Senior Seminar each semester.** Juniors may enroll in these courses as electives. Each is offered for ½ credit. These courses are being offered to gauge student interest; they will*

*actually occur subject to sufficient enrollment. **Students are advised to put second and third choices for all Senior Seminars.***

Constitutional Law (*½ credit*)

This course will examine the many aspects of United States constitutional law from legal and historical perspectives. Students will read actual case law and learn how to thoughtfully digest legal opinions and to develop the vocabulary and tools necessary to understand how the Constitution shapes American life and serves as a useful reflection of American history. In completing the course students will: increase their understanding of how judicial decisions reveal constitutional law doctrine and how lawyers advocate for changes in constitutional law; further develop their research and writing skills; better understand current events; and be better equipped to become informed, involved citizens. Substantively, this course will also focus on First Amendment freedoms: why we have them, how they work, and how they can be protected.

Queer Studies (*1/2 credit*)

This course will examine queer histories and the history of "queer" as a social label, current theories of queer identity, and queer activism in the 20th and 21st centuries, mainly by examining primary sources (memoirs and oral histories; legal codes and court cases; queer manifestos and other publications) in context. We will begin in the colonial period to study how non-binary identities were formulated in European colonial and indigenous societies and continue through the present day, discussing recent civil rights gains and efforts to roll back those gains. We will pay particular attention to the ways conceptions of queerness and queer people's experiences vary across race, class, and ethnicity. Class requirements will include reading comprehension check quizzes, response essays, and a short research project.

Visible Language: Writing and Literacy in the World Today (*1/2 credit*)

While our brains are hard-wired for speech, writing is a technology that can only be learned with considerable time and effort. Yet it's difficult to imagine our world without writing, or even to go a day without experiencing it in some way. This is a recent development, for until a few centuries ago, most people in most societies could not read or write. How did writing become so pervasive, and, for that matter, what is writing? What relationship does writing have with speech, and what are the cognitive processes involved with reading and writing? This course seeks to answer these and other questions through an examination of the major writing systems of the world. How did they develop, and what does their future hold in this digital age?

**Spring Senior Seminars will be announced in November, and students will sign up for them then.*