

HIST 3849
The Histories of Student Activism in the United States
Spring 2025
In Person Syllabus
3 Credits
Tu/Thu 11:15am-12:30pm
Location: TBD

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Office Hours: TBD

Course Description:

College students do a lot of things. They study. They are part of clubs, sports teams, and organizations. They work. They build lives outside the institution. They also protest and look for ways to change the world. This is a course that explores the many histories of student activism. Students have taken part in some of the most important social movements in the world. Students have also turned their attention inward to demand that the university change or expand in one way or another. In all of these ways, students are engaging in civic life and thinking through the ethics of many public problems.

Through a focus on the United States and particular attention paid to the University of Minnesota itself, students will think deeply about questions of activism and reflect on the actions of their direct historical counterparts. We will examine how various student groups debate ethics and make decisions about how to engage with the broader body politic. Throughout the semester we will be learning and discussing both how world events shape college students and how college students shape the world around them.

Course Goals:

This course has several goals:

- First, to expose you to the history of student activism in the United States. We will be working with content that challenges us to grapple with complex questions and encounter a multitude of perspectives about the role of student protest at college campuses around the country. For example, how have students historically evaluated the risks associated with protest? In what ways has the surveillance and policing of students shaped the trajectory of student activism? What issues have attracted student attention at different historical eras?
- Second, this course will engage you in the question of knowledge production. How is knowledge about student activism produced and how does history, as a discipline, take up this question? How are the stories and narratives captured and then interpreted? We will also take up questions of collective memory.
- Third, this course provides you with spaces and opportunities to apply knowledge to practice. With the guidance and expertise of Institutional Archivist, Ellen Holt-Werle, we will be working directly with primary sources, engaging in analysis, posing historical questions, and communicating your findings to your peers. In doing this, you are actively applying the knowledge you have learned and thereby honing your critical thinking skills, communication

skills, and developing the skills for effective citizenship. Put simply, you will be doing the work of the field, not just reading about it. Perhaps most interestingly, we will see how the stories and narratives of student activists here at the U have been captured and think deeply about how we can interpret them. Overall, this course will not only provide valuable insight about the history and development of student activism, but you will also develop and refine skills to evaluate evidence, communicate effectively, and practice thinking and writing like a historian. Furthermore, this course is designed to foster ethical thinking about these questions, encourage us to reflect on how the legacies of student protest influence us, and illuminate the ways that we are all historical agents.

Learning Outcomes:

-Can communicate effectively:

Throughout the semester students will practice working through ambiguity, synthesizing information, and developing their own thoughts. These building blocks are essential in helping students communicate effectively both verbally and in writing. Every class session has allotted time for class discussion. During these times, students will communicate their thoughts and ideas about specific primary sources to their peers in small groups and at other times to the class at large. Additionally, the “Reflection Piece” Assignment (see below) serves as an additional space for students to synthesize their thoughts, make sense of contradictions, and communicate their thoughts in writing.

-Critical Thinking:

Throughout the semester, students will go directly into University Archives with the explicit task of locating primary sources and evaluating the information in those sources. They will critically analyze and contextualize this information in order to better understand the world around them. In addition to class discussion in every class, the “Archival Element” assignment (see below) serves as a particular space for students to engage in focused critical thinking.

Historical Perspectives CORE (LE)

This course operates on three levels, thereby meeting the three-part mission of the Historical Perspectives Criteria. **Level 1:** This course examines the human past, beliefs, and practices as it relates to student activism in the United States. It hones in on the changes over time in how students approach activism and highlights the difference and similarities between various historical periods. For example, activism during the Great Depression was different from activism during the Vietnam War, and the rise of globalization. **Level 2:** This course exposes students to the different ways that historians produce knowledge about the history of student activism. In small groups and in larger class discussions, students explore the value, limitations, and silences of each source we encounter and connect these conclusions with how this knowledge shapes our understanding of the past and its significance. Students are asked to think and write like historians of student activism in order to better understand methods and disciplinary value. **Level 3:** This course provides opportunity and space for students to work directly with primary sources. Continual analysis of primary sources and engaging in their own interpretive work allows students to make meaning out of historical material and reflect on the production of knowledge. Their engagement with different types of sources and archives exposes them to a multitude of perspectives and opportunities to evaluate the uses and limits of each document.

Assignments and Grading Distribution:

- **Reflection Pieces: 25% (5 papers in total worth 5% each)**

Five times during the semester, you are to respond to that particular week's reading. In these short papers: 1) demonstrate that you have read the material, 2) demonstrate that you gave meaningful thought to that week's reading, and 3) show that you can do the interpretive work that history, as a discipline, engages in. Each 'Reflection Piece' must be between 2 to 3 pages double spaced. Which week you write these is your choice with the caveat that at least three are submitted before spring break. Pick weeks that interest you the most. **Due by noon via Canvas before class.

- **Archival Element: 25%**

Historians search through archival files, databases, newspapers, legal documents, recorded interviews, correspondence, and more. For this assignment you will be engaging with University Archives here at the University of Minnesota and do some rummaging of your own. In pairs, pick a time period or event that interests you and find sources from the archives that speak to that era. Select 3 pieces of evidence each and provide a close analysis of them. This is your chance to put knowledge into practice and use your historical interpretation skills. Communicate with your partner in order to reconstruct a narrative.

In a 4-5 page paper, analyze your three pieces of evidence (but informed by the three sources of your peer) and then reflect on the value and limits of these sources. Who are the people highlighted in the sources you worked with? Whose voices and experiences are present? Whose voices and experiences are missing? Discuss how the type of source you picked shapes our knowledge of the past and our understanding of its significance. Additionally, what questions did the sources inspire in you? What challenges did you face in interpreting these sources?

Lastly, understanding that student activists often go to archivists to learn what has happened in the past, prepare a 10 minute presentation (10%) on what you found.

- **Attendance & Engagement: 20%**

Your attendance and participation are a key part of making this course successful and meaningful in the long run. Discussion during group work is particularly important. It serves as a critical time for you to engage in the ideas of the readings, the lectures, and most importantly of your peers. Being absent more than 3 times will automatically lower your earned participation grade by a full letter grade. More than 5 absences will lower you another letter grade. If you are absent, it is your responsibility to get the notes from a classmate.

- **Final Exam: 30%**

The final exam will consist of short answer identification of key terms, matching chronology, multiple choice, and an essay question.

Grade Scale

A = 93-100%
A- = 90-92%
B+ = 89-87%
B = 83-86%
B- = 80-82%
C+ = 77-79%
C = 73-76%
C- = 70-72%
D+ = 67-69%
D = 64-66%
F = 65% and below

Late Work Policy

If you contact the professor ahead of time, we can come up with an extended deadline. Otherwise, no late work will be accepted. See university policy for exceptions.

Accessing Course Material:

All readings are fully accessible via our canvas page. The only exception is Rodrick Ferguson's book *We Demand*, which you will need to purchase.

Course Culture:

- It is fundamental to this course that we all remember that we will *not* be debating the issues themselves, but rather we will focus on learning about the array of historical actions that students have taken. We will think about how students of the past approached these questions, their tactics, and organization.
- Additionally, it is important to state that we will be discussing difficult topics in this course. Some of those topics include: racial violence and sexual violence, etc. You should approach class discussions with respect, compassion, grace, and good-faith curiosity.

Well-Being and Community:

If the last four years reminded us of anything, it is that health (both physical and mental) is of the utmost importance. Taking care of your mental and physical well being requires intention, pre-planning, and time management. As a student at the University of Minnesota, an array of resources and activities are available to you (this includes counseling and access to wellbeing guides). Please take advantage of these resources and experiment with identifying the healthy coping mechanisms that work best for you. If you find yourself feeling down, lacking motivation, struggling with anxiety, sleep issues, etc. please reach out to the university's mental health services.

University Services: <http://www.mentalhealth.umn.edu>.

Furthermore, I highly encourage you to stay home if you do not feel well, whether it is the flu, a cold, covid, or something else, stay home, seriously. I also encourage you to befriend your classmates so that you can support each other, if you miss class.

University Policies

See: [Student Conduct Code](#)

[Grading and Transcripts](#)

[Makeup Work for Absences](#)

[Teaching and Learning: Student Responsibilities](#)

[Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault, Stalking and Relationship Violence](#)

[Equity, Diversity, Equal Employment Opportunity, and Affirmative Action](#)

[Discrimination](#)

[Disability Resources](#)

[Academic Freedom and Responsibility](#)

Course Schedule

Tues, Jan 16

Introduction to the course and to each other

Who is the “college student”? Why study the history of student activism?

Read:

- “The Importance of Student Resistance in the World” in *Student Resistance: A History of the Unruly Subject*

Thurs, Jan 18

Student Life during the Early Period to the 19th Century

Read:

- *Ebony & Ivy*, excerpt
- “Colonial College Students” in *The History of American Higher Education*
- Primary Source: “College Presidents and Their Students: Thomas R. Dew’s Address Before the Students of The College of William and Mary,” pgs. 50-74

Archives Lab: Early Moments at the U

Tues, Jan 23rd

Grappling With the Archives

Read:

- Schwartz, Joan M., and Terry Cook. “Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory.”

Archives Lab: Cavern Tour

Thurs, Jan 25th

Long 19th Century Troubles: Discipline, Progressive Era Protest, and World Wars

- “The Problem With College Students” in *The History of American Higher Education*
- On the University of Minnesota: The Truth Project Executive Summary
- “The Great University Land Grab, University of Cambridge/ Robert Lee and Tristan Ahtone, “Land-Grab Universities”
- Primary Source: “Student Memoir: Robert Benchley’s ‘What College Did To Me’”

Archives Lab: UMN During The Progressive Era

Tues, Jan 30th

Universities in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s

Read:

- *The Student Peace Movement in the 1930s*, excerpt
- Jack Dougherty, “Uncovering Unwritten Rules Against Jewish and Black Students at Trinity College,” in *On the Line: How Schooling, Housing, and Civil Rights Shaped Hartford and its Suburbs* (2022)
- Primary Source: “Student Memoir: Lyman C. Bagg’s Four Years at Yale”
- *Compromised Campus: The Collaboration of Universities with the Intelligence Community, 1945-1955*, excerpt

- “Coeducation and Student Life: Rules and Regulations for Women in Higher Education in 1955-1956”

Archives Lab: Student Life at the U in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s

Thurs, Feb 1st

The University and the Military Industrial Complex

Read:

- *Cities of Knowledge: Cold War Science and the Search for the Next Silicon Valley*, excerpt
- "To 'Administer the Present': Clark Kerr and the Purpose of the Postwar American Research University"

Archives Lab: UMN Students Challenging the Military Industrial Complex

Tues, Feb 6th

The Early Civil Rights Movement

Read:

- “Racial Desegregation at State Universities: Commemorative Plaque at the University of Mississippi”
- *The Campus Color Line: College Presidents and the 1960s Struggle For Black Freedom*, excerpt

Archives Lab: UMN Students’ Roles in a Growing Civil Rights Movement

Thurs, Feb 8th

Berkeley and the Free Speech Movement

Read:

- *Subversives: The FBI's War on Student Radicals, and Reagan's Rise To Power*, excerpt
- “Campus Unrest and Student Protest: Mario Savio’s “Put Your Bodies Upon The Gears” Speech, UC Berkeley”
- *Sex in the Heartland*, excerpt

Archives Lab: The Berkeley Effect at the U

Tues, Feb 13th

The Power Movement Part I

Read:

- “Opening the American: Mind and Body: The Role of Asian American Studies”
- *Harlem vs. Columbia University: Black Student Power in the Late 1960s*, excerpt
- Select Primary Sources on UMN Afro-American Action Committee, American Indian Studies, Chicano Studies

Thurs, Feb 15th

The Power Movement Part II

Read:

- Martha Biondi, “A Revolution is Beginning: The Strike at San Francisco State” (2012)

- Tina Burnside, “Why Black students occupied the U’s administration building for 24 hours in 1969,” *MinnPost*, May 21, 2018.

Tues, Feb 20th

The Vietnam War: Campuses Divided

- Ken Burns Documentary on The Vietnam War, excerpt

Thurs, Feb 22nd

From the View of Administrators

Read:

- *The Campus Color Line: College Presidents and the 1960s Struggle For Black Freedom*, excerpt
 - *Undermining Racial Justice: How One University Embraced Inclusion and Inequality*, excerpt
- Archives Lab: Administrator Voices at the U

Tues, Feb 27th

Goldwater, Young Americans for Freedom, and the Conservative Movement on Campus Pt I

Read:

- *Resistance from the Right: Conservatives and the Campus Wars in Modern America*, excerpt
- Archives Lab: Conservative groups at the U

Feb 29th

Goldwater, Young Americans for Freedom, and the Conservative Movement on Campus Pt II

Read:

- *Resistance from the Right: Conservatives and the Campus Wars in Modern America*, excerpt
- Archives Lab: Conservative groups at the U

March 4 and 7: SPRING BREAK

Tues, March 12th

Kent State and Jackson State Massacres

- Above the Shots: An Oral History of the Kent State Shootings
- Archives Lab: UMN response to Kent State, Jackson State, and Vietnam

Thurs, March 14th

The Aftermath of Violence

Read

- *Campus Sex, Campus Security*, excerpt
 - “The Making of a University Police Dept”
- Archives Lab: Increasing Security at the U

Tues, March 19th
Assignment Due & Presentation Day

Read:

- University of Minnesota, 150 years, University of Minnesota; 2001

Thurs, March 21st
Student Life in the 1970s and 1980s Feminists, Abortion, and Pro-Life
(LECTURE)

Read:

- “The Changing Profile of College Students in the 1980s”
- Primary Source: “The Campus Condition: The 1971 Newman Report on Higher Education”
Archives Lab: Pro-Life @ the U

Tues, March 26th
University Student Life in the 1970s and 1980s Feminists, Abortion, and Pro-Life
(LAB)

- Read Selected Primary Sources

Thurs, March 28th
The University and Capitalism

Read:

- *Student Resistance in the Age of Chaos: Globalization, Human Rights, Religion, War, & The Edge of the Internet*, excerpt
Archives Lab: UMN Student Advocacy: WTO protests, Divestment, Occupy Protests

Tues, April 2
Students and Disability- ADA (1990)

Read:

- *Creating Our Own Lives: College Students with Intellectual Disability*, excerpt
Archives Lab: Disability Awareness and Activism at the U

Thurs, April 4th
Student Athletes and Mascots

Read:

- “College Sports Reform: The Problems of Presidents and Rising Expenses in the Knights Commission of 2010”
- “Student Memoir: Jackie Jensen as the “Student Athlete” Archives Lab: Sports, The Big 10, and Equity at the U

Tues, April 9th
Student Media, Student Fashion

Read:

- *Live from the Underground: A History of College Radio*, excerpt

Thurs, April 11th
Understanding University Hierarchy

Read:

- Start Reading Roderick Ferguson, *We Demand: The University and Student Protests*

Tues, April 16th
“Black Study, Black Struggle” and DACA

Read:

- Robin D.G. Kelley, “Black Study, Black Struggle”
 - Continue Roderick Ferguson, *We Demand: The University and Student Protests*
- Archives Lab: DACA and BLM at the U

Thurs, April 18th:
Students and the Environmental Movement

- Finish, Roderick Ferguson, *We Demand: The University and Student Protests*
- Archives Lab: Environmental Movement at the U

Tues, April 23rd:
Crisis in Higher Education

- Eli Meyerhoff, “Against the Romance of Education,” in *Beyond Education*

- Thurs, April 25th**
- Closing Conversation: Why Does the History of Student Activism Matter?**
- Discussion and Reflection – What issues matter to you as a student?
 - What are some key takeaways across historical movements?

****Syllabus including readings and due dates are subject to change under the instructors’ discretion**