Introduction
This course employs an innovative approach to university education called “Reacting to the Past.” “Reacting” courses consist of elaborate games set in the past, in which students are assigned and assume roles informed by real historical events and texts. In this class, you will learn about the past—specifically the United States’ founding moment—by reenacting the Constitutional Convention. In the process, you will learn to construct arguments from historical texts and then support your positions through reasoned, sometimes impassioned, speech and writing. As you immerse yourself as an actor or agent in an unfolding historical drama, you will become deeply engaged, both intellectually and emotionally, with the subject matter. I will act as the “gamemaster,” determining your roles, preparing you to play, evaluating (grading) your work, and occasionally intervening to advance the game as it develops. The immediate object is to win, of course, but what “winning” looks like will vary from player to player . . . and because history is filled with contingencies the result of our Convention might vary from what the Framers actually produced in 1787.

Our game is set in a critical moment in the history of the early republic, in the steamy city of Philadelphia in the summer of 1787. Some fifty-five delegates representing twelve of the thirteen new American states that had recently achieved their independence gathered to reform—or perhaps to completely remake—the government of the United States. The delegates were knowledgeable, experienced, savvy, and opinionated. Their views varied on
numerous points, though all were committed to the establishment of a more effective, “republican” government for the country. But the form such a government would take was unclear. The prestigious group deliberated in secret and, in September 1787, ultimately produced the United States Constitution, which was ratified by the requisite number of states in 1788. The first federal government emerged, then, in 1789, with George Washington elected as the nation’s first president. The Constitution remains the basic charter of government and the guarantor of rights in the United States today, though it has been amended and (by necessity) been the subject of interpretation since the 1780s. Your job is not to reproduce that historic document but to reproduce the process of its creation. Perhaps you can improve on it! But as individual delegates, each of you must embody the values, principles, circumstances or experiences inherent in your particular role—as one of the “Founding Fathers.” That’s the challenge.

The first three weeks of the course will set up our game, providing background and context on the American Revolution and the so-called “Critical Period” of the early American republic, roughly from 1776 to 1787. By the end of week three, you will each be assigned a role in the game, and in week 4 the Convention will begin. Our game—the Convention—will last about 6 weeks. The final week of the course will be devoted to postmortem discussions, covering both what actually happened in the Constitutional Convention of 1787 and our assessment of the game we played.

Objectives
This course is designed to count toward the social science component of the University of Oregon’s General Education requirements. In it, you will learn how to analyze complicated texts and evaluate primary sources from a number of perspectives, developing your ideas and understanding through spoken and written assignments. In this way you will acquire familiarity with the central methods and techniques used by historians, political theorists, and other social scientists who strive to answer big questions such as:

• What is a nation?
• How should nations be governed? What are the greatest threats they face and how may they be best preserved?
• What is a “republic”? What do we mean by “democracy”?
• What do we mean by “liberty”? What are “rights” and how do we preserve or promote them?
• How do we balance liberty and security?

By re-enacting one of history’s great turning points, you will also learn to weigh the role of individual decisions versus large-scale social forces as factors determining the course of human events.

Course Reading
The readings for this class are all free and on-line, via the Course Blackboard site and its links. Student may wish to buy a basic history of the Constitutional Convention, but this is not a requirement. There is plenty to read in the course already. In addition, you need not (and should not) read (or reread) the U.S. Constitution before we commence the game. Historical study requires leaps of imagination; ironically, sometimes we have to momentarily forget how things turned out in order to understand how significant events occurred.

Both Madison and Farrand are on reserve, and both are available on-line:
Madison:  
[http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/debcont.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/debcont.asp)
Farrand:  
or  
or  
[http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwfr.html](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwfr.html)

**Workload**

Note that there is a lot of reading in the first part of this course. Then it tapers off as preparation for the game begins. Don’t be alarmed by the heavy workload at the beginning. The point of having so many readings early is to expose you to the complexity of factors you’ll be considering as you haggle over the political future of the United States. Nor should you be fooled by the absence of reading assignments in the weeks when the game is being played. During this time, you will be frantically caucusing with other members of your faction (both online and in person), drafting speeches and writing assignments using arguments derived from course texts, rebutting and co-opting your fellow students’ own speeches and writings, and repeatedly delving back into the course material to fashion new arguments and develop an ever deeper understanding of the issues that ultimately determined the fate of American government and nationhood. Many students become so immersed in their roles that they devote extra time to the course over and above the formal requirements. Don’t hesitate to get involved in this way—it’s part of what “Reacting” is all about—but keep your other courses in mind and don’t let other obligations fall by the wayside!

**Grades and Assignments**

The breakdown of graded assignments is as follows:

- Two quizzes each worth 10 percent = 20 percent total
- Papers, varying number and length, depending on your role, but equivalent in terms of workload = 45 percent total
- Class participation, worth 35 percent

Quiz dates are listed below; due dates for papers vary according to your character. There is no final exam.

The quizzes test your understanding of the background history that we will be studying during the first three weeks of the game; they will be objective in format, with multiple choice and/or short answer questions. Papers will be due during the game itself. Because different players have different roles in the game, their papers will vary (in number, format, and length). Nonetheless, the workload will be the same for all students. In your particular role description, I will clearly specify your writing requirements.
A short, final paper will be a postmortem exercise. In it, you should explain to me why you played your role the way you did and how you went about researching and preparing for it. You should also explain how you might have played your role differently and where you feel you deviated, both from the role as dictated by the game and from the actual historical figure(s) on whom your role was based.

Again, each of you will receive a sheet describing your role and “victory objectives” by the end of week three. The class participation component of your grade is based on how successfully you play your assigned role, as well as how faithfully you do so. Do not be tempted into being untrue to your character purely to advance your victory objectives, or to avoid a calamitous end to the game. It will cost you if you do so.

In determining your class participation grade, I will pay close attention to a number of factors: the quality and quantity of your public statements during discussions, debates, and faction meetings; your ability to make alliances within and between factions on the basis of shared political aspirations; and the depth of your engagement with course texts, including not only those pertaining directly to your character but also those that address wider issues in the history of the early American republic. Lastly, you may be rewarded for winning the game and achieving your prescribed victory objectives, but this is a relatively small component of the participation grade since the game might, to some extent, tend toward certain outcomes.

As a practical matter I will maintain a log with a record of each student’s participation (that is mostly what I will be doing during the game: watching and noting both the frequency and quality of your play). I will also keep track of what students are doing outside of class in preparation for the game. Because I will be in frequent communication with game players, I should have a good idea of what different individuals and different factions are doing and thinking about doing.

Class attendance is required: the game simply will not function in your absence. You will not be able to properly play your role without attending the pre-game sessions. Missing two sessions of the game itself without a valid excuse will result in your failure of the course. Reading assignments on the schedule below should be completed before the relevant class.

Schedule
Week 1: Set-Up, The American Revolution and Its Aftermath
September 27: Introduction
September 29: Revolution and Revolutionary Settlement; lecture/discussion.

Week 2: Set-Up, united states of America
October 4: The Confederation and the States; discussion.
October 6: Republicanism and American political theory: Quiz 1; discussion.

Week 3: Set-Up, the Constitutional Convention
October 11: Toward the Convention: Quiz 2; discussion of supplementary texts.
October 13: Receive roles, begin individualized game preparation, meet in factions.
   Assignment: study your role description carefully, connect with likeminded delegates, and prepare for the Convention.

Week 4: Virginia Plan
October 18 & 20: Structure of Congress (bicameralism); House of Representatives (mode of election, term of office, mode of pay); Senate (mode of election, term of office, mode of pay, ineligibilities); Legislative Powers (enumeration, negative).

Week 5: Virginia Plan
October 25 & 27: Presidency (number, mode of election, term of office, reelection, impeachment, veto power, appointment power, council of revision, council of advisors); Judiciary (appointment, inferior tribunals, judicial review).

Week 6: New Jersey Plan / Great Compromise
November 1: New Jersey Plan (small republics vs. large republics, republican representation, standing armies).
November 3: Great Compromise (proportional representation for both houses, Pinckney plan, Sherman plan).

Week 7: Committee on Detail and Postponed Matters
November 8 & 10: Election of president; slavery (slave trading, import tax, representation, taxation, fugitive slave clause, periodic census).

Week 8 Committee on Detail and Postponed Matters
November 15 & 17: Commerce (export tax, navigation acts); western states; amendments, ratification.

Week 9: Committee of Style and Arrangement
November 22: Debate, Revision, Final Vote
November 24: Thanksgiving Holiday

Week 10: Post-Mortem
November 29 & December 1: Assessing the Convention and the game.
On the erection of the Eleventh Pillar of the great National Dome, our legislature met secretly to deliberate on our dear country.

The Federal Edifice. ELEVEN STAKES, in quick procession rise. ELEVEN COLUMNS, rise our warlike men. See, on the whole, shall fulfill the harmonious Dome. Columba's head—our freedom's hallowed home, Here shall the ARTS in glorious splendor shine. And AGRICULTURE give her duties divine. COMMERCE self-glorious as more than gold. And this new world, teach WISDOM to the wise. RELIGION here shall fix her blissful shade. Array'd in splendor, like imperial GOD. JUSTICE and LAW shall render PEACE maintain. And the SATURNIN AGE return again.

Boston, Saturday, August 2. I saw a lively scene on the street, the wheel of the carriage concealed. Some of the flags were well.