

## History at the Movies

History 2189A (Fall 2015)

Department of History, University of Western Ontario

Film Screening: Mondays 5:30–8:30 pm, SEB 2202

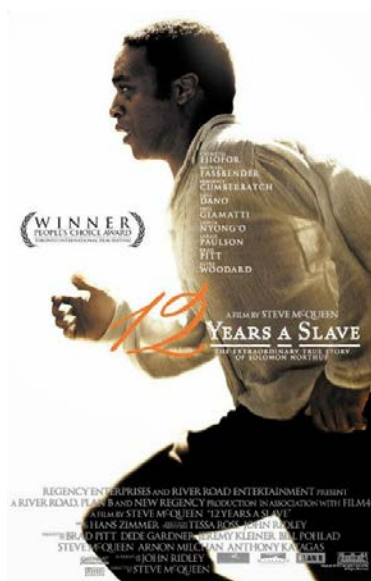
Lecture: Thursdays 1:30–3:30 pm, TC 309

Dr. A. L. Zuschlag

Office hours: Mondays 2:00–4:00 pm

Office: Lawson Hall 2239

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“Cinema is a matter of what’s in the frame and what’s out.”

—Martin Scorsese

“To me, film is historical document and therefore it has practical value. People five hundred years from now will look at our films and be able to figure out what we were like.”

—George Lucas

### Course Description

Film is one of the most powerful ways in which we remember and imagine our past. Even historians enjoy historical movies! But do movies make good history? Yes and no. There is no shortage of good historical films, both fictional films and documentaries. The best historical movies are engaging and compelling. They blend historical rigor with imaginative recreation. They investigate real historical questions and they open up rich terrain for discussion. But such films are “good” in a different way than historical books or articles are “good.” As a medium for history, film has its own strengths and weaknesses, genres and conventions.

This course goes to the movies to study the past and to better understand the nature of history itself. We will watch a host of great films from a century of filmmaking: Hollywood blockbusters, PBS documentaries and historical films from around the world. As we'll see, every historical film represents a dialogue between the time it depicts and the time it was created. A good historical movie is therefore a double window onto the past. For history too has a history, and it changes over time.

## Learning Objectives

Students completing this course will:

- Appreciate and evaluate historical films as secondary sources—as representations and interpretations of the past.
- Situate and analyze historical films in their own historical and cultural contexts.
- Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of film as a medium for history.
- Develop historical thinking skills: assessing historical significance, evaluating evidence and accuracy, identifying context and perspective.
- Develop verbal and written communication skills.

## Required Text

Robert A. Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Pearson, 2012).

**\*\*The textbook is on 1-day reserve at Weldon Library\*\***

Assigned readings outside the course textbook will be available through OWL (many are also available via Weldon Library databases). Students are expected to complete the assigned readings and be prepared to explore them in class discussion.

## Assignments and Evaluation

- |   |     |
|---|-----|
| • Historiographic film review (Oct. 26) | 25% |
| • Historical film treatment (Nov. 29)   | 25% |
| • In-class response papers              | 15% |
| • Final exam (covers entire course)     | 35% |

Each week you will attend **one two-hour lecture** (on Thursdays, 1:30–3:30 pm) and **one film screening** (on Monday evenings, 5:30–8:30 pm), at which we will usually watch one feature-length film or selections from several films. You are expected to attend all screenings and lectures. The lectures will contain information and analysis that cannot be gleaned from the viewings and readings alone. The film screenings will be accompanied by mini-lectures and discussion, so **viewing films at home or online is not a substitute for attending the weekly screening.**

In several classes (not announced before hand) you will be asked to write a **short, informal response paper** regarding the film screened that week. This gives you a chance to respond to the films and rewards you for attending every screening.

Your first written assignment for the class will be to write a **historical film review**. You will choose and watch a film about some historical subject made before the year 2000. You should then research and find reviews of this film from when it was first released (we will discuss where to find these

reviews in class). You will then write a paper of about 1,000–1,500 words (4–6 pages, double-spaced) describing how your film portrays the historical event it is about, but also discussing how your film is a product of the historical period in which it was made. Students must inform the instructor of their chosen film, via email, by **October 5**. The film review is due **in class on October 26**.

Your second written assignment for this course will be to write a **treatment for a proposed historical film**. A “treatment” is a synopsis of, and pitch for, a proposed film. You will come up with an idea for a film about a real historical figure or event, research that topic and write a synopsis of the imagined film you would like to make about this topic in history. Your treatment should be about 1,000–1,500 words (4–6 pages double-spaced), concisely describing the plot or structure of your imagined film, identifying its main characters and themes, and explaining the argument or statement it seeks to make about the past. The film treatment is due **in class on November 30**.

A **final exam** will cover all material from the course (films, readings and lectures). There is no midterm exam.

## Lectures and Screenings

### Act I

The first third of the course (weeks 1–4) introduces the key ideas of our course, and trains you to watch, analyze and discuss films in historical terms.

#### Week 1 | Welcome to the Course (Sept. 10)

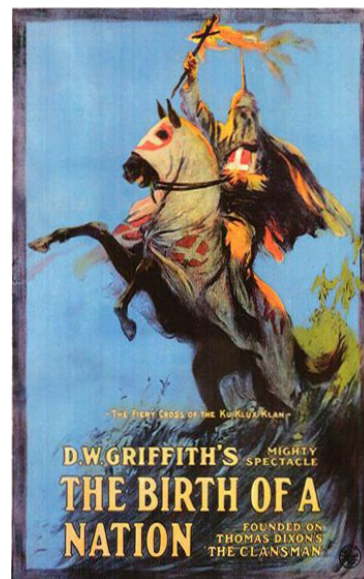
#### Week 2 | History Has a History (Sept. 14/17)

**Screening:** Selections from *The Birth of a Nation* (D.W. Griffith, 1915), *Gone with the Wind* (Victor Fleming, 1939), *Glory* (Ed Zwick, 1989), *12 Years a Slave* (Steve McQueen, 2013)

**Readings:** Rosenstone, Ch. 2 “To See the Past” (13–34) and Ch. 3 “Mainstream Drama” (37–55).

Ruth Elizabeth Burks, “*Gone With the Wind*: Black and White in Technicolor,” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 21 (2004): 53–73. [online at Weldon]

Thomas Cripps, “The Year of *The Birth of a Nation*,” *Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film, 1900–1942* (New York: Oxford University Press), 41–69. [online at Weldon]



#### Week 3 | Written History vs. History on Film (Sept. 21/24)

**Screening:** Selections from *Flags of Our Fathers* (Clint Eastwood, 2006) and *Letters from Iwo Jima* (Clint Eastwood, 2006).

**Readings:** John M. Gourlie, “Eastwood’s *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima*: The Silence of Heroes and the Voice of History,” in *New Essays on Clint Eastwood*, edited by Leonard Engel (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2012), 249–65.

David J. Morris, “The Image as History: Clint Eastwood’s Unmaking of an American Myth,” *Virginia Quarterly Review* 83:2 (Spring 2007): 94–107. [online at Weldon]



### Week 4 | “Accuracy” on Film (Sept. 28/Oct. 1)

**Screening:** Selections from *Frost/Nixon* (Ron Howard, 2008) and *Dick* (Andrew Fleming, 1999).

**Readings:** Rosenstone, Ch. 6 “Telling Lives” (101–23).

Dennis Bingham, “The Lives and Times of the Biopic,” in *A Companion to the Historical Film*, ed. by Robert Rosenstone and Constantin Parvulesu (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 233–53. [e-book available at Weldon]

### Act II

The middle third of the course (weeks 5–9) features films on a number of historical episodes made in different eras, so as to hammer home the key historiographical idea: each of these films tells us something about the era it depicts, but just as much if not more about the era in which it was made.

### Week 5 | World War I (Oct. 5/8)

#### **\*\*FILM REVIEW CHOICE DUE BY EMAIL\*\***

**Screening:** Selections from *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Lewis Milestone, 1930) and *Johnny Got His Gun* (Dalton Trumbo, 1971).

**Readings:** John Whiteclay Chambers, “The Movies and the Antiwar Debate in America, 1930–41,” *Film & History* 36:1 (2006): 44–57.

Heather Frazer and John O’Sullivan, “All Unquiet on the Hollywood Front: Actor Lew Ayres as Conscientious Objector,” *Film & History* 27:1–4 (1997): 34–39. [online at Weldon]

Modris Eksteins, “War, Memory and Politics: The Fate of the Film *All Quiet on the Western Front*,” *Central European History* 13:1 (March 1980): 60–82. [online at Weldon]

### Week 6 | The Great Depression (Oct. 12: NO SCREENING/Oct. 15)

**Screening:** Selections from *The Grapes of Wrath* (John Ford, 1940) and *Bonnie & Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967).

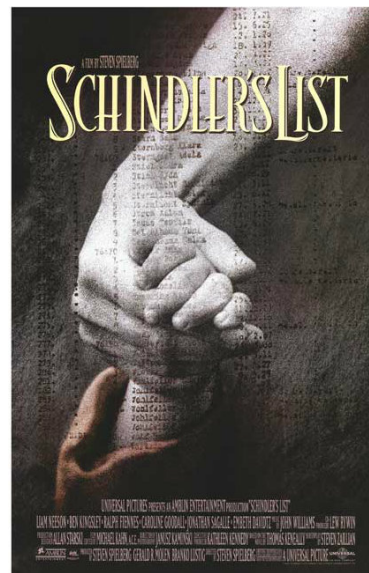
**Readings:** Arnon Gutfeld, “Nostalgia, Protest and Tradition in the 1960s: History as Reflected by *Bonnie and Clyde*,” *Journal of the American Studies Association of Texas* 40(November 2009): 5–34. [online at Weldon]

**Week 7 | The Holocaust (Oct. 19/22)**

**Screening:** *Schindler's List* (Steven Spielberg, 1993).

**Readings:** Rosenstone, Ch. 8 "Engaging the Discourse" (151–72).

Lynn Rapaport, "Hollywood's Holocaust: *Schindler's List* and the Construction of Memory," *Film & History* 32:1 (May 2002): 55–65. [online at Weldon]

**Week 8 | The Civil Rights Movement (Oct. 26/29)**

**\*\*OCT. 26: FILM REVIEW DUE IN CLASS\*\***

**Screening:** Selections from *Selma* (Ava DuVernay, 2014) and *Mississippi Burning* (Alan Parker, 1988).

**Readings:** Kristen Hoerl, "Burning Mississippi into Memory? Cinematic Amnesia as a Resource for Remembering Civil Rights," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 26:1 (March 2009): 54–79. [online at Weldon]

"Interview: Bill Moyers on LBJ and *Selma*," *Moyers & Company*, January 15, 2015.

<http://billmoyers.com/2015/01/15/bill-moyers-selma-lbj/>

Joseph A Califano, Jr., "The Movie *Selma* Has a Glaring Flaw," *Washington Post*, December 26, 2014.

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-movie-selma-has-a-glaring-historical-inaccuracy/2014/12/26/70ad3ea2-8aa4-11e4-a085-34e9b9f09a58\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-movie-selma-has-a-glaring-historical-inaccuracy/2014/12/26/70ad3ea2-8aa4-11e4-a085-34e9b9f09a58_story.html)

Peniel Joseph, "*Selma* Backlash Misses the Point," *NPR: Code Switch*, January 10, 2015.

<http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2015/01/10/376081786/selma-backlash-misses-the-point>

"*Selma* Director Defends Film's Portrayal of LBJ-MLK Dispute on Voting Rights Legislation," *Democracy Now*, January 27, 2015.

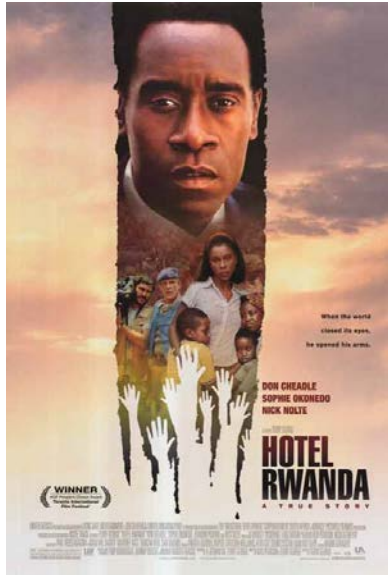
[http://www.democracynow.org/2015/1/27/selma\\_director\\_defends\\_films\\_portrayal\\_of](http://www.democracynow.org/2015/1/27/selma_director_defends_films_portrayal_of)

**Week 9 | The Vietnam War (Nov. 2/5)**

**Screening:** Selections from *Hamburger Hill* (John Irvin, 1987), *Heaven+Earth* (Oliver Stone, 1993) and *We Were Soldiers* (Randall Wallace, 2002).

**Readings:** Michael Comber and Margaret O'Brien, "Evading the War: The Politics of the Hollywood Vietnam Film," *History* 73:238 (June 1988): 248–60. [online at Weldon]

Susan L. Carruthers, "Bringing It All Back Home: Hollywood Returns to War," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 14:1 (Spring 2003): 167–82. [online at Weldon]



### Act III

The last third of the course (weeks 10–13) moves beyond Hollywood feature films, with documentaries, films from other countries, and postmodern films and films that are self-consciously “about” the project of history.

#### Week 10 | Africa on Film (Nov. 9/12)

**Screening:** Selections from *Cry Freedom* (Richard Attenborough, 1987) and *Hotel Rwanda* (Terry George, 2004).

**Readings:** Njeri Ngugi, “Presenting and (Mis)representing History in Fiction Film: Sembène’s *Camp de Thiaroye* and Attenborough’s *Cry Freedom*,” *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 16:1 (June 2003): 57–68. [online at Weldon]

Vivian Bickford-Smith, “Reviewing Hollywood’s Apartheid: *Cry Freedom* (1987) and *Dry White Season* (1989),” *South African Historical Journal* 48 (May 2003): 23–34. [online at Weldon]

Vivian Bickford-Smith, “Rosenstone on Film, Rosenstone on History: An African Perspective,” *Rethinking History* 11:4 (December 2007): 531–45. [online at Weldon]

#### Week 11 | Documentary Film (Nov. 16/19)

**Screening:** Selections from *Why We Fight: Prelude to War* (Frank Capra, 1942), *Fog of War* (Errol Morris, 2003) and *The War* (Ken Burns, 2008).

**Readings:** Marnie Hughes-Warrington, Ch. 6 “Documentary,” *History Goes to the Movies: Studying History on Film* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 122–43.

Robert F. Jefferson, “Whose War Is It Anyway? Ken Burns’ *The War* and American Popular Memory,” *The Oral History Review* 36:1 (2009): 71–81. [online at Weldon]

Betsy A. McLane, Ch. 7/Part C “Indoctrination – *Why We Fight?*” (139–142) and Ch. 14 “The Ken Burns Phenomenon” (312–14), in *A New History of Documentary Film*, 2nd ed. (New York: Continuum, 2012).

#### Week 12 | Non-Hollywood Films (Nov. 23/26)

**Screening:** *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Daniel Vigne, 1982)

**Readings:** Anthony Guneratne, “Cinhistory and the Puzzling Case of Martin Guerre,” *Film & History* 21:1 (1991): 2–19.



Janet Staiger, “Securing the Fictional Narrative as a Tale of the Historical Real,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 88:2 (1989): 393–413.

#### Week 13 | Postmodern History Films (Nov. 30/Dec. 3)

**\*\*NOV.30: FILM TREATMENT DUE IN CLASS\*\***

**Screening:** *JFK* (Oliver Stone, 1991)

**Readings:** Rosenstone, Ch. 7 “Film-maker/Historian” (125–49).

Marita Sturken, “Reenactment, Fantasy and the Paranoia of History: Oliver Stone’s Docudramas,”  
*History & Theory* 36:4 (December 1997): 64–79.

## **Expectations and Policies**

### ***Attendance and Absences***

Students are expected to attend screenings and lectures. Attendance is paramount for student success. Students who do not attend lectures or the screenings cannot expect to do well. Viewing films online or at home is not a substitute for attending screenings.

*Extended Absences*—Absences that will have you missing significant class time might necessitate a reduction in overall course workload, i.e., dropping a course/s. Actions such as this must be completed by the appropriate deadlines. Please see the Registrar's Office for scheduled dates. Academic counsellors are available to help you consider your options. With your permission, counsellors will keep the instructor informed.

### ***Participation***

Critical thinking skills can only be established through engaging with the course materials. This makes class discussions essential to the success of the course. Students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings and films in meaningful, thoughtful ways. It's not just about the 'quantity' of a student's engagement in discussion, but also on the 'quality' of that contribution to the overall discussion.

### ***Safe/Productive Learning Environment***

The aim of this course is to create a positive and productive learning environment in which students feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and opinions. Bullying, harassing and/or threatening behavior during class discussions and at screenings will not be tolerated, and are a very real detriment to the class dynamic. If students are encountering issues, they are encouraged to communicate with the instructor via email or during office hours.

Please see Equity and Human Rights Services (<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/board/code.pdf>) for Western's Student Code of Conduct.

My aim is to get students excited about the convergence of history and film. I encourage students to come to office hours and/or contact me through email to discuss any questions they may have with regard to the readings, screenings, assignments, class discussions, etc.

### ***Late Penalties***

Assignments submitted after the due date will receive a penalty of three per cent per day (including weekends) until the paper is handed in. A paper copy and electronic version of the assignment must be submitted. Neglecting to hand in an electronic version will also result in a three per cent per until it is submitted.

### ***Academic Accommodation on Medical Grounds***

Academic accommodation on medical grounds can in most cases only be granted if supported by a Western University Student Medical Certificate. This form can be accessed at the following website: [https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/medical\\_document.pdf](https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/medical_document.pdf). Hard copies are available at the Academic Counseling Office in the student's home faculty. For more details, please refer to: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation\\_medical.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf).

If, on medical or compassionate grounds, you are unable to meet your academic



responsibilities, i.e., unable to write term tests or final examinations or complete course work by the due date, you should follow the instructions listed below. You should understand that academic accommodation will not be granted automatically. You must demonstrate that there are compelling medical or compassionate grounds that can be documented before academic accommodation will be considered. Read the instructions carefully. In all cases, action must be taken at the earliest possible opportunity, preferably prior to the scheduled examination, test or assignment.

1. Inform the instructor prior to the date of the scheduled time of the test or examination, or due date of the assignment. If you are unable to contact the instructor, leave a message for him/her at the department office.
2. Bring your request for accommodation to the Academic Counseling Office, Social Science Centre Rm 2105, telephone 519 661-2011 or fax 519 661-3384. Be prepared to submit documentation of your difficulties.
3. Rewriting tests or examinations, or having the value of the test or examination re-weighted on a retroactive basis is not permitted.

### ***Final Examinations***

1. You require the permission of the Dean, the instructor and the Chair of the department in question to write a special final examination.
2. If you are unable to write a final examination, contact the Academic Counseling Office in the first instance to request permission to write a special final examination and to obtain the necessary form. You must also contact your instructor at this time. If your instructor is not available, leave a message for him/her at the department office.
3. Be prepared to provide the Academic Counseling Office and your instructor with supporting documentation (see below for information on documentation).
4. You must ensure that the Special Examination form has been signed by the instructor and Department Chair, and that the form is returned to the Academic Counseling Office for approval without delay.

### ***Documentation***

*Personal Illness* —If you consulted Student Health Services regarding your illness or personal problem, you should complete a Records Release Form allowing them to notify Academic Counselling (the form is available in the Academic Counseling Office, 2105). Once your documentation has been assessed, the academic counselor will inform your instructor that academic accommodation is warranted. If you were seen by an off-campus doctor, obtain a certificate from his/her office at the time of your visit. The off-campus medical certificate form must be used (<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/medicalform.pdf>). The doctor must provide verification of the severity of the illness for the period in question. Notes stating "For Medical Reasons" are not considered sufficient.

*In Case of Serious Illness of a Family Member* – Obtain a medical certificate from the family member's physician. In Case of a Death: Obtain a copy of the newspaper notice, death certificate or documentation provided by the funeral director.

*For Other Extenuating Circumstances* – If you are not sure what documentation to provide, ask an Academic Counselor.

## ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

### **Prerequisites and Antirequisites:**

Unless you have either the requisites for this course, as described in the Academic Calendar description of the course, or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites. The Academic Calendar description of each course also indicates which classes are considered antirequisites, i.e., to cover such similar material that students are not permitted to receive academic credit for both courses.

### **Academic Offences:**

Scholastic Offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitute a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

### **Plagiarism:**

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offense (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

The following rules pertain to the acknowledgements necessary in academic papers.

A. In using another writer's words, you must both place the words in quotation marks and acknowledge that the words are those of another writer.

You are plagiarizing if you use a sequence of words, a sentence or a paragraph taken from other writers without acknowledging them to be theirs. Acknowledgement is indicated either by (1) mentioning the author and work from which the words are borrowed in the text of your paper; or by (2) placing a footnote number at the end of the quotation in your text, and including a correspondingly numbered footnote at the bottom of the page (or in a separate reference section at the end of your essay). This footnote should indicate author, title of the work, place and date of Publication and page number. Method (2) given above is usually preferable for academic essays because it provides the reader with more information about your sources and leaves your text uncluttered with parenthetical and tangential references. In either case words taken from another author must be enclosed in quotation marks or set off from your text by single spacing and

indentation in such a way that they cannot be mistaken for your own words. Note that you cannot avoid indicating quotation simply by changing a word or phrase in a sentence or paragraph which is not your own.

B. In adopting other writer's ideas, you must acknowledge that they are theirs.

You are plagiarizing if you adopt, summarize, or paraphrase other writers' trains of argument, ideas or sequences of ideas without acknowledging their authorship according to the method of acknowledgement given in 'A' above. Since the words are your own, they need not be enclosed in quotation marks. Be certain, however, that the words you use are entirely your own; where you must use words or phrases from your source; these should be enclosed in quotation marks, as in 'A' above.

Clearly, it is possible for you to formulate arguments or ideas independently of another writer who has expounded the same ideas, and whom you have not read. Where you got your ideas is the important consideration here. Do not be afraid to present an argument or idea without acknowledgement to another writer, if you have arrived at it entirely independently. Acknowledge it if you have derived it from a source outside your own thinking on the subject.

In short, use of acknowledgements and, when necessary, quotation marks is necessary to distinguish clearly between what is yours and what is not. Since the rules have been explained to you, if you fail to make this distinction, your instructor very likely will do so for you, and they will be forced to regard your omission as intentional literary theft. Plagiarism is a serious offence which may result in a student's receiving an 'F' in a course or, in extreme cases, in their suspension from the University.

## **Medical Issues:**

The University recognizes that a student's ability to meet his/her academic responsibilities may, on occasion, be impaired by medical illness. Please go to [https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/medical\\_accommodations\\_link\\_for\\_OOR.pdf](https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/medical_accommodations_link_for_OOR.pdf) to read about the University's policy on medical accommodation. This site provides links to the necessary forms. In the event of illness, you should contact Academic Counselling as soon as possible. The Academic Counsellors will determine, in consultation with the student, whether or not accommodation should be requested. They will subsequently contact the instructors in the relevant courses about the accommodation. Once the instructor has made a decision about whether to grant an accommodation, the student should contact his/her instructors to determine a new due date for tests, assignments, and exams.

### **SUPPORT SERVICES:**

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to [Mental Health@Western](mailto:MentalHealth@Western), <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

*Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 661-2111 x 82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation.*

If you have any further questions or concerns please contact, Morgan Sheriff, Undergraduate Program Advisor, Department of History, 519-661-2111 x84999 or [msherif5@uwo.ca](mailto:msherif5@uwo.ca)