

HIST 33205: The Nuclear Age

CRN: 35286 — Spring 2026

Tuesdays & Thursdays • 1:30–2:45 PM

Instructional Modality: Face-to-face

Course Description

This course examines how the invention and use of nuclear weapons in 1945 transformed **military strategy**, **international diplomacy**, and **global politics**. It also explores the relationship between nuclear weapons and nuclear energy, investigating how policymakers have historically evaluated the risks and benefits of nuclear technology.

Key topics include:

- Early fission research
 - The Cold War nuclear arms race
 - Nuclear weapons testing and radiation exposure
 - Deterrence theory
 - Nonproliferation and arms control
 - Nuclear accidents and close-calls
 - Disarmament movements
 - Proliferation pressures and climate-change-era energy debates
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Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

1. Demonstrate knowledge of major concepts and historical patterns throughout the Nuclear Age.
2. Identify strengths and weaknesses in competing explanations for the emergence and persistence of the Nuclear Age.
3. Analyze archival documents using historical methods.
4. Interpret evidence to explain the behavior of individuals, institutions, and organizations during the Nuclear Age.

5. Explain how social, historical, and technical knowledge shape global decision-making, using examples from nuclear history.
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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)
2. **Command and Control**, dir. Robert Kenner (PBS, 2016), streaming online
3. **Blue Books**, required for in-class quizzes and exams. Available at:
 - University Bookstore (360 W. State St.)
 - Follett's Purdue West Bookstore (1265 W. State St.)

Additional Required Readings (on Brightspace via Library Reading List)

All PDFs, podcasts, and online sources appear in the full list below. These include works by:

- Abraham
- Auffant
- Blix
- Budjeryn
- Burr
- Colbourn
- Desmaele
- Drogan
- Dunn
- Evangelista
- Gibbons
- Glaser, Long & Vaddi
- Holloway
- Jervis
- Jones
- Legge
- Long & Rittenhouse Green

- Radchenko
- Riles & Fihn
- Rodriguez
- Roehrlich
- Rosenberg
- Sime
- Van Wyk & Möser
- Weber

(Full citations retained exactly as provided.)

Assignments and Grade Breakdown

List of Assignments

1. **Quiz** (Blue Books; Jan 22) — 10%
2. **Exam 1** (Blue Books; Feb 5) — 15%
3. **Exam 2** (Blue Books; Mar 10) — 15%
4. **Primary-Source Paper** (1,200–1,400 words; due Mar 25 by 11:59 PM) — 15%
5. **Response Paper** on *Command and Control* (800–900 words; due Apr 6 by 11:59 PM) — 10%
6. **Exam 3** (Blue Books; Apr 16) — 15%
7. **Final Exam** (Blue Books; May 4–9) — 20%

Assignment Table

Assignment	Points	Due Date	Format
Quiz	10%	Jan 22	In class (Blue Book)
Exam 1	15%	Feb 5	In class (Blue Book)
Exam 2	15%	Mar 10	In class (Blue Book)
Primary-Source Paper	15%	Mar 25, 11:59 PM	Submit on Brightspace
Response Paper	10%	Apr 6, 11:59 PM	Submit on Brightspace
Exam 3	15%	Apr 16	In class (Blue Book)
Final Exam	20%	May 4–9	In person (Blue Book)

Submission Notes

- Submit all non-in-class assignments on **Brightspace**.
- Students **must bring their own Blue Books** for all exams and quizzes.

- All in-class assessments are **closed-note, closed-book, no devices** (unless formally accommodated).
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Late Assignment Policy

- Without written authorization, **one full letter grade** is deducted for every day late.
 - Work submitted **more than 4 days late** receives a failing grade.
 - Requests for extensions must be made **in writing at least 72 hours before** the deadline.
 - For excused absences (bereavement, military service, jury duty, parenting leave, emergent medical care), contact **ODOS** to initiate the notification process.
 - Emergencies without prior warning require immediate email contact and may require documentation.
 - Extensions outside official policies are at instructor discretion.
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Generative AI Policy

- Limited personal use for **self-study** is allowed.
 - **AI may not be used for any part of assignment development**, including brainstorming or proofreading.
 - AI detection tools will **not** be used due to false positives.
 - Poor performance resulting from reliance on AI is the student's responsibility; **no redo opportunities** will be given.
 - AI becomes academic dishonesty only if it causes a student to present others' work without proper citation.
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Grading Scale

Grade	Percentage
A+	Exceptional work
A	93% and above
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 may round up **only by 0.5%**.