

Vesalius College

Course description

Course title: History of Conflicts since 1914

Course code: HIS 301E

Teacher responsible: Michael F. Palo, Ph. D., Associate Professor of History at Vesalius College

Course description:

One of the main objectives of this course is to analyze the reasons why the 20th century and start of the 21st century have been so conflict-ridden, despite efforts by governments to establish international organizations and mechanisms to preserve peace. Thus it will be necessary to pay some attention to the origins and causes of war in this period. However, the diplomatic history leading to the various conflicts discussed will not be the dominant focus. Instead, the political, economic, and ideological background to, influence on, and consequences of, selected conflicts will be stressed. Moreover, though the military aspects of certain conflicts will be discussed in terms of impact and outcome, this course will not concentrate on battles and warfare per se. In other words, this is not a course in military history. The aim rather is to study the impact of the World Wars (but especially the First World War), on the one hand, and selected post-1945 conflicts, on the other hand, so that students can gain a better understanding of (1) how European societies were transformed by total war during the first half of this century and (2) why the transition from colony to nation-state in the so-called “Cold War” era has been so conflict-ridden internally and externally. Other problems of interest will be the role of nationalism, secular ideology, culture, and religion in national liberation wars, civil wars, and regional disputes; the success or failure of recent attempts at “humanitarian” intervention in the so-called “post-Cold War” period; and the implications of the post-9/11 “war on terrorism.”

Course objectives:

In addition to providing factual information about the topics treated in the lectures and discussed in the readings, this course aims to help students to improve both research and analytical skills (see more on this below) and to appreciate the complexity of the historiography (i.e., the varying interpretations that historians make on the basis of their study of the subject in question) that exists on the topics examined. As will be seen from the explanation of the written assignments, students in this course are expected to address the problem of historical interpretations in a comparative way in their papers. They are also expected to pay close attention to interdisciplinary approaches to the study of conflict. Courses in the social sciences (i.e., Communications, Economics, Politics, Psychology, and Sociology) as well as those in the humanities, such as Philosophy, may contain insights into the conflicts being studied that should not be ignored. Particularly important are concepts, definitions, hypotheses, and theories from other disciplines that have a bearing on the particular conflict that is being investigated. The basic format of this course is lecture-discussion.

Grade weighting scheme:

Written Assignments-----	Subtotal = 50%
Book Review-----	15%
Topic Proposal Essay for Research Paper -----	05%
Title, Thesis Statement, Outline, and Bibliography (Research Paper)-----	05%
Final Research Paper-----	25%
Examinations-----	Subtotal = 50%
Midterm-----	20%
Final-----	30%
Total-----	= 100%

Used course material (handbooks, readers, readings, newspapers, magazines) and references:

Ian F. W. BECKETT, *The Great War, 1914-1918* (London, New York, etc.: Longman, an imprint of Pearson Education, 2001. ISBN 0-582-32248-0

Antony BEST, Jussi M. HANHIMÄKI, Joseph A. MAIOLO, and Kirsten E. SCHULZE *International History of the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: Routledge, an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, 2004) ISBN 0-415-20740-1