

HTS 4001A Syllabus

Seminar in U.S. History: College Football and Modern America (4 Credits) - Fall 2026

Instructor Information

Instructor: Dr. Johnny Smith

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Office: G21 – Old Civil Engineering Building

Office Hours: T/R 3:00 – 4:00 (please email in advance for an appointment)

General Course Information

***This syllabus is subject to copyright law and may not be distributed or posted on any websites without permission of the instructor.**

****This syllabus is subject to revision at the instructor's discretion. All changes to the syllabus will be announced in class and shared on Canvas.**

Course Description

In this class we will examine the historical significance of college football. The purpose of this seminar is to understand how college football became a uniquely influential cultural institution and the most visible aspect of modern American universities. We will examine critical conflicts and contradictions between the sport's founding amateur ideals and its evolving commercial realities. Thinking critically, will investigate what college football can teach us about the history of capitalism, class, education, ethnicity, gender, labor, law, politics, race, religion, technology, and violence.

Course Format

Students will produce a substantial independent research paper (20-25 pages) on a topic related to the history of college football. This research paper must be based on primary sources and engage relevant historiography. Throughout this seminar we will discuss weekly readings and explore what it means to be a historian, the research process, and the craft of writing. At the end of the semester, students will deliver a formal, oral presentation summarizing their research conclusions during the School of History and Sociology's Fall Undergraduate Research Symposium.

Course Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course students should be able to:

- Examine the historical forces that transformed college football into an influential cultural institution
- Conduct independent historical research based on primary sources

- Formulate scholarly arguments with evidence and defend their historical interpretations orally and in writing

Required Course Materials

Students will be required to read journal articles, book chapters, and primary sources. Most readings will be provided by the instructor and posted on Canvas; a few readings can be accessed using the GT Library catalog. See the course schedule below for the full list of readings.

Grading Policy

Participation in Seminar Discussions (75 points)
 Preliminary Bibliography and Proposal (25 points)
 Annotated Bibliography and Revised Proposal (50 points)
 Outline (25 points)
 Draft Paper (50 points)
 Peer-Review Writing Exercise (25 points)
 Final Presentation (50 points)
Final Paper (100 points)
400 Total Points

Grading Scale

A: 100 – 90% (400 – 360 points)
 B: 89 – 80% (359 – 320 points)
 C: 79 – 70% (310 – 280 points)
 D: 69 – 60% (279 – 240 points)
 F: 59% or lower (239 points or lower)

Description of Graded Components

Participation in Seminar Discussions (75 points): Students must consistently participate in class discussions. You are expected to offer thoughtful comments and ask relevant questions. Students should come to class prepared to ask questions about the reading and offer insight about the subject. If you attend class, but fail to demonstrate that you completed the readings, I reserve the right to mark you absent for that day. Furthermore, I may conduct reading quizzes to determine whether students have completed the readings prior to class.

Preliminary Proposal and Bibliography (25 points): Your preliminary bibliography will consist of sources that you intend to consult. You must include at least three scholarly sources (books/journal articles) and three primary sources. Your bibliography should follow the format in the *Chicago Manual of Style*. In the same document, you will write a proposal about two pages long. A good research proposal clearly outlines the scope of your topic and the key questions that will be addressed. Your proposal must describe your research methods, sources, and the historical significance of the selected topic. You should also address any concerns you

have about pursuing the topic or problems you have faced in your preliminary research. I do not expect students to provide a thesis in their initial proposal. Your preliminary proposal and bibliography are due on **October 14**.

Peer-Review Exercise (25 points): Students will be asked to provide feedback on a classmate's proposal. Additional information on this activity will be provided later in the semester.

Annotated Bibliography and Revised Proposal (50 points): The annotated bibliography will consist of an extensive list of secondary sources and primary sources. For each source listed, students should write about a paragraph explaining the relevance of the source to their topic and how you plan to use it. All entries should follow the format described in the *Chicago Manual of Style*. The annotated bibliography serves two purposes: (1) it should help students think about how they are going to use their sources; (2) students will demonstrate that they have located quality sources that will allow them to execute their project.

Additionally, after receiving feedback from the instructor on the initial proposal, students should explain how they have revised the focus of their project. Revised proposals and annotated bibliographies are due on **October 28**.

Essay Outline (25 points): Outlining a paper helps writers organize their ideas. It should also challenge you to consider how you will use your sources, develop an argument, and defend your thesis with evidence. Each outline must include an introduction, thesis statement, and an overview of your paper. The outline does not need to follow a specific format, but it should have a clear structure that you can follow. Essay outlines are due on **October 28**.

Essay Draft (50 points): The most significant assignment in this course is an extensive research paper based on primary and secondary sources. Students will receive a detailed handout that outlines the guidelines and standards for the draft and final paper. Students will submit a polished draft by 11:59 pm on **Sunday, November 22**.

Final Presentation (50 points): Students will make a formal presentation discussing all aspects of their project. All students are required to bring two guests to attend their presentations. The instructor will provide a detailed handout that outlines the guidelines and standards for the final presentations. Student presentations will take place during the HSOC Research Symposium on **December 2**.

Final Paper (100 points): Research papers will be graded using a clear criterion based on the following: (1) following instructions; (2) quality of research; (3) citations; (4) quality of writing; (5); organization; (6) use of evidence; (7) and analysis of the material. Students will receive a detailed handout that outlines the guidelines and standards for the final paper. **All final papers**

must be submitted to the instructor in person on December 9 at 12:30 pm. No late final papers will be accepted.

College Football and Modern America: Seminar Schedule

August 26: Course Introduction

- **Reading:**
 - Erin C. Tarver, “College Football Is Here. But What Are We Really Cheering?,” *New York Times*, August 21, 2017

September 2: Historiography: College Football as American Cultural History

- **Watch Before Class:** [*College Football 150—Football Is US: The College Game*](#) (ESPN, 2019)
- **Reading:**
 - Kurt E. Kemper, “Reconciling the Consequences of Modernity: College Football As Cultural History,” in *A Companion to American Sports History, First Edition*, Edited by Steven A. Riess, (2014): 202-220

September 9: Origins and Myths

- **Reading:**
 - (1) Ronald A. Smith, Ch. 1, “Amateurism Then and Now,” in *The Myth of the Amateur: A History of College Athletic Scholarships* (2021), 9-18
 - (2) Kathleen Bachynski, Ch. 1, “The Modern Knight Errant: Nation, Race, and the Origins of American Football,” in *No Game For Boys To Play: The History of Youth Football and the Origins of a Public Health Crisis* (2019), 9-27
 - (3) Brian M. Ingrassia, “Public Influence Inside the College Walls: Progressive Era Universities, Social Scientists, and Intercollegiate Football Reform,” *Journal of the Gilded Age & Progressive Era* (2011): 59-88
 - (4) David Wallace Adams, “More Than a Game: The Carlisle Indians Take to the Gridiron, 1893-1917,” *Western Historical Quarterly* (2001): 25-53

September 16: King Football: Part I

- **Reading:**
 - (1) John Sayle Watterson, Ch. 8, “Playing and Coaching for Pay in the 1920s,” and Ch. 9, “Growth of Subsidized Football, 1920-1929,” in *College Football: History, Spectacle, and Controversy* (2000), 143-176.
 - (2) William J. Baker, Ch. 7, “For God, The Gipper, and The Green,” in *Playing With God: Religion and Modern Sport* (2007), 129-147
 - (3) John R. Tunis, “The Great God Football,” *Harper’s Monthly*, November 1928, 742-752

September 23: College Football: A History of Violence

- **Reading:**

- Michael Oriard, Ch. 3, “Should Your Boy Play Football?,”; Ch.5, “Paying the Price,” and Ch. 6, “Dishing It Out,” in *Sanctioned Savagery: A History of Violence in American Football* (2025), 79-97; 119-169

September 30: One-on-one meetings with Dr. Smith – Old Civil Engineering G21

October 7: One-on-one meetings with Dr. Smith – Old Civil Engineering G21

October 14: Cold War Football

- **Reading:**
 - (1) Kurt E. Kemper, Prologue: “The Game the War Made,” Ch. 1, “Pasadena: The Terms of Postwar Football,” and Ch. 2, “Columbus: in *College Football and American Culture in the Cold War Era* (2009), 8-79
 - (2) Howard Chudacoff, Chapter One, “Abolishing the Sanity Code and Launching the Modern College Sports Establishment,” in *Changing The Playbook: How Power, Profit, and Politics Transformed College Sports* (2015), 7-25
- **Assignment: Preliminary Proposal and Bibliography Due**
- **Assignment: Peer-Review In-Class Activity**

October 21: The Sport of the South: Race, Region, and Religion

- **Reading:**
 - (1) Andrew Doyle, “Turning the Tide: College Football and Southern Progressivism,” *Southern Cultures* (1997): 28-51
 - (2) Matthew Bailey, “Honor, Markets, and Feuds: The Severance of Athletic Relations Between the University of Georgia and Georgia Tech,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, vol. 97, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 1-28
 - (3) Charles H. Martin, “Racial Change and Big-Time College Football in Georgia, 1892-1957,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, vol. 80, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 532-562
 - (4) Andrew Doyle, “Bear Bryant: Symbol for an Embattled South,” *Colby Quarterly* (1996): 72-86

October 28: The State of the Game

- **Reading:**
 - (1) John Branch, “What Does College Football Have to Do With College?,” *New York Times*, October 4, 2024
 - (2) Victoria Jackson, “Want College Sports Reform? Start with Paying Power 5 Football Players,” *Arnold Ventures* (2022)
- **Assignment: Revised Proposal and Annotated Bibliography Due**
- **Assignment: Essay outline due**

November 4: One-on-one meetings with Dr. Smith – Old Civil Engineering G21

November 11: One-on-one meetings with Dr. Smith – Old Civil Engineering G21

November 18: Prepare Presentations; Writing Lab

November 22: Drafts of Final Paper Due by 11:59 PM

November 25: NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING

December 2: Final Presentations – Undergraduate Research Symposium (Location TBD); Dr. Smith returns drafts

December 9: FINAL PAPER DUE AT 12:30 PM

Course Policies

Attendance and Professionalism

Attendance for this seminar is mandatory. **Students are expected to attend all class meetings but may miss one meeting without penalty** (excluding a class where a student is scheduled to present or meet with me individually). For every absence thereafter, students will be penalized one full letter grade.

Class begins on time and tardiness will not be tolerated. If you know in advance that you are going to be late please notify me. I also expect that you will always respect your classmates and the instructor. I will not tolerate sleeping in class, texting, or using your computer for any purposes other than taking notes. Students should also check their Georgia Tech email on a regular basis, especially the day before class to ensure that they receive all announcements from the instructor.

Late assignments: The policy for late assignments is that you will need a documented health, funeral, or university sponsored excuse for turning in late assignments at full credit. Assignments turned in after a due date without an excuse will receive a drop in letter grade every two days beyond their due date.

Student-Faculty Expectations Agreement

At Georgia Tech, we believe that it is important to strive for an atmosphere of mutual respect, acknowledgement, and responsibility between faculty members and the student body. [The Student-Faculty Expectations](#) articulate some basic expectations that you can have of me and that I have of you. In the end, simple respect for knowledge, hard work, and cordial interactions will help build the environment we seek. Therefore, I encourage you to remain committed to the ideals of Georgia Tech while in this class.

I expect all students adhere to professional standards of classroom etiquette. That means students will arrive on time prepared to listen attentively, take notes, and participate in meaningful class discussions. It also means students will demonstrate respect for classmates and the instructor. Cell phones should be put away and turned on silent for the duration of class. Although I will

allow students to use laptops exclusively for notetaking, using technology for activities unrelated to class is strictly prohibited.

Academic Integrity

In this course, we will conduct ourselves as a community of scholars, recognizing that academic work requires the highest standards of academic integrity. Students are expected to follow the [Georgia Tech Honor Code](#). All assignments and written submissions must be original and properly cited. Plagiarism, cheating, or any form of academic dishonesty will result in immediate consequences as outlined in the university's academic integrity policy.

Students are prohibited from plagiarizing or cheating on written assignments. Plagiarism is defined by Webster's as "to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own; use another's production without crediting the source." That means that students are prohibited from copying the words of others and presenting them as their own. This includes submitting written work generated by artificial intelligence (AI).

Students are not allowed to use Generative AI applications (e.g., ChatGPT, OpenAI Research, Gemini) or AI Tools (e.g., Grammarly, Co-Pilot, Notebook) in this course for any reason. Using Generative AI to conduct research, prepare, draft, or complete written assignments will be considered cheating.

If I suspect any student has violated the Georgia Tech Honor Code or the rules outlined in this syllabus, I will report them to the Office of Student Integrity. **Students who cheat on assignments or plagiarize written work will receive an F on the assignment and may also fail the course.** All students are responsible for understanding and complying with Georgia Tech rules.

Core IMPACTS

This is a Core IMPACTS course that is part of the Social Sciences area.

Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas. This course will help master course content and support students' broad academic and career goals.

This course should direct students toward a broad Orienting Question: How do I understand human experiences and connections?

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcome:

- Students will effectively analyze the complexity of human behavior, and how historical, economic, political, social, or geographic relationships develop, persist, or change.

Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help students develop the following Career- Ready Competencies:

- Intercultural Competence
- Perspective-Taking
- Persuasion

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with learning needs that require special accommodation, [contact the Office of Disability Services](#) (404-894-2563) as soon as possible to make an appointment to discuss your special needs and to obtain an accommodations letter. Please also e-mail me as soon as possible to set up a time to discuss your learning needs.

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