This course explores how historians and other social scientists have approached the world in which we live by posing a variety of questions for investigation, among them: How do we conceptualize the world and how are those conceptions shaped by underlying political, cultural, and ideological assumptions? How have natural and historical processes affected human beings and their societies? What vocabularies and concepts are used to discuss the processes of change that have resulted in today’s “globalized” world of nation-states and transnational actors and institutions?

This seminar addresses these and other questions through a close examination of the ways that world history has been conceived from ancient times to the present. We will read and discuss a variety of primary texts and secondary, analytical works that bear on such issues as

- Metageography, e.g., What are continents? Why are there seven? What assumptions do we make about the “shape of things?”
- World civilizations -- What peoples, places, and cultures are left out when we take this approach?
- “The rise of the West” – How do we evaluate this narrative and its implications?
- “Globalization” – How do we place today’s global, transnational economy and institutions in historical perspective?

Throughout the course we will examine the role of the social scientist, in particular the historian, in formulating questions for investigation, plotting a strategy for answering the questions, and thus producing and disseminating knowledge, which sometimes becomes “common knowledge” in the culture at large. In particular we will learn ask how the questions investigated shape the “history” produced.

In history courses, and particularly in a first-year seminar we focus on developing skills of critical thinking, including close reading, logical and articulate discussion, and clear
analytical writing. We will learn how to identify and evaluate the arguments in the books and articles we read. You will also be introduced to various components of academic and intellectual discourse and usage—the language and customs of the culture, and to the processes involved in doing historical research.

This course will use a web-based program called Blackboard for posting assignments and as a forum for discussion. I will discuss with you how to access and use the site http://oncampus.oberlin.edu/

Assignments:
All assignments must be completed to receive credit for the course. Since the course emphasizes reading and discussion, it is important to keep up with the reading and be prepared for discussion. Class attendance is crucial and required for your own learning, but also for the learning of the other participants, including me.

1. Study questions will be posted on Blackboard for the major readings. A discussion question will also be posted on the Discussion Board of the Blackboard web site for each major reading. Each student should post a short informal response to the Discussion Board questions or follow up on another student’s comments at least 24 hours before the scheduled discussion. Comments should be thoughtful and around 300-500 words.

2. An analytical essay of 5-8 pp. will be assigned early in the semester on a topic based on the reading and class discussions.

3. Historiographical research: In order to learn how to research a topic we will engage in an initial brief research activity. The goal is to understand and summarize the historical debate and newest scholarship surrounding a given incident, issue, or person significant to world historical studies. A list of topics and detailed instructions for the exercise will be distributed. The goal is to produce a 3-5 page summary of the historiography of your topic and a bibliography of what you have identified as the important scholarship on the topic.

4. Collaborative research: The class will be divided into groups for cooperative projects and mini-discussions. The cooperative project includes a panel presentation. Topics will be discussed in class midway through the first half of the course. Group members will present the results of their work to the class and moderate a discussion after the presentation. Members of the previous group will submit short written critiques of the current panel to me and to the panel participants. The group scheduled for the last presentation will critique the first presentation. We will discuss the principles and practices of collaborative research and constructive critique in advance.
5. **Final Project:** Based on her or his part in the collaborative research project, each student will provide a write-up in a final essay as an annotated research report of approximately 10-12 pp.

All work at the College and in this course is governed by the Honor Code. Familiarize yourself with the code and your responsibilities under it: [http://new.oberlin.edu/office/dean-of-students/honor/students.dot](http://new.oberlin.edu/office/dean-of-students/honor/students.dot). We will have opportunities to discuss the role of the Honor Code at Oberlin during the semester.

If you are eligible for and need academic adjustments or accommodations because of a disability, please speak to me early in the semester, or contact the Office of Disability Services at [http://new.oberlin.edu/office/disability-services/](http://new.oberlin.edu/office/disability-services/).

Books available for purchase: (and on Reserve under FYSP 153)

Class Meetings: Mondays and Wednesdays with occasional Fridays possible.

Sept. 3    Introduction to the course and to each other

          Martin and Wigen, *The Myth of Continents*,
          Selections (in Blackboard under Course Documents;
          read the notes as well) for next discussion

Sept. 8    Discussion: Martin and Wigen

Sept. 10   Mapping History-presentation and discussion

          read Bentley, *Old World Encounters*, Chapters 1-3
          (93 pp.) for next class discussion

Sept. 15   World Histories: Some Big Questions: Discussion

Sept. 17   Research: Topics and Strategies and Concepts

          Finish Bentley, *Old World Encounters* for next class discussion

Sept. 22   Discussion: Bentley, *Old World Encounters*

          (113 pp.)

Sept. 24   Library Session in Mudd 113

Sept. 29   Discussion: *Human Web*

          discussion

Oct. 1     Research: Topics

          First essay due

Oct. 6     Discussion: *Human Web*

          discussion
Oct. 8     Final discussion: *Human Web*

Oct. 13    Exploration of collaborative research topics

Oct. 15    Big History

          *Short historiographical essay and preliminary bibliography due*

Begin, Christian, *Maps of Time*

**Fall Break:** Complete, Christian, *Maps of Time*

Oct. 27    **Finalization of collaborative research teams and projects with discussion**

Oct. 29    Discussion of *Maps of Time*

          Pomeranz and Topic, *The World that Trade Created: Society, Culture & the World Economy, 1400 to the Present*, begin reading

Nov. 3     Discussion: How does Big History fit into world historical studies?

Nov. 5     Discussion: *The World That Trade Created*

Nov. 10    Discussion: *The World That Trade Created*

Nov. 12    Topical Reading and Discussion:


Nov. 17    Topical Reading and Discussion:


Nov. 19    Panel:

Nov. 24    Panel:

Nov. 26    Panel:
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 28</td>
<td>Panel:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec. 1</td>
<td>Assessment and Discussion of Group Project Experience</td>
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<td>Dec. 8</td>
<td>Discussion of Course Themes and Outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec. 10</td>
<td>Discussion of Research Projects and Wrap Up</td>
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**Final Project Due:** Thursday, December 19, by 9:00 pm. (College deadline)