The University of Western Ontario  
Department of History  
History 2814G  
The History of Aviation  
Winter 2024  
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This is a draft syllabus. Please see the course site on OWL for a final version.

Course Description
This course explores the history of aviation from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day. It focuses on the key events and personalities associated with the history of aviation from the romantic era of flight to the development of the modern aviation industry.

Antirequisite(s): History 2215F/G

Course Syllabus
This course explores the idea of flight. When people began to experiment with flight they were seen as visionaries but also as somewhat eccentric. To those who pursued such experiments, balloons and then flying machines represented great scientific and technological advances as well as the hope that technology might bring the world together in peace. But the early promise of flight would be shattered when airplanes were shown to be efficient weapons in war, too. The early dreams of flight persisted into the middle decades of the twentieth century, which helped to propel the creation of a commercial aviation industry. The decades following the Second World War were a so-called golden age of aviation, a time when flight became more comfortable, safer, and accessible to a new generation of people with both the means and the desire to travel as a form of leisure. The deregulation of the skies beginning in the seventies, however, would ultimately spell the end of the carriers that had done so much to sell the public on the romance of flight. Flying would become more accessible to the masses but it would also become simply one among many other forms of transportation. This course focuses on the key events and personalities in the history of aviation, including Orville and Wilbur Wright and Charles Lindbergh. We will also consider how some literary figures, including H.G. Wells and Tom Wolfe, have understood flight. As well, we will trace the development of the commercial aviation industry, including the rise of such companies as Pan-Am, TWA, Canadian Airways, and Trans Canada Airlines. This course, in the end, is concerned with the idea of flight in the modern western imagination.

In this course students will—in addition to learning the broad outline of the history of aviation— sharpen their ability to read and think critically, develop their analytical skills, and learn to organize and present their thoughts in the form of an examination and two short essays.
Course Materials
All course readings will be made available on the course page on owl or on reserve at the Weldon Library.

Methods of Evaluation
Midterm Examination (Feb. 9)  30%
First Short Essay (due Mar. 8)  35%
Second Short Essay (due Apr. 5)  35%

The expectation will be that students attend the lectures and complete all of the weekly readings. In addition, students will write a midterm examination in class on February 7. Students will also write two short essays; the first will be due on March 8 and the second will be due on April 5. Each short essay will be five pages (1,250 words) in length and will be written in response to a question that will be made available to you in advance of the submission deadlines. All of the material that students will need to write the two short essays will be found in the course readings and slides. No outside research will be expected. These two short essays are to be typed, double-spaced, well-written, provide sound analysis, draw upon the appropriate course material, follow proper scholarly conventions (including citation style and bibliography) and include a cover page. The cover page and bibliography will not count toward the length requirement. You will upload copies of your essays to the course web page on owl, where they may be subject to turnitin analysis. Essays submitted after the due dates will be subject to a penalty of five percent the first day and one percent for every day thereafter (including weekends).

Please note: All work submitted in this course must be your own. You may not make use of generative AI tools like ChatGPT for any assignments in this course.

Make-up tests, midterms, and exams can only be approved by Academic Counselling. Please see https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html for department procedures and requirements involving make-up tests and exams.

Course Schedule and Readings

Jan. 12: Introduction

Jan. 19: The Idea of Flight

Jan. 26: Balloons

Feb. 2: The Pioneers
Feb. 9: Midterm Examination

Feb. 16: The Age of Lindbergh

Feb. 23: Reading Week

Mar. 1: The Bush Pilot

Mar. 8: Commercial Aviation in Canada

Mar. 15: Commercial Aviation in the United States

Mar. 22: The Jet Age

Mar. 29: Good Friday

Apr. 5: Conclusion

Additional Statements
Please review the Department of History’s shared policies and statements for all undergraduate courses at: https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate-program_module_information/policies.html for important information regarding accessibility options, make-up exams, medical accommodations, health and wellness, academic integrity, plagiarism, and more.