The European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century has been described as a “revolution of the mind”—a turning point in the way Europeans imagined the world and their place within it, and an intellectual foundation of modern society, politics and culture. At the heart of the Enlightenment was a commitment to understanding the causes, and advancing the conditions, of human betterment in the here and now (as opposed to religious concern with life after death). Given this commitment, what eighteenth-century thinkers called “political economy,” and what we see in retrospect as an early form of economics, was at the center of their concern. Economic thinking existed before the eighteenth century, but the Enlightenment transformed it, and laid the groundwork for the way we continue to think and talk about the economy. This course examines some of the key elements in this transformation, including the emergence of positive attitudes towards consumption, the development of the idea that economies self-regulate via market mechanisms, and the celebration of economic liberty. Reading texts written in the eighteenth century, we will explore what was novel about Enlightenment economics—what kind of break it represented with previous ways of knowing and seeing. And by situating these works in their social, economic and political contexts we will attempt to explain why this intellectual revolution occurred when, and in the way, that it did. The course will offer students an introduction to some of the methods and perspectives of intellectual history, especially the history of economic ideas. In addition, students will develop basic research skills valuable for work in the humanities and social sciences. We will devote particular attention to strategies for developing strong argument-based writing, and the class will culminate in a research paper based on primary and secondary sources, exploring a theme related to the history of Enlightenment economics.

Books Available for Purchase:


***Most course readings will be available through the NYU Classes site.***

Course Guidelines

The goal of the course is to develop students’ skills in argument and expression, their ability to think in a sophisticated way about history, and their capacity for research, oral expression, and strong writing in the humanities and social sciences. The final grade will be based on the following components:

*Participation (20%):* Your principal responsibility for the first ten weeks of the course is to complete the reading assignments on time and to come to class prepared to discuss them. You are expected to attend every class meeting and to participate actively in the discussion of the assigned readings. In working out
the participation portion of the grade, both your attendance in class and the quality of your interventions (questions and comments) will be weighed. A student who attends regularly, but whose participation is minimal should not expect a participation grade above a B.

**Short Papers (30%)**: Students are required to write two short papers (3–4 pages), each analyzing the readings for a particular week, the first based on readings from weeks 1–5, the second on weeks 6–10. These essays should be treated as formal writing assignments, not "reaction papers," and each will count for 15% of the course grade. Papers should summarize the main themes and arguments of the assigned readings, identify connections with themes developed in previous weeks, and assess the significance of the readings for the history of the Enlightenment. Where more than one text is assigned, papers should identify major points of convergence or debate among the authors. Papers must have a title, an introduction, and a clear thesis statement which articulates the central claim of the paper. This claim must be supported with evidence in the body of the paper. Papers must be carefully proofread, and all quotations or direct references to other texts must be properly cited. Papers should be sent as MS Word attachments to john.shovlin@nyu.edu before the beginning of class on the day we discuss the readings they analyze. Extensions are not permitted. In case of illness, you will be reassigned a paper topic on a subsequent week.

**Presentation (10%)**: Students will be required to make a short presentation (7–8 minutes) on the research project they are undertaking for the course (see discussion of research paper below). Presentations will be made in class on December 1 and will count for 10% of the course grade.

**Research paper (40%)**: Students will be required to write a short research paper (12–15 pages) exploring a topic to be worked out between the student and the instructor. The paper must touch on a main theme of the course, but within these parameters the scope for individual choice of topic will be wide. Papers must be based on a combination of primary and secondary sources. A topic may be selected only if primary sources are available to adequately address it. Quality of writing, and skill in constructing arguments, in addition to quality of research and conceptualization, will count in determining the final paper grade. Students will be required to submit a proposal identifying the principal question their paper will address along with the chief primary and secondary sources they plan to use.

Students will be required to submit a complete draft of the paper in addition to the final draft. This draft will be graded and will count for half of the overall paper grade. Drafts will be peer reviewed and discussed in class over the last two weeks of the course. Paper drafts are due on the Monday preceding the class in which they will be discussed. There can be no extensions for drafts. The final draft should constitute a complete revision of the first draft, in light of the written comments, and peer review, students receive. Typically, additional research in both primary and secondary sources is necessary when revising a draft.

**Peer Paper Review**: Over the last two weeks of the course, first drafts of student papers will be discussed in class. Active involvement in the peer review process will be an important basis for determining the participation grade.

**Schedule of Assigned Readings:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Introduction</th>
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<tr>
<td>Thurs 9/8</td>
<td>No assigned reading.</td>
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Week 2  **Voltaire: An Introduction to the Enlightenment**  

Week 3  **Imagining a Secular World**  

Week 4  **Consumption: The Luxury Debate**  

Week 5  **Freedom of Trade I—International Commerce**  

Week 6  **Freedom of Trade II—Food and Markets**  
**Week 7**  
**Going Public**

Thurs 10/20  


**Week 8**  
**War and Peace**

Thurs 10/27  


**Week 9**  
**Questioning Empire**

Thurs 11/3  


**Week 10**  
**Slavery and Abolition**

Thurs 11/10  


Week 11 Conferences on Paper Drafts

Thurs 11/17 Class will not meet this week. Instead there will be mandatory individual conferences to discuss progress on paper drafts. Conferences will be scheduled during the class period but will take place in Prof. Shovlin’s office, KJCC 422.

Weeks 12 Thanksgiving Recess

Week 13 Presentations on Research in Progress

Thurs 12/1 No assigned reading—the class period will be devoted to presentation of student research for the final paper.

Class meetings on December 8 and December 15 will be devoted to peer discussion of student draft papers.

The papers of your fellow seminar students constitute your reading assignment in these weeks of the course. Paper drafts must be submitted to john.shovlin@nyu.edu as an e-mail attachment on the Monday preceding class discussion. They will be posted on the NYU Classes site for other students to access.

Final Papers Due By December 19