Math 161 Syllabus

Instructor: Prof. Wilson.
Office: Room 304, 16 Colchester Avenue.
Office hours: Monday 3:00–4:00, Tuesday 1:00–2:00, and by appointment.
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We will try to cover most of the material in chapters 1–15 (from the beginnings until a century or so past the European Renaissance), and then make a mad dash to the beginnings of calculus.

I will post readings, some supplemental material, and other information (including this syllabus) on the website. From time to time I will assign study problems based on the lectures and the reading material. I will go over the study problems in class. You will see problems like them on the quizzes.

Grading: Your grade will be based on four very short in-class quizzes and two research papers. Each quiz will count for 5% of your grade; each paper will count for 40%. The first quiz will take place approximately 3 weeks into the term and the last quiz will take place on April 23 or April 25 (all precise quiz dates are TBA). The first paper will be due on Friday, March 2, and the second paper will be due on Wednesday, May 2 (the last class meeting). Each paper must have between two and three thousand words. The first paper must be on some mathematical topic (person, mathematical creation, application of mathematics, etc.) that historically dates from before 1500 AD; the second must be on some topic dating from after 1500 AD. I will decide on ambiguous cases; therefore, if you plan to do a paper on a topic close to the cut-off date, or one that “straddles” it, you had better clear the topic with me. I will hand out 2 lists of suggested paper topics. The topics on the lists are only suggestions: do not feel bound by them. I encourage all of you to discuss your paper topics with me ahead of time. This is not simply to make sure that they are okay. Sometimes I can direct you to resources you don’t know of.

Each paper must have a minimum of 6 references. At least half of these, must be print (i.e., non-Web) sources. A print source you can access online (e.g., Maxwell’s Treatise on Electricity and Magnetism) counts as a print source, if you can give the print reference (date, publisher, etc.). No references can be from Wikipedia. I have nothing against Wikipedia: it’s great fun and it’s a great place to start your research. But you should let it guide you to other sources.

Because you are getting the paper deadlines well in advance, I will be rather hard-nosed about them. Extensions will only be granted with a note from a doctor, employer, academic advisor, dean, or other person of comparable authority (and not a parent). On the
brighter side, you may (and I encourage you to) submit your papers electronically (as email attachments sent to my office address). Permitted formats are plain text, Microsoft Word (.doc format, not .docx), and PDF. Given the problems I’ve had with Microsoft Word, I greatly prefer PDF or plain text.

I will be more lenient about missed quizzes. If you have a reasonable excuse—illness, car trouble, family emergency, “away” athletic event, etc.—I generally won’t ask for written verification of it. Just notify me ASAP, and we’ll arrange a time and place for a make-up. Similarly, if you know in advance that you’re going to miss a quiz, let me know ASAP. I might start asking for written verification of excuses if I feel that people are taking advantage of my good nature; fortunately, this almost never happens. If it does happen, and I do ask you for a note, don’t feel that you’re the bad guy: somebody else is, but the policy has to be uniform.

FAIR WARNING: If you come to a quiz feeling ill, take it, and bomb it, you will be stuck with the score.

If I am unable to come in for some reason (illness, inclement weather, etc.), I will send an email to the entire class (that’s assuming we don’t lose power at our house) and telephone the department, asking them to put up a note. If I can’t email the class, I’ll at least call the department.

Policy on learning disabilities: If you have a learning disability requiring special accommodations (such as large-print or untimed exams), the University and I will be happy to provide them. However, it is your responsibility to inform me and ACCESS (656-7753) well ahead of time if you do require such accommodations. Your request for special accommodations will be kept completely confidential.