



HIST 489.01E Independent Study (24303)

COURSE SYLLABUS: Fall 2025

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Professor: Dr. Cynthia Ross
Class Time: Tuesday 1:00pm – 2:00pm
Class Location: SS 104
Office Location: SS 104
Office Hours: Tuesday 2:30pm to 4:00pm,
Thursday 1:00pm to 3:00pm
and by appointment
Email Address: cynthia.ross@etamu.edu
Preferred Form of Communication: **Email**
Communication Response Time: Within 24 hours, excluding weekends

COURSE INFORMATION

Materials – Textbooks, Readings, Supplementary Readings

Core books (student-selected pool; will discuss and finalize at first meeting):

James A. Millward, *The Silk Road: A Very Short Introduction* (2013)

~Christopher I. Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present* (2009)

~Kenneth W. Harl, *Empires of the Steppes: A History of the Nomadic Tribes Who Shaped Civilization* (2023)

Robert N. Spengler III, *Fruit from the Sands: The Silk Road Origins of the Foods We Eat* (2019)

Valerie Hansen, *The Year 1000: When Explorers Connected the World—and Globalization Began* (2020)

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

Susan Whitfield, *Life Along the Silk Road* (2015)

Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (1979) [SELECTIONS]

*Mark Kurlansky, *Paper: Paging Through History* (2016)

*James C. Scott, *In Praise of Floods: The Untamed River and the Life It Brings* (2024)

*(Optional / lighter biographical angle) Laurence Bergreen, *Marco Polo: From Venice to Xanadu* (2007)

~ Instructor recommends selecting one [See schedule]

*Instructor recommends removing or reading only selections

Supplementary readings (as needed):

Short scholarly articles/chapters posted by the instructor to support the research paper topic (including nomads/agricultural states, Central Asian intermediaries, and Sogdian merchant networks if relevant).

Course Description

HIST 489.01E Independent Study (Spring 2026) is a guided, individualized research and reading course focused on the Silk Road and Afro-Eurasian connectivity. The central theme is the dynamic between nomadic peoples and agricultural states: coexistence, conflict, cooperation, trade, diplomacy, religion, culture, and environmental constraints across long time spans. The student will build a research project through structured weekly assignments and scaffolded writing steps, culminating in a polished final research paper grounded in primary and secondary sources.

Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, the student will be able to:

1. Define and apply key concepts used to analyze Silk Road exchange (e.g., connectivity, intermediaries, mobility, frontier, empire, ecology) in written work.
2. Compare and evaluate historical arguments about nomadic peoples and agricultural states using evidence from scholarly monographs.
3. Locate and curate relevant primary and secondary sources for a focused Silk Road research question, including identifying at least two viable primary-source “evidence sets.”
4. Produce a sustained research paper that advances a clear argument, situates the topic in historiography, and uses appropriate evidence and citation practice.

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Meeting Schedule

Meeting day/time: Tuesdays, 1:00pm–2:00pm

Start week: Week of Jan 12; first meeting **Tuesday, January 13, 2026**

Format: Weekly one-hour seminar meeting (discussion, guided research coaching, writing/revision planning).

Spring Break: No meeting **Tuesday, March 10, 2026.**

Course Objectives

This independent study is designed to:

Build deep content knowledge of Silk Road historiography and methods

Develop a manageable, researchable question connected to course themes

Practice sustainable upper-division reading habits

Produce a polished research paper suitable for future thesis preparation or conference-style development

Readings and Sources

Core Secondary Sources (6)

James A. Millward, *The Silk Road: A Very Short Introduction* (entire book)

Kenneth W. Harl OR Christopher I. Beckwith (student chooses ONE; entire book)

Valerie Hansen, *The Year 1000: When Explorers Connected the World—and Globalization Began* (entire book)

Robert N. Spengler III, *Fruit from the Sands: The Silk Road Origins of the Foods We Eat* (entire book)

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

Susan Whitfield, *Life Along the Silk Road* (entire book)

Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (selections only, assigned by instructor)

Primary sources:

The student will identify primary sources aligned with the research topic (digital archives and databases are acceptable and encouraged). Primary-source work is integrated through weekly “Evidence Clips” and bibliography assignments.

Student Responsibilities

Complete readings and submit weekly assignments **by Tuesday 10:00am** (so the instructor can respond during the 1:00pm meeting).

Bring a copy of readings (physical or digital) and notes to each meeting.

Maintain a working research file (notes, citations, PDFs, archive links, draft fragments).

Communicate early if schedule disruptions occur; the course is designed to be flexible

Assignments

Due **Tuesdays by 10:00am** unless otherwise noted.

1) Silk Road Field Note (450–600 words)

A prompted reflection tied to the week’s theme—focused on argument, questions, patterns, and “nomads vs. states” dynamics (not a summary). Template will be posted in D2L for copy/paste into a Word doc.

2) Evidence Clip (choose one each week)

Either:

Two primary-source leads (archive/database and what it might show), OR

One secondary-source lead and a 4–5 sentence explanation of how it helps the research question.

3) Three discussion questions

- One factual/clarifying

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- One interpretive
- One analytical tied to nomads/agricultural states or exchange systems

Research Paper (scaffolded)

A **15–20 page** research paper grounded in primary and secondary sources, Turabian/Chicago footnotes, and bibliography. Key steps:

- Working research question + scope statement
- Proposal (600–800 words)
- Annotated bibliography (initial 10 sources)
- Outline and paragraph plan
- Partial draft (6–8 pages)
- Full draft (12–15 pages)
- Final paper

Assessment

Because independent studies function best with clear, predictable grading, the course uses a point-based system:

Weekly Field Notes, Evidence Clips, Questions (10 weeks @ 10 pts)	100 pts
Research Question, Scope Statement	25 pts
Research Proposal (600–800 words)	50 pts
Annotated Bibliography (10 sources)	75 pts
Outline, Paragraph Plan	50 pts
Partial Draft (6–8 pages)	75 pts
Full Draft (12–15 pages)	75 pts
Peer-review style revision plan, updated bibliography	50 pts
Final Research Paper (15–20 pages)	350 pts
Engagement (meeting preparation, responsiveness to feedback, consistency)	75 pts

TOTAL: 1000 points

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COURSE OUTLINE / CALENDAR

Week 1 — Tue, Jan 13, 2026

What do we mean by “Silk Road”?

Read: Millward, *The Silk Road: A Very Short Introduction* — start the book (aim ~½ this week)

Meeting plan (1:00–2:00):

Course setup: goals, time reality, how we’ll keep this sustainable

Define your “big interest”: nomads vs. agrarian states (coexistence / clash / cooperation)

Discussion: what counts as a Silk Road “source” (textual vs material vs environmental evidence)

Build the semester’s working question bank (5 candidate questions)

Due by 10:00am: Weekly Assignment #1

Review preliminary syllabus and note any suggested modifications to readings/assignments

Week 2 — Tue, Jan 20, 2026

Routes, systems, and the myth of one road

Read: Millward — finish the entire book

Meeting plan:

Discussion: what Millward insists the Silk Road is *not*

Mini-lesson: turning interests into a researchable scope (time, place, and evidence)

Draft a “project lens”: political, religious, environmental, commodity, or cultural network lens

Due: Weekly Assignment #2

Scaffold due (1 page): “What I think I want to study right now” + 3 possible research questions

Week 3 — Tue, Jan 27, 2026

Nomads and states: labels that cause trouble

Read (choose track; start your chosen spine book):

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

Option A (Harl): begin *Empires of the Steppes* (aim ~100–140 pages)

Option B (Beckwith): begin *Empires of the Silk Road* (aim ~100–140 pages)

If you choose Harl, the emphasis tends to be comparative steppe empires and “how nomadic power works.”

If you choose Beckwith, the emphasis tends to be Central Eurasia as a historical engine of change with a more debate-forward “big thesis.”

Meeting plan:

Map the core problem: “nomadic” and “sedentary” as strategic categories, not identities

Discussion: what your spine author thinks historians get wrong about the steppe

Research coaching: what kinds of primary sources might exist for your time/place interest?

Due: Weekly Assignment #3

Scaffold due (½–1 page): Working scope statement (what you will NOT cover)

Week 4 — Tue, Feb 3, 2026

Coexistence and conflict: tribute, trade, raid, alliance

Read: Continue chosen spine book (aim ~100–140 pages)

Meeting plan:

Discussion: pick one relationship model (tribute, frontier markets, diplomacy, violence, intermarriage, religious networks)

Build a list of key terms to use consistently in the final paper

Research coaching: locating 2 digital archives/collections (even if you don’t pick items yet)

Due: Weekly Assignment #4

Scaffold due (1 page): Working research question, why it matters, what evidence might answer it

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

Week 5 — Tue, Feb 10, 2026

Steppe power as a political system

Read: Continue chosen spine book (aim ~100–140 pages)

Meeting plan:

Discussion: steppe governance, legitimacy, extraction, mobility, and the limits of “state”

Mini-lesson: distinguishing argument vs narrative (so the Field Notes stay analytical)

Research coaching: how to judge “good enough” sources for an independent study

Due: Weekly Assignment #5

Scaffold due: Primary-source scouting — 3 primary-source leads (collections, why each might matter)

Week 6 — Tue, Feb 17, 2026

Empires, borders, intermediaries (the people who make it work)

Read: Continue chosen spine book (aim ~100–140 pages)

Meeting plan:

Discussion: intermediaries (merchants, translators, religious specialists, diplomats)

Research coaching: what counts as a primary source in Silk Road work (text, objects, inscriptions, archaeological reports, travel accounts)

Drafting workshop: proposal structure (question, to claim direction, to evidence plan)

Due: Weekly Assignment #6

Scaffold due (draft): Research proposal draft (600–800 words)

Week 7 — Tue, Feb 24, 2026

What your spine book explains best (and what it can't)

Read: Continue chosen spine book (aim ~100–140 pages)

Meeting plan:

Discussion: strongest explanatory section of your spine book

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Identify one weakness/bias/limit and how you will compensate with other books/sources

Proposal revision coaching

Due: Weekly Assignment #7

Scaffold due (final): Research proposal (600–800 words)

Week 8 — Tue, Mar 3, 2026

Finish the spine: synthesis and research traction

Read: Finish the entire chosen spine book (Harl or Beckwith)

Meeting plan:

Spine synthesis: write your “one-sentence model” of nomads–states interaction

Build a 6-part outline template (intro, context, argument sections, conclusion)

Research coaching: dividing sources into “must use” vs “nice to have”

Due: Weekly Assignment #8

Scaffold due: Annotated Bibliography version 1.0 (10 sources)

Recommended minimum: **6 secondary and 4 primary** (or primary collections if items are still forming)

Week 9 — Tue, Mar 10, 2026

SPRING BREAK — No meeting, no submission required

Week 10 — Tue, Mar 17, 2026

Connectivity before “modern globalization”

Read: Hansen, *The Year 1000* — begin (aim ~120–160 pages)

Meeting plan:

Discussion: how Hansen defines “connection” and why that matters

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Mini-lesson: using a big synthesis book without letting it take over your project

Research coaching: turning bibliography into an evidence strategy

Due: Weekly Assignment #9

Scaffold due: Thesis-in-progress (1 sentence), 3 supporting claims (bullet list)

Week 11 — Tue, Mar 24, 2026

Globalization as stories of people, not just systems

Read: Continue Hansen (aim ~120–160 pages)

Meeting plan:

Discussion: what gets centered (and what disappears) when we narrate “globalization”

Workshop: paragraph architecture (claim > evidence > analysis > stakes)

Draft planning: decide which sections of the final paper you can write now

Due: Weekly Assignment #10

Scaffold due: Outline and Paragraph Plan (2–3 pages)

Thesis (tentative)

4–6 section headings

2–3 sentences per section: claim and evidence you plan to use

Week 12 — Tue, Mar 31, 2026

Finish Hansen + start writing substantial pages

Read: Finish the entire Hansen book

Meeting plan:

Hansen synthesis: how your project does (or doesn't) fit her connectivity frame

Writing workshop: draft your introduction strategy (hook, stakes, claim, roadmap)

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

Research coaching: source triage (what you need next, what you can stop chasing)

Due: Weekly Assignment #11

Scaffold due: Partial Draft (5–7 pages)

(Preferably: intro + one body section you can keep.)

Week 13 — Tue, Apr 7, 2026

Food, plants, and environment as Silk Road evidence (methods week)

Read: Spengler, *Fruit from the Sands* — begin (aim ~120–160 pages)

Plus (Boyce selections begin): Boyce selections (assigned excerpt, ~30–50 pages)

Meeting plan:

Discussion: what archaeobotany changes about causation and timelines

Apply to your project: where environment is doing “real work” in your argument

Religion add-on: where belief/practice might travel with people and goods

Due: Weekly Assignment #12

Scaffold due: Evidence Set Memo (1–2 pages)

What are your two main bodies of evidence?

What can each show, and what can't it show?

Week 14 — Tue, Apr 14, 2026

Exchange you can taste: daily life, movement, and power

Read: Continue Spengler (aim ~120–160 pages)

Plus (Boyce selections): Boyce selections (assigned excerpt, ~30–50 pages)

Meeting plan:

Discussion: food exchange vs political exchange—how they intersect

Workshop: integrating secondary scholarship without losing your own voice

Drafting plan: identify which section you'll write next and what sources you'll use

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Due: Weekly Assignment #13

Scaffold due: Expanded Draft (8–10 pages)

(Add one additional section beyond the Week 12 partial draft.)

Week 15 — Tue, Apr 21, 2026

Finish Spengler + begin “lives along the Silk Road” (microhistory)

Read: Finish the entire Spengler book

Begin: Whitfield, *Life Along the Silk Road* — start (aim ~½ this week)

Plus (final Boyce selections): Boyce selections (assigned excerpt, ~20–40 pages)

Meeting plan:

Synthesis: how Spengler strengthens (or complicates) your thesis

Microhistory lens: what individual lives reveal that systems narratives hide

Draft workshop: transition sentences and signposting (make the paper readable)

Due: Weekly Assignment #14

Scaffold due: Full Draft (12–15 pages)

(It can still be rough—this is the “now we have something to revise” milestone.)

Week 16 — Tue, Apr 28, 2026

Finish Whitfield + revision plan (global revision, not just edits)

Read: Finish the entire Whitfield book

Meeting plan:

Discussion: what Whitfield adds to your project that you couldn't get elsewhere

Revision workshop: global revision priorities (argument, structure, evidence flow)

Final logistics: citations, bibliography cleanup, formatting checks

Due: Weekly Assignment #15

Scaffold due: Revision Plan (1–2 pages) and Updated Annotated Bibliography v2.0

Top 3 revisions: problem > fix > what success looks like

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

Finals Week — Tue, May 5, 2026

[We can reschedule the time around the Final Exam Schedule block, if needed]

Final conversation + next steps

Meeting plan:

Short oral defense/conversation about your argument and evidence

What you learned about research, scope, and historical method

What you'd do next with one more month

Due (final):

Final Research Paper

Final Reflection (1 page)

What changed in your thinking about the Silk Road?

What changed in how you “do” history (sources, scope, causation)?

Your next research question?

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

LMS

All course sections offered by East Texas A&M University have a corresponding course shell in the myLeo Online Learning Management System (LMS). Below are technical requirements

LMS Requirements:

<https://community.brightspace.com/s/article/Brightspace-Platform-Requirements>

LMS Browser Support:

https://documentation.brightspace.com/EN/brightspace/requirements/all/browser_support.htm

YouSeeU Virtual Classroom Requirements:

<https://support.youseeu.com/hc/en-us/articles/115007031107-Basic-System-Requirements>

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ACCESS AND NAVIGATION

You will need your campus-wide ID (CWID) and password to log into the course. If you do not know your CWID or have forgotten your password, contact the Center for IT Excellence (CITE) at 903.468.6000 or helpdesk@etamu.edu.

Note: Personal computer and internet connection problems do not excuse the requirement to complete all course work in a timely and satisfactory manner. Each student needs to have a backup method to deal with these inevitable problems. These methods might include the availability of a backup PC at home or work, the temporary use of a computer at a friend's home, the local library, office service companies, Starbucks, a ETAMU loaner laptop, etc.

COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT

If you have any questions or are having difficulties with the course material, please contact your Instructor.

Technical Support

If you are having technical difficulty with any part of Brightspace, please contact Brightspace Technical Support at 1-877-325-7778. Other support options can be found here:

<https://community.brightspace.com/support/s/contactsupport>

Interaction with Instructor Statement:

Students are encouraged to email the professor with questions, concerns, or comments. Students must provide a valid return email address for replies. Unless otherwise announced, students can expect replies between 8:00am and 5:00pm during the week. Response times are not guaranteed over the weekend.

When sending an email always do the following:

- 1) Use a subject line. This tells me what the topic is and prevents your message from ending up in my junk mail.
- 2) Include your class and section (or class time). I need to know exactly which of my courses you are in. This course is Hist 489.01E.
- 3) Use clear, formal English in your emails. Before sending ask yourself, "Would I send this email to my boss?" If not, revise it for professionalism.
- 3) End the email with your first and last name, that is "sign" your message. I need to know who you are. If you go by a name that is different than the roster, please let me know.

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COURSE AND UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES/POLICIES

All writing assignments should be in standard format – Times New Roman, 12-point font, one-inch margins, double-spaced.

Standard paragraphs are 6 to 8 sentences; short paragraphs are 4 to 6 sentences.

Turabian style (Chicago style) with full author-title footnotes and bibliography page is required of all history majors.

Late Assignments:

Any late work will be accepted at the discretion of the advisor and must include documentation.

Extra Credit:

None

Student Conduct:

All students enrolled at the university shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment. (See current Student Guidebook)

Academic Honesty:

In all courses, I expect that all work that you do and turn in is your own. It is the policy of the University, the History Department, and myself that no form of plagiarism, cheating, collusion, or any other form of academic dishonesty will be tolerated. Plagiarism is defined as deliberately taking the words or ideas of someone else and passing them off as your own. Cheating is obtaining unauthorized assistance on any assignment. Collusion is the selling of academic products with the intention that they be submitted to satisfy an academic requirement. Students are expected to uphold and support the highest academic standards at all times.

It is fine to use other people's words and ideas as long as they receive credit in citations. If you are unsure about the precise definition of plagiarism and/or think you may have committed this form of academic dishonesty, see the instructor or visit the Online Writing Lab before you turn in the assignment.

If a student commits academic dishonesty on any part of an assignment, the assignment will receive a zero with no possibility for make-up. Additionally, any incidents of academic dishonesty may be reported to the Office of the Provost by the Professor according to university policy 13.99.99.R0.03 Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty.

AI Use in Course

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

East Texas A&M University acknowledges that there may be legitimate uses of Artificial Intelligence, ChatBots, or other software that has the capacity to generate text, or suggest replacements for text beyond individual words, as determined by the instructor of the course. Any use of such software must be documented. Any undocumented use of such software constitutes an instance of academic dishonesty (plagiarism). Individual instructors may disallow entirely the use of such software for individual assignments or for the entire course. Students should be aware of such requirements and follow their instructor's guidelines. If no instructions are provided the student should assume that the use of such software is disallowed. In any case, students are fully responsible for the content of any assignment they submit, regardless of whether they used an AI, in any way. This specifically includes cases in which the AI plagiarized another text or misrepresented sources.

Very limited AI use is allowed in this course. Students may use AI in certain areas of historical research, outlined in a separate document. Students should not use any text generated by AI in any graded assignments. All use of AI must be documented and submitted with the final paper. This applies to this course only (Hist 489.01E).

Students should be aware of the requirements in all their classes and follow their instructors' guidelines. If no instructions are provided the student should assume that the use of such software is disallowed. In any case, students are fully responsible for the content of any assignment they submit, regardless of whether they used an AI, in any way. This specifically includes cases in which the AI plagiarized another text or misrepresented sources.

13.99.99.R0.03 Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty

13.99.99.R0.10 Graduate Student Academic Dishonesty

Writing Lab:

The [ETAMU Online Writing Lab](#) is a valuable service free to any student. They can help you get started on a paper, help with drafts, and answer specific questions about citation style, grammar, and spelling. While they will not write the paper for you, they are there to give feedback and guidance.

Students with Disabilities Information:

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact:

Student Disability Resources & Services
East Texas A&M University
Waters Library, Room 162
Phone (903) 886-5150 or (903) 886-5835
Fax (903) 468-8148

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StudentDisabilityServices@etamu.edu

Nondiscrimination Notice:

ETAMU will comply in the classroom, and in online courses, with all federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination and related retaliation on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age, genetic information or veteran status. Further, an environment free from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression will be maintained.

Campus Concealed Carry Statement:

Campus Concealed Carry - Texas Senate Bill - 11 (Government Code 411.2031, et al.) authorizes the carrying of a concealed handgun in East Texas A&M University buildings only by persons who have been issued and are in possession of a Texas License to Carry a Handgun. Qualified law enforcement officers or those who are otherwise authorized to carry a concealed handgun in the State of Texas are also permitted to do so. Pursuant to Penal Code (PC) 46.035 and ETAMU Rule 34.06.02.R1, license holders may not carry a concealed handgun in restricted locations. For a list of locations, please refer to (<http://www.etamu.edu/aboutUs/policiesProceduresStandardsStatements/rulesProcedures/34SafetyOfEmployeesAndStudents/34.06.02.R1.pdf>) and/or consult your event organizer). Pursuant to PC 46.035, the open carrying of handguns is prohibited on all A&M-Commerce campuses. Report violations to the University Police Department at 903-886-5868 or 9-1-1.

Statement on Student Grievances:

Students who have questions or concerns about the Instructor's course policies or the conduct either of the Instructor or a classmate should first consult with the Instructor. In the event of a lack of resolution or satisfaction on the matter, the student may bring their concerns to the head of the History Department, Sharon Kowalsky (Sharon.Kowalsky@etamu.edu). If this does not result in a satisfactory conclusion to the matter, students may bring the issue to the attention of the Associate Dean of Students per procedures outlined on pp. 15-19 of the Student Guide Book.

ETAMU Supports Students' Mental Health:

The Counseling Center at ETAMU, located in the Halladay Building, Room 203, offers counseling services, educational programming, and connection to community resources for students. Students have 24/7 access to the Counseling Center's crisis assessment services by calling 903-886-5145. For more information regarding Counseling Center events and confidential services, please visit www.etamu.edu/counsel.

Syllabus Change Policy:

The syllabus/schedule are subject to change.

The syllabus is a guide. Circumstances and events may make it necessary for the professor to modify the syllabus during the semester. Any changes made to the syllabus will be announced as soon as possible.

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