Business History Seminar

Course Syllabus

Walter Friedman
Course Description
The Business History Seminar explores the history of firms, industries, business systems, and entrepreneurs. We will read about, and discuss, the different trajectories and interpretations of firm growth, industry development, and entrepreneurial activity from the late eighteenth century to the present. We will also analyze the integration of firms into the economic, technological, cultural, and political contexts of the time. Among the topics covered are the emergence of modern management, the rise of big business, the impact of government policies and legal frameworks on business, the transformation of industries, and the role of entrepreneurship in capitalist economies. The course provides a framework for understanding the emergence of business institutions, structures, and practices embedded in specific historical and geographical contexts. The overall aim of the course is to introduce graduate students to central issues in the history of business and of capitalism and to explore the relevance of this literature to other disciplines.

In each meeting we will discuss key literature by prominent authors in the field and explore the premises on which these works are based. We will cover some of the classic studies as well as recent research and publications.

A key component of the course is the research paper. The course provides an opportunity to develop analytical research skills through designing, researching, and writing a paper using original historical sources. Students are strongly encouraged to choose a topic relevant to their own research interests or dissertation project and will have the opportunity to work closely with the instructor during the semester on the paper.
The course is relevant for graduate students working in a range of fields, including history, economics, economic history, and business administration. Cross-registrants are welcome.

**Class 1 Course Introduction**


**Class 2 Early Merchants**


**Class 3 The Rise of Big Business**


Alfred D. Chandler, *Strategy and Structure* (1962), Chapters 1 (the Historical Setting), 2 (Du Pont), and 7 (the Spread of the Multidivisional Enterprise).


Class 4 The Evolution of Marketing


John A. Quelch and Katherine E. Jocz, “Milestones in Marketing”

Class 5 TOUR OF BAKER LIBRARY HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS


Class 6 Automobiles and Mass Production


Alfred Sloan, *My Years with General Motors*, selected chapters.


**Class 7 Telecommunications**


Tim Wu, *Master Switch: The Rise and Fall of Information Empires*, ch. 3 (Vail).


**Class 8 Credit Systems**

Rowena Olegario, *The Nation that Credit Built: A History of Lending and Borrowing in America*, unpublished manuscript.


Class 9 Taylor and other Business Analysts

Walter Friedman, “Roger W. Babson: The Rule of Past Patterns,” from The Fortune Tellers (Princeton 2013)


F. W. Taylor, Principles of Scientific Management (Free Google book)


Class 10 Entrepreneurs and Innovation


**Class 11 Family Business and Capitalism**


**Class 12 Organization Man and the Business Press**
Alan Brinkley, *The Publisher: Henry Luce and His American Century* (2011), selected chapters.


**Class 13 Summary and Review**