

## Teaching Discussion Sections

HSTR 500-01 | Fall 2017

Monday, 11:10-noon

Room: LA 250

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**office hours: Monday 3:00-4:00PM, Wednesday 1:30-2:30PM, and by appointment**

Welcome aboard! I so look forward to working together this semester. HSTR 500-01 coincides with your teaching assistantship for American History I this semester. Your primary responsibilities for this class are to lead your weekly discussion sections, grade the exams, keep track of students' attendance and participation grades, and assign each of your students a final grade. Each Monday following lecture, we will meet to discuss your plans for discussion sections that week and go over any questions you have about lectures or the reading. These Monday meetings are required, as is your attendance for the lectures.

I hope that you will find your teaching assistant responsibilities for this course rewarding and enjoyable. If, at any point throughout the semester, you feel that your responsibilities for this class are detracting from your own research and coursework, please speak with me as soon as possible so we can discuss ways to help you achieve balance in your research and teaching commitments. Maintaining open lines of communication between the seven of us will be important, as we work together to ensure students are able to get as much out of the course as possible. I welcome your feedback during the semester. If we have confused students, please let me know. If you have a question from a lecture, please ask, but also remember the lecture is for the students. I am going to count on you all to be my eyes and ears on the ground!

### **Overview of Expectations:**

1. Attend the lectures for American History I.
  - ❖ Lectures meet in ULH on M/W/F from 10-10:50AM. Please arrive a few minutes before lecture if possible and distribute yourselves throughout the lecture hall. I will excuse two absences for illness or family emergencies. If you will need to miss a lecture, please let me know at least 24 hours in advance and make a plan with your fellow TAs to borrow notes for the lecture you missed.
2. Attend, come prepared for, and participate actively in our weekly Monday meetings. [See below for details.]
  - ❖ Monday meetings are at 11:10 (immediately following lecture) in LA 250. We will also meet on Friday, 10/13 from c. 11:10-12. There will be no meeting on 11/20. We will likely meet for an additional hour (day & time TBD) the week of 11/27 before you hand back midterm #2.
3. Complete all the **overview** and **discussion** reading ahead of our Monday meetings.
4. Diligently prepare for and lead your weekly discussion sections (T/Th). You should draw from the reading and big picture questions on the syllabus as well as from questions you devise and we

compile together during our Monday meetings. Your primary responsibility is to lead a discussion about the **discussion readings**, all the while working to get students to make connections between the readings, and between the readings and material covered in lecture.

- ❖ Please note that, barring any campus-wide emergency, you should not cancel any of your discussion section meetings. If, due to a family or medical emergency, you must miss one of your discussion sections, it is your responsibility to coordinate with your fellow TAs (and to let me know) and to ask one of them to step in for you (with as much notice as possible). You should plan to do the same for them, should the need arise.

5. Administer and grade weekly reading check-ins. This year, I'd like to move away from the weekly reading quiz and try a few other kinds of assignments (weekly 3-2-1 reading responses, film response, etc.) I will talk about these during our TA meeting before the semester gets going.

6. Complete all grading (exams and participation) promptly and according to the guidelines we develop together. Please keep a back-up record of all grades until you enter them. See below for details.

7. Hold office hours each week for 90 minutes sometime during regular 8 a.m.-5 p.m. hours. You should inform your students of your office hours and post your office location and hours on your UM webpage. You should also hold extra office hours during the exam weeks.

8. Respond to students' emails using your UM email account and within 24-hours of their email. Do not discuss a student's grade over email. If a student asks about their grade via e-mail, you can let them know that they should speak with you in person. Please reply promptly to all emails from me. I check my email regularly and will do my best to respond within a few hours during the week and within 24 hours on the weekend. If there is an emergency or urgent matter, you can reach me at 406-600-0557. Please do not share my phone number with your students! Thanks ☺

9. Conduct yourselves in a professional manner at all times when interacting with students. This shouldn't stop you from enjoying your students and your discussions! It's our job to show our students how important it is to study history and how enjoyable that study can be.

10. Immediately communicate any questions, problems, or issues to me so we can work together to address them as effectively and efficiently as possible. If you notice or suspect any instances of **academic misconduct** (cheating, inappropriate behavior, suspected plagiarism, etc.) you must report them to me in person immediately. For the UM Student Conduct Code, you can visit [http://www.umt.edu/vpsa/policies/student\\_conduct.php](http://www.umt.edu/vpsa/policies/student_conduct.php).

### **Electronics Policy:**

Please silence and put away your cell phones during lecture. If you choose to take notes on a laptop, model good electronic-use-practices for the students sitting behind you. Please do not surf the web or otherwise do things on your computer that will distract those students sitting around you! I'd also highly recommend that you do not allow students (except those with a particular need they have discussed with you) to use laptops in your discussion sections, as it will facilitate better conversation and discussion.

### **Monday Meeting Expectations:**

For our weekly Monday meetings, you should come prepared having completed all the reading assigned for the week and having reviewed your notes from lecture. In addition to having completed the reading and looked at your notes to see if you have any questions, please bring with you the following:

1. **Two discussion questions** that are different from the questions listed on the syllabus. Here are a few things to keep in mind as you come up with your discussion questions:
  - Your discussion questions should aim to get a conversation started! For example, questions that can be answered with a simple yes, no, date, or fact are useful only as a stepping stone to an effective discussion question.
  - Think about devising broader questions that ask students to draw connections between different readings and between material covered in lecture and the readings.
  - You might consider asking students why “facts” matter for a particular interpretation.
  - Generally avoid questions that ask students to judge the past in our own modern terms. In other words, steer towards historical rather than normative questions. Consider, for example, the differences between these questions you might pose as part of a conversation you and your students are having about Thomas Jefferson’s views on race and slavery:
    - Why was Thomas Jefferson an evil hypocrite?
    - In what ways can paying attention to Thomas Jefferson’s historical context help us make sense of the seemingly contradictory views he advances in the Declaration of Independence and the Notes on the States of Virginia? OR, given what we learned in lecture and from the readings about the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, are Jefferson’s views about human equality as advanced in the Declaration of Independence and Notes on the State of Virginia in fact contradictory?
2. **Any ideas you have for discussion section activities** if you would like to mix it up and include something other than a traditional discussion in your class!
3. **Any of your own clarification** questions about the readings or lecture.
4. **Any issues or problems** regarding your discussion sections.

### **Grading Expectations:**

You are responsible for assigning the students in your discussion sections a final grade for the course at the end of the semester, after the final examination grading has been completed. You should assign grades fairly, consistently, and professionally, according to university policies and to the guidelines we will develop together as a team.

Here is the general grading rubric you should follow:

A: 93-100	C: 73-76
A-: 90-92	C-: 70-72
B+: 87-89	D+: 67-69
B: 83-86	D: 63-66
B-: 80-82	D-: 60-62
C+: 77-79	F: 59 and below

A “passing” grade for the course is a 70 (C-) for GER credit/most scholarships. Students receive credit (CR) for the course as an elective if they get above a 60 (D-). If students have questions about changing their grades to credit/no-credit, please have them see me.

❖ **Participation Grades**

- You are responsible for keeping track of the participation grade for students in your discussion sections each week and for assigning them a final participation grade at the end of the class. The participation grade is a combination of discussion section participation/attendance and of the short reading quizzes you will assign each section meeting. We will discuss best practices for recording participation grades during our first meeting. Please note that you must keep track of attendance and be sure to note that last day of attendance for any students receiving an “F” grade.

❖ **Examination Grades**

There will be *three exams* for this class: one in-class midterm, one take-home midterm, and one final. We will discuss the exams ahead of time so you will be prepared to help students review. We will discuss as a group a rubric and timeframe for returning exams to the students promptly. To help you have confidence in your grading, you will show me several examples of “A,” “B,” “C,” and below “C” exams so we can make sure grading is as consistent as possible across different discussion sections. ***Please note that the final is from 8-10 am on Friday, December 15th.***

❖ **Reminders!**

- DO NOT grade in pen! Use a pencil (erasable colored pencils are great) for grading your midterms and final exams.
- DO NOT lose the examinations you are grading! I’d recommend keeping your exams in a plastic bag and avoid transporting them from place to place (i.e. out of town). You must keep a backup or electronic copy of all of your grades.
- If you are unsure of what grade to assign or have a question about a student’s participation or exam, please don’t hesitate to speak with me. It’s perfectly normal to have questions about grading and how to do it consistently. You shouldn’t worry if you have any concerns.

**Discussion Section Visit:**

During the semester (likely between weeks 9-11), I will observe one your discussion sections. I will work individually with each of you to determine in advance which section you’d like me to visit.