**HIST 33205: The Nuclear Age** (CRN: 35286)
Spring 2026
Tuesday and Thursday, 1:30pm–2:45pm
Instructional Modality: Face-to-face

**Course Description**
How did the invention of nuclear weapons and their use as an act of war in 1945 change military strategy, international diplomacy, and world politics? This course surveys historical efforts to understand and to navigate these changes at national, regional, and global scales. At the same time, it examines the development of nuclear energy and its complex relationship with nuclear weapons. How have policymakers weighed the benefits and risks of this form of electricity generation? How do these trade-offs look today facing proliferation pressures and climate change? Course topics include fission research, the Cold War arms race, weapons testing and radiation exposure, nuclear deterrence, nonproliferation and arms control, accidents and close-calls, and disarmament efforts.

**Learning Outcomes**
1. Demonstrate knowledge of major concepts, empirical patterns, and historical context during the Nuclear Age;
2. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of competing explanations or interpretations for the emergence of the Nuclear Age and its persistence today;
3. Analyze archival documents from the Nuclear Age using historical methods;
4. Interpret relevant evidence to support conclusions about the behavior of individuals, institutions, and organizations during the Nuclear Age;
5. Explain how social, historical, and technical knowledge informs and can shape global decisions, based on examples from the Nuclear Age.

**Learning Resources, Technology, and Texts**
Required Texts for Purchase
1. Alex Wellerstein, *The Most Awful Responsibility: Truman and the Secret Struggle for Control of the Atomic Age* (HarperCollins, 2025). Available for purchase from University Bookstore (360 W. State St.), Follett's Purdue West Bookstore (1265 W. State St.), or online vendors such as Amazon.com.
2. *Command and Control*, dir. Robert Kenner (PBS, 2016). Documentary film available for streaming online (e.g., Amazon).
3. Students will occasionally be required to bring Blue Books to class for assignments as indicated on syllabus. Blue Books are available for purchase at University Bookstore and Follett's Purdue West Bookstore.

All other required texts, listed below, are available online using the Library Reading List tool on Brightspace.

Other Required Texts (Accessible on Brightspace)
Abraham, Itty. "Decolonizing Arms Control: The Asian African Legal Consultative Committee and the Legality of Nuclear Testing, 1960–64." *Asian Journal of Political Science* 26, no. 3 (September 2018): 314–30.

Auffant, Marino. "Oil for Atoms: The 1970s Energy Crisis and Nuclear Proliferation in the Persian Gulf." *Texas National Security Review* 5, no. 3 (2022): 59–82.
Blix, Hans. "Verification of nuclear nonproliferation: The lesson of Iraq." *Washington Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (1992): 57–65.
Budjeryn, Mariana. "Non-Proliferation and State Succession: The Demise of the USSR and the Nuclear Aftermath in Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 24, no. 2 (2022): 46–94.
Burr, William. "U.S. Secret Assistance to the French Nuclear Program, 1969-1975: From 'Fourth Country' to Strategic Partner." Wilson Center, 2011. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/us-secret-assistance-to-the-french-nuclear-program-1969-1975-fourth-country-to-strategic.
Colbourn, Susan. *Euromissiles: The Nuclear Weapons That Nearly Destroyed NATO.* Cornell University Press, 2022.
Desmaele, Linde. "US Security Assurances and Nuclear Tripolarity." *Survival* 66, no. 2 (2024): 143–156.
Drogan, Mara. "The Nuclear imperative: Atoms for Peace and the development of US policy on exporting nuclear power, 1953-1955." *Diplomatic History* 40, no. 5 (2016): 948–74.
Dunn, David H. "'Real Men Want to Go to Tehran': Bush, Preemption and the Iranian Nuclear Challenge." *International Affairs* (2007): 19–38.
Evangelista, Matthew. *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War*. Cornell University Press, 1999.
Gibbons, Rebecca D. "The humanitarian turn in nuclear disarmament and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons." *Nonproliferation Review* 25, no. 1–2 (2018): 11–36.
Glaser, Charles L., Austin Long, and Pranay Vaddi. "Debating Damage Limitation, Again (Pt. II in a series)." *Strategic Simplicity*. November 13, 2025. Podcast, 1:07:00. https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/debating-damage-limitation-again-pt-ii-in-a-series/id1812677015?i=1000736638671.
Holloway, David. "Racing toward Armageddon? Soviet Views of Strategic Nuclear War, 1955–1972." In *The Age of Hiroshima*, edited by Michael D. Gordin and G. John Ikenberry, 71–88. Princeton University Press, 2020.
Jervis, Robert. *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution*. Cornell University Press, 1989.
Jones, Matthew. *After Hiroshima: The United States, Race, and Nuclear Weapons in Asia, 1945–1965*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.
Legge, J. Michael. *Theater Nuclear Weapons and the NATO Strategy of Flexible Response*. RAND, 1983.
Long, Austin, and Brendan Rittenhouse Green. "Stalking the Secure Second Strike: Intelligence, Counterforce, and Nuclear Strategy." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38, no. 1–2 (2014): 38–73.
Radchenko, Sergey. *To Run the World: The Kremlin's Cold War Bid for Global Power*. Cambridge University Press, 2024.
Riles, Annelise and Beatrice Fihn. "Working to Eliminate Nuclear Weapons." Produced by Northwestern University's Roberta Buffett Institute for Global Affairs. *Breaking Boundaries*. June 29, 2023. Podcast, 30:13. https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/northwestern-buffett-inst8/episodes/Working-to-Eliminate-Nuclear-Weapons-with-Beatrice-Fihn-e2lit7k/a-abdft30.

Rodriguez, J. Luis. "Mexico and the Balancing of Nuclear Perils and Promises in the 1960s." *Cold War History* (2025): 1–22.
Roehrlich, Elisabeth. *Inspectors for Peace: A History of the International Atomic Energy Agency*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2022.
Rosenberg, David A. "The Origins of Overkill: Nuclear Weapons and American Strategy, 1945-1960." *International Security* 7, no. 4 (1983): 3–71.
Sime, Ruth L. "The Politics of Forgetting: Otto Hahn and the German Nuclear-Fission Project in World War II." *Phys. Perspect.* 14 (2012): 59–94.
van Wyk, A.-M. and R. Möser. "1989 in South(ern) Africa: The Fall of the Nuclear Wall." *Comparativ* 29, no. 5 (2019), 45–61.
Weber, Ella. "How did Nuclear Weapons Get on my Reservation?" Produced by Scientific American. *Science Quickly*. November 14, 2023. Podcast, 19:50. https://www.scientificamerican.com/podcast/episode/how-did-nuclear-weapons-get-on-my-reservation1/.

**Assignments**

1. Quiz on all material to date, including Wellerstein's *Most Awful Responsibility*, in class using Blue Books, January 22, 10% of final grade;
2. Exam 1, in class using Blue Books, February 5, 15%;
3. Exam 2, in class using Blue Books, March 10, 15%;
4. Primary-source-based paper (1,200–1,400 words) on nonproliferation, using Wilson Center online document collection, "U.S. Secret Assistance to the French Nuclear Program, 1969-1975: From 'Fourth Country' to Strategic Partner," due by 11:59pm on March 25, 15%;
5. Response paper (800–900 words) on Kenner's *Command and Control*, due by 11:59pm on April 6, 10%;
6. Exam 3, in class using Blue Books, April 16, 15%;
7. Final exam, in person using Blue Books, May 4–9, 20%.

Unless done in class or otherwise in person, assignments are to be submitted online using Brightspace. *Each student is responsible for bringing their own Blue Book(s) to class* when required for in-class assessments. As a reminder, Blue Books are available for purchase at University Bookstore or Follett's Purdue West Bookstore.

Students are not permitted to consult or otherwise use notes during quizzes and exams. Students are not permitted to use electronic devices during quizzes and exams, unless stipulated as part of the student's course accommodations. In-class assignments are closed-note, closed-book, all devices put away.

Late Assignment Policy

Without written authorization from the instructor, student work forfeits the equivalent of one full letter grade (e.g., A work automatically becomes B work) for each day it is late. Work submitted more than 4 days late without this written authorization will receive a failing grade and will not otherwise be graded.

Students should *request extensions in writing at least 72 hours before* the assignment deadline, no matter the circumstances. When conflicts can be anticipated, such as for many University-

sponsored activities and religious observations, inform the instructor of the situation as far in advance as possible. For cases that fall under excused absence regulations, you or your representative should contact or go to the Office of the Dean of Students (ODOS) website to complete appropriate forms for instructor notification. Under academic regulations, excused absences may be granted by ODOS for cases of grief/bereavement, military service, jury duty, parenting leave, or emergent medical care. The processes are detailed, so plan ahead.

Regarding make-up exams, or any other in-class assignment, please contact the instructor (and/or ODOS, if relevant) by email as far in advance as possible.

For unanticipated or emergency circumstances when advance notification is not possible, contact the instructor as soon as possible by email. Such emergencies may require documentation. Extensions not covered by the excused absence or emergency policies will be granted at the instructor's discretion.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) / Large Language Models Policy
Limited use of GenAI is permitted, but discouraged. You may use GenAI as a personal learning tool for self-study. Remember that you will, however, be assessed on your understanding of the assigned course materials, not any content produced by GenAI. Due to current limitations, such as lack of specificity and inability to weigh competing explanations, GenAI may lead students astray in this course. Based on your instructor's experience, use of GenAI may disappoint students, especially insofar as grades are concerned. For this reason, students are not permitted to use GenAI at any stage of completing course assignments, from brainstorming to proofreading. Because current AI detection tools have very high false-positive rates, they will not be used. All assignments will be graded on their own merits. If use of GenAI results in a poor grade, students will not be allowed to re-do the assignment. AI use will not be considered plagiarism or academic dishonesty for the purposes of this course, unless AI leads the student to present others' work as their own and to fail to provide proper scholarly credit and citation.

**Grading Scale**
A+: exceptional work
A: 93% or higher
A-: 92-90
B+: 89-87
B: 86-83
B-: 82-80
C+: 79-77
C: 76-73
C-: 72-70
D+: 69-67
D: 66-63
D-: 62-60
F: 59 or lower

Grades round up no more than one half point (0.5%).