

SELF PROGRAM

2025/2026

The European Revolutionary Tide since 1789

Dr Andrew Baldwin

Course information

Number of credits: 6 credits

Contact hours: 30 hours

Hours taught per week: 3 hours

Teaching period: spring 2026

Course description:

This course will introduce students to the background, events and consequences of the successive waves of political revolution that have marked the history of Europe during the last two centuries. Beginning with the cataclysmic impact of the French Revolution from the late eighteenth century, participants will learn about the changing contexts of national upheaval in Europe, as well as the factors that contributed to the success or, in many cases, failure of revolutionary movements in each of the successive eras.

Course outline

Class 1: Understanding modern revolutions

Class 2: Coups and constitutions: upheavals in the 1820s and 1830s

Class 3: The “springtime of nations”: the revolutions of 1848

- Class 4:* 1848 rebooted: the true “spring of nations” in the 1860s
- Class 5:* The old order collapses: the consequences of World War One
- Class 6:* Back to barracks: the last military coups in western Europe 1958-1961
- Class 7:* Behind the Curtain: eastern European challenges to Soviet dominance 1956-1981
- Class 8:* Sound and fury: was there a revolution in western Europe in the 1960s?
- Class 9:* Communism overthrown: the end of the Eastern Bloc 1989-1991

Prerequisites

No prior knowledge of the subject is required. Any previous historical study of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in general, and in particular of political upheavals and changes during that period, will obviously be an asset to understanding; but the only prerequisite for taking part in the course is an interest in, and willingness to appreciate, the significance of political upheaval (or sometimes the failed attempt to instigate such upheaval) in the making of modern Europe.

Course objectives

By completing this course, students should gain:

- A good grasp of the chronology of European revolutions since 1789
- An appreciation of the similarities and differences between countries’ political upheavals, both within particular eras, and also over time
- An opinion on what contributes to the success or failure of revolution

Assessment

30% – mid-term in-class test of knowledge comprehension

70% – final in-class (i.e. class 10) extended writing examination

*Please note that the marks obtained for each element in the assessment are definitive. Save in exceptional medical circumstances, there will be **no retakes or supplementary tests**.*

Attendance

In order to participate, students must be present. Nevertheless, a maximum of 2 (two) unexcused absences will be allowed otherwise no mark will be given. An unexcused absence at a test (final test or continuous assessment) means no credits for the course.

Bibliography

- J. Sperber, *The European Revolutions, 1848-1851* (2nd edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)
- V. Sebestyen, *Revolution, 1989: The Fall of the Soviet Empire* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2009)

These books focus on only a couple of the best-known waves of revolution; further readings will be advised during the course.