Honors 4900
Transcontinentals: Railroads and the American West

Currier & Ives, Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way, 1868
(based on Fanny Frances Palmer's painting, Across the Continent)

Syllabus

Historian Richard White argues that: “The transcontinental railroads of the late nineteenth century were the first corporate behemoths. Their attempts to generate profits from proliferating debt sparked devastating panics in the U.S. economy. Their dependence on public largess drew them into the corridors of power, initiating new forms of corruption. Their operations rearranged space and time, and remade the landscape of the West. As wheel and rail, car and coal, they opened new worlds of work and ways of life.”

Kathryn L. MacKay, Ph.D.

- office: SL309M
- phone: 626-6782
- email: kmackay@weber.edu
- web page: http://faculty.weber.edu/kmackay/
WSU Resources:

- Canvas technical support: (801) 626-6499; wsuonline@weber.edu
- IT Help desk: (801) 626-7777; csupport@weber.edu
- Chi-tester support: (801) 626-6477
- Library Circulation: (801) 626 6545
- Library Reference: (801) 626 6415

Texts:

- additional readings as assigned

Honors Student Learning Goals:

- Students will practice clear and compelling written and/or creative expression;
- Students will engage in critical thinking that is open-minded, objective, and as free as possible from prejudice and presupposition;
- Students will undertake the comprehension of abstract arguments and the ability to move between the general and the particular;
- Students will encounter a variety of human experience, exploring both its universality and its diversity.

History Student Learning Goals:

A. Historical Knowledge

- Students will demonstrate a knowledge of basic facts, events -- and, especially, of significant questions and major themes in the history of railroading in the American West before 1900
- Students will explain economic impacts the transcontinental road had on the nation.
- Students will describe the effects the railroad had on American life from a variety of perspectives (promoters, settlers, Chinese and Irish immigrants, Native Americans, women).
- Students will present an argument for how the building of the transcontinental railroad should be remembered and commemorated.

B. Historical Thinking

- Students will use a historical perspective by which to understand present issues in the American West.
- Students will consider a wide variety of historical sources and learn about how historians go about "recovering the past."
C. Historical Skills

- Students will hone their skills in reading, thinking, and writing. Students will learn how to learn, how to reflect on their own learning.

Activities in support of learning goals:

- **3 Response papers** (2-3 pages). Points (15) are earned for:
  - Accomplishment of the assignment = 7 points
  - Composition skills = 5 points
  - Citation of sources = 3 points

- **3 Oral presentations.** Points (10) are earned for:
  - Handout provides relevant material = 5 points
  - Delivery is natural, clear, articulate = 2 points
  - Questions are answered accurately and effectively = 3 points

- **Academic journal for field trips** = 50 points
- **Midterm Reflection and Participation Statement** = 25 points

This class will be conducted as a seminar. Active participation and critical thinking about the reading is essential. Careful reading is the single most important thing you can do to be successful in this course. In evaluating your participation grade, we will be looking for three main things: 1) active, regular participation; 2) direct engagement with the text by offering reflections, posing questions, pointing out problems, etc.; and 3) interaction with your peers by building on their comments, asking further questions, and putting forth a different view with respect and courtesy.

I emphasize these three areas because they mirror my approach and understanding of what a seminar should be -- a collegial space for exchanging and discussing ideas. We tend to think of seminar as a conversation among peers who come to class with thoughtful questions, remarks, and comments about the assigned reading and then leave with other issues in mind that have surfaced after carefully listening to and engaging with the ideas of their colleagues. Like any good, animated conversation, discussion depends on give and take from all of those involved — listening as much as talking.

There will be a number of field trips for this class as part of the region-wide commemoration of the Golden Spike:

- Ogden Union Station
- Spike 150 events: [https://spike150.org/](https://spike150.org/)
- Evanston Depot
- Heber Creeper
- California Zephyr
**Grades:**

Grades will be based on a percentage of the points possible

- 3 formal response papers: 45 points
- 3 formal oral presentations = 30 points
- Academic journal (field trips) = 50 points
- Midterm reflection and Participation = 25 points

A = 94 - 100%
B = 83 - 86%
C = 73 - 76%
D = 60 - 66%

---

**About Accommodations:**

- Any student requiring accommodations or services due to a disability must contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) in room 181 of the Student Service Center. SSD can also arrange to provide course materials (including this syllabus) in alternative formats if necessary.
- Weber State University recognizes that there are times when course content may differ from a student's core beliefs. Faculty, however, have a responsibility to teach content that is related to the discipline and that has a reasonable relationship to pedagogical goals. If you, as a student, believe that the content of the course conflicts with your ability to pursue the topic, you may request a resolution from the instructor. (See PPM 6-22.)

**About Plagiarism:**

Plagiarism on any of your work will result in failure of the project in question. Plagiarism may also be grounds for failing the course. If at any time, you are unsure about what might constitute plagiarism, just ask. I'll be glad to help you figure out where and when you need to document sources or credit others with ideas you wish to borrow.

**Emergency Closure:**

Look for announcements on Weber e-mail. Code Purple is a good way to be alerted to campus closures, and you are encouraged to sign up for it.