

**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](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

- Laurence Goldstein, *The Flying Machine and Modern Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 14-62.

**Jan. 26:** Balloons

- Richard Holmes, *The Age of Wonder* (London: Harper Press, 2008), 125-162.

**Feb. 2:** The Pioneers

- Joseph J. Corn, *The Winged Gospel: America's Romance with Aviation, 1900-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 3-70.

**Feb. 9:** Midterm Examination**Feb. 16:** The Age of Lindbergh

- John W. Ward, "The Meaning of Lindbergh's Flight," *American Quarterly* (Spring 1958):3-16.
- Augustus Post, "Columbus of the Air," *North American Review* (Sept-Oct, 1927): 353-364.
- Laurence Goldstein, *The Flying Machine and Modern Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 97-109.
- Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1989), 241-274.
- Thomas Kessner, *The Flight of the Century: Charles Lindbergh and the Rise of American Aviation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 224-240.

**Feb. 23:** Reading Week**Mar. 1:** The Bush Pilot

- Jonathan F. Vance, *High Flight: Aviation and the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: Penguin, 2002), 133-158.
- Shirley Render, *Double Cross: The Inside Story of James A. Richardson and Canadian Airways* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1999), 21-67.

**Mar. 8:** Commercial Aviation in Canada

- Peter Pigott, *Wingwalkers: A History of Canadian Airlines International* (Madeira Park, B.C.: Harbour Pub., 2003), 187-231.

**Mar. 15:** Commercial Aviation in the United States

- Jenifer Van Vleck, *Empire of the Air: Aviation and the American Ascendancy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 89-130.

**Mar. 22:** The Jet Age

- Jenifer Van Vleck, *Empire of the Air: Aviation and the American Ascendancy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 239-280.
- Charles Lindbergh, "A Letter from Lindbergh," *Life* (July 4, 1969).
- Tom Wolfe, *The Right Stuff* (New York: Picador, 1979), 15-101, 141-168, 283-288.

**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](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.