

BAYLOR HISTORY DEPARTMENT
Semester Electives Program

Semester elective courses represent a unique part of Baylor's history program. Whereas three year-long core courses are required during 9th, 10th, and 11th grades, juniors and seniors who do not enroll for AP history courses have the option of enrolling in a variety of electives lasting one semester. These courses enable students to develop a deeper understanding of particular subjects than is possible in the core courses. While the subject matter of electives depends entirely on the interests and expertise of their instructors and therefore varies widely from one course to the next, instructors share a range of fundamental pedagogical aims.

Teachers of electives pursue intellectual goals which often exceed the limits of any particular area and even the very discipline of history. Because students choose to take these courses, instructors can assume a healthy interest in the subject matter and, therefore, can concentrate on cultivating independence of thought, broadened perspectives, and the application of history to the lives their students are living. In pursuing these objectives, teachers consistently solicit their students' ideas and opinions, thus showing the students that their thinking matters. Instructors use the freedom facilitated by semester electives to supplement typical classroom activities with direct experience of the subject matter, including interaction with participants in historical events, discussions led by experts, and visits to houses of worship.

In elective courses, students continue developing the skill set cultivated in the History Department's core courses. With some variation from one course to the next due to the priorities of each instructor, analytical thinking, critical reading, expository writing, public speaking, careful listening, oral participation, self-organization, and technological agility are emphasized. Because their classes consist largely of seniors, teachers anticipate the demands of college by stressing the independent application of these skills both day to day and through research projects which often culminate in oral presentations. The greater independence expected in electives extends to self-discipline and time management, as students are given substantial freedom inside and outside the classroom, with the expectation that they will manage their studies appropriately.

The pedagogy of the History Department's semester-long elective courses thus entails a more mature approach to history than is possible in its core courses. While typically serving as the culmination of one's history experience at Baylor, these courses represent the beginning of the academic approach to be encountered at the college level, encouraging students to think deeply, express their ideas openly, and apply their skills independently.