

**The University of Western Ontario
Department of History
2814G: The History of Aviation
Winter 2026**

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Office hours: Friday, 11:30-12:30, in Lawson Hall 1221

This is a **draft** outline. Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace for a final version.

Course Description

This course explores the idea of flight. When people began to experiment with flight they were seen as visionaries but also as somewhat eccentric. To those who pursued such experiments, balloons and then flying machines represented great scientific and technological advances as well as the hope that technology might bring the world together in peace. But the early promise of flight would be shattered when airplanes were shown to be efficient weapons in war, too. The early dreams of flight persisted into the middle decades of the twentieth century, which helped to propel the creation of a commercial aviation industry. The decades following the Second World War were a so-called golden age of aviation, a time when flight became more comfortable, safer, and accessible to a new generation of people with both the means and the desire to travel as a form of leisure. The deregulation of the skies beginning in the seventies, however, would ultimately spell the end of the carriers that had done so much to sell the public on the romance of flight. Flying would become more accessible to the masses but it would also become simply one among many other forms of transportation. This course focuses on the key events and personalities in the history of aviation, including Orville and Wilbur Wright and Charles Lindbergh. We will also consider how some literary figures, including H.G. Wells and Tom Wolfe, have understood flight. As well, we will trace the development of the commercial aviation industry, including the rise of such companies as Pan-Am, TWA, Canadian Airways, and Trans Canada Airlines. This course, in the end, is concerned with the idea of flight in the modern western imagination.

In this course students will—in addition to learning the broad outline of the history of aviation—sharpen their ability to read and think critically, develop their analytical skills, and learn to organize and present their thoughts in the form of an examination and two short essays.

Antirequisite: History 2215F/G

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Methods of Evaluation

Midterm Examination (Feb. 6)	30%
First Short Essay (due Mar. 6)	35%
Second Short Essay (due Mar. 27)	35%

The expectation will be that students attend the lectures and complete all of the weekly readings. In addition, students will write a **midterm examination** in class on **February 6**. Students will also write **two short essays**; the first will be due on **March 6** and the second will be due on **Mar. 27**. Each short essay will be five pages in length and will be written in response to a question that will be made available to you in advance of the submission deadlines. All of the material that students will need to write the two short essays will be found in the course readings and slides. No outside research will be expected. These two short essays are to be typed, double-spaced, well-written, provide sound analysis, draw upon the appropriate course material, follow proper scholarly conventions (including citation style and bibliography) and include a cover page. The cover page and bibliography will not count toward the length requirement. You will upload copies of your essays to the course web page on owl, where they may be subject to turnitin analysis. Essays submitted after the due dates will be subject to a penalty of five percent the first day and one percent for every day thereafter (including weekends).

A note on academic integrity: You may not make any use of generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, in this course. Any use of such tools for assignments in this course may be considered a form of academic misconduct. It is expected that students produce work that is written using their own words and that relies on research that they have conducted themselves. Submitting work that is not your own is considered dishonest. It is thus not permitted to copy other peoples' work, copy from published or unpublished texts, or to present artificially generated text (i.e. ChatGPT or other AI content generators) as your own. Nor would it permitted to submit an essay or a response to an exam question using ChatGPT or any other AI content generator even if you acknowledge that you have done so with proper source attribution.

Please note: In this course, your written assignments have a 3-day grace period. This means that you can submit either of these assignments up to 3 days past the posted deadline without penalty. As such, requests for academic consideration without supporting documentation will be denied. No assignments will be accepted after the last day of classes. Any accommodation for the midterm examination will require supporting documentation.

Make-up tests, midterms, and exams can only be approved by Academic Advising. Please see https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html for department procedures and requirements involving make-up tests and exams.

Course Materials

The following books have been ordered and will be available at the university bookstore (prices are included in parentheses below; second-hand or other editions of these books are fine). All other readings will be made available on the course page on owl or on reserve at the Weldon Library. All course readings are intended to supplement the lectures and to serve as the source material for the two short essays and the midterm examination.

- Lawrence Goldstone. *Birdmen: The Wright Brothers, Glenn Curtiss, and the Battle to Control the Skies*. New York: Ballantine, 2015. (\$21.00)
- Thomas Kessner. *The Flight of the Century: Charles Lindbergh and the Rise of American Aviation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. (\$37.75)
- Brendan I. Koerner. *The Skies Belong to Us: Love and Terror in the Golden Age of Hijacking*. New York: Crown, 2014. (\$19.00)

Course Schedule and Readings

Jan. 9: Introduction

Jan. 16: The Idea of Flight

- Laurence Goldstein, *The Flying Machine and Modern Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 14-62.

Jan. 23: Balloons

- Paul Keen, "The 'Balloomania': Science and Spectacle in 1780s England," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 39, no. 4 (Summer 2006), 507-535.
- John Robbins, "Up in the Air: Balloomania and Scientific Performance," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 48, no. 4 (Summer 2015), 521-538.
- Claire Brant, "The Progress of Knowledge in the Regions of Air?: Divisions and Disciplines in Early Ballooning," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 45, no. 1 (Fall 2011), 71-86.

Jan. 30: The Pioneers

- Lawrence Goldstone, *Birdmen: The Wright Brothers, Glenn Curtiss, and the Battle to Control the Skies* (New York: Ballantine, 2015).
- Joseph J. Corn, *The Winged Gospel: America's Romance with Aviation, 1900-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 3-70.

Feb. 6: Midterm Examination

Feb. 13: The Age of Lindbergh

- John W. Ward, "The Meaning of Lindbergh's Flight," *American Quarterly* (Spring 1958): 3-16.
- Augustus Post, "Columbus of the Air," *North American Review* (Sept-Oct, 1927): 353-364.
- Laurence Goldstein, *The Flying Machine and Modern Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 97-109.
- Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1989), 241-274.
- Thomas Kessner, *The Flight of the Century: Charles Lindbergh and the Rise of American Aviation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Feb. 20: Reading Week

Feb. 27: The Bush Pilot

- Jonathan F. Vance, *High Flight: Aviation and the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: Penguin, 2002), 133-158.
- Shirley Render, *Double Cross: The Inside Story of James A. Richardson and Canadian Airways* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1999), 21-67.

Mar. 6: Commercial Aviation in Canada

- Peter Pigott, *Wingwalkers: A History of Canadian Airlines International* (Madeira Park, B.C.: Harbour Pub., 2003), 187-231.

Mar. 13: Commercial Aviation in the United States

- Jenifer Van Vleck, *Empire of the Air: Aviation and the American Ascendancy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 89-130, 239-272.

Mar. 20: Paradoxes

- Brendan I. Koerner, *The Skies Belong to Us: Love and Terror in the Golden Age of Hijacking* (New York: Crown, 2014).
- Jenifer Van Vleck, *Empire of the Air: Aviation and the American Ascendancy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 272-280.
- Charles Lindbergh, "A Letter from Lindbergh," *Life* (July 4, 1969).
- Tom Wolfe, *The Right Stuff* (New York: Picador, 1979), 15-101, 141-168, 283-288.

Mar. 27: Conclusion**Additional Statement**

Please review the Department of History's shared policies and statements for all undergraduate courses at: https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html for important information regarding accessibility options, make-up exams, medical accommodations, health and wellness, academic integrity, plagiarism, and more.