In this course, students will become immersed in the two crucial moments of the Founding of America: making a Revolution and framing a Constitution. We will do this by playing two “Reacting to the Past” games. The first is “Patriots, Loyalists, and Revolution in New York City, 1775-1776.” The second is “America’s Founding: The Constitutional Convention.”

About “Reacting to the Past”:

In most classes students learn by receiving ideas and information from instructors and texts, or they discuss such materials in seminars. “Reacting to the Past” courses employ a different pedagogy. Students learn by taking on roles, informed by classic texts, in elaborate games set in the past; they learn skills—speaking, writing, critical thinking, problem solving, leadership, and teamwork—in order to prevail in difficult and complicated situations. That is because Reacting roles, unlike those in a play, do not have a fixed script and outcome. While students will be obliged to adhere to the philosophical and intellectual beliefs of the historical figures they have been assigned to play, they must devise their own means of expressing those ideas persuasively, in papers, speeches or other public presentations; and students must also pursue a course of action they think will help them win the game. There are several reacting games; in this course, we will play two. (For more information about reacting, see http://reacting.barnard.edu).

Course Requirements:

1. It is vital that you participate in this course both in the sessions devoted to preparation and during the games (in fact, it’s hard to avoid participating in the games—you will want to participate). Your participation will be evaluated in three ways: (1) your participation in non-game sessions devoted to discussion of documents and other readings; (2) your participation in the games themselves, according to how successful you are in playing the role you are assigned; (3) attendance. Participation will be worth 25% of your grade.
2. Written assignments within the games. Some of these assignments will take the form of written versions of speeches you will give; other assignments may involve the creation of newspapers, the writing of pamphlets or petitions, or keeping a diary. These assignments will be worth 50% of your grade. For assignments that involve oral presentation during the games, the quality of the presentation will be part the evaluation of the written assignment (as opposed to considering the presentation quality as a part of participation).

3. Two other written assignments: (1) a two-three page paper reflecting on your experience playing the games; (2) a three-page book review on an aspect of the “Founding of America” chosen from a list to be provided (I strongly suggest you choose your book before the beginning of week 6 and begin reading it soon thereafter with the goal of finishing it by the end of the week 9). These assignments will be worth 25% of your grade and will be due on Friday, June 13.

4. Finally, a note on victory: Roles in Reacting games have victory objectives and players can either win or lose the game depending on a variety of factors including success in executing particular tasks, ability to persuade others to join with them, and chance. Some instructors teaching Reacting games factor victory and defeat into students’ grade for the course. I have chosen not to do this. Victory is its own reward (and defeat its own misery).

Readings:

1. Each game has a Gamebook, which includes historical overviews, primary sources, and instructions for the game. The Gamebook for the first game, Patriots, Loyalists, and Revolution in New York City, 1775-1776 (second edition), is available in the Duckstore. The Gamebook for the second game, America’s Founding: The Constitutional Convention, 1787, is not yet published; each student will be furnished with a hard copy courtesy of the professor.

2. All students are required to read an excerpt from Barnet Schecter, The Battle for New York. This will be made available to you through Blackboard.

3. Depending on your roles in the games, you will be required to read additional primary and secondary sources. There are also many opportunities for optional readings for those who wish to play the games with the greatest possible knowledge.

Learning Objectives:

1. Understand the social and political processes that led to the American Revolution and the creation of the U.S. Constitution.

2. Understand social and political divisions in the era of the American Revolution and Constitution.

3. Develop an awareness of the historical contingencies involved in momentous historical events like the American Revolution and Constitution.
4. Develop skills of interpreting and using primary historical texts by using these texts to prepare speeches, pamphlets, etc., and in oral debate.

5. Develop skills of placing secondary historical texts in historiographical context.

6. Develop skills of oral presentation and argumentation through speaking and debating.

**Schedule:**

**Week 1**
3/30: Introduction to Reacting to the Past/introduction to the New York game
4/1: Preparation for New York game
   Reading: New York Gamebook, pp. 1-131
   Note: roles assigned between 4/3 and 4/5

**Week 2**
4/6: Prep for New York game—continued
   Review New York Gamebook, pp. 14-17, 65-76
   In-class quiz
   Faction meetings
4/8: New York session 1 (April 1775)

**Week 3**
4/15: New York session 3 (August-December 1775)

**Week 4**
4/20: New York session 4 (August-December 1775)

**Week 5**
4/27: New York session 6 (July 1776)
4/29: Post-mortem

**Week 6**
5/4: Prep for Con Con
   Reading: Con Con Gamebook, pp. 1-26, 54-92
5/6: Prep for Con Con—continued
   Reading: Con Con Gamebook, pp. 27-53, 93-110
Week 7
5/11: Con Con session 1 (Virginia Plan 1)
5/13: Con Con session 2 (Virginia Plan 2)

Week 8
5/18: Con Con session 3 (New Jersey Plan)
5/20: Con Con session 4 (Great Compromise)

Week 9
5/25  Memorial Day holiday
5/27: Con Con session 5 (New issues 1)

Week 10
6/1: Con Con session 6 (New issues 2)
6/3: Con Con session 7  (Committee of Style and Arrangement)

Exam Week
6/8 (2:45-4:45): Con Con session 8 (Committee of Style and Arrangement—continued)
Postmortem