

History 395
History of the Appalachian Trail
(ver. 1.2)

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Introduction: In this course, we will examine the history the Appalachian Trail, America's oldest multi-state long distance hiking trail. From Springer Mountain in Georgia to Mount Katahdin in Maine, the AT currently spans 2,190 miles and passes through 14 states. Those who hike the entire length of the trail experience 464,500 feet of elevation gain and loss (that's a lot of hills) and each year the trail is visited by more than 3 million people, only a tiny fraction of whom attempt to hike it from end to end. The trail has a rich and sometimes controversial history dating back into the 1920s and it is this history that will be our primary concern.

This course also serves as an introduction to the methods of digital public history. A relatively new field, digital public history uses digital media to present historical topics to a general audience rather than to just a small community of scholars. No IT skills are required to be successful in this course, however, you will learn a few during the semester. You will also complete a final digital public history project that I hope you will be proud of and can show to friends, family, and future employers.

Course Structure: All semester long we are going to be cycling between in-class and out of class activities. The in-class activities include a mix of traditional lecture, group discussion, and the planning and execution of the final projects. The out of class activities will include research in various archival collections, work as a group on the public display of our final efforts, and spending time on the AT. I have planned two formal (optional) trips to the Trail as part of the course, but as an active volunteer for the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, I'm out on the trail a lot throughout the fall, so there will be some less formal, i.e., ad hoc hiking opportunities as well. None of the hikes is mandatory, but all are encouraged.

My expectations of you: This course offers you a chance to do something interesting, possibly exciting, and most of all, public. Because we will be making our work public, I expect that you will be a consistent participant in class – attendance, discussing, etc. – that you will be respectful of others, and that you will take advantage of the opportunity this course gives you to do something new and different. Students who have taken one of my courses before know that I place a very high premium on students deciding how to do their own work, but the trade off is that I'm not going to spoon feed you solutions. You have to think. You have to work. And you need to bring your "A" game most of the time (no one can bring it every day).

Your expectations of me: You should to expect me to bring my "A" game almost every day, to challenge you intellectually, to show respect for you as a student and a human, to have created a course where you can learn some interesting things and produce work that you will be proud to show to others.

Assignments

In addition to completing all the assigned readings in a timely manner and coming to class ready to discuss the topic of the day, you will be expected to complete the following assignments:

Writing – 2 short papers

Project work (yours) – 10 database entries, one online exhibit (see Appendix A)

Project work (ours) – help with the creation of the public project (Appendix B)

Grading

Grades in this course will be allocated according to the following scheme:

Class participation	20%
Short papers	30%
Final project (yours)	35%
Final project (ours)	15% -- Based on your contributions to the final project.

Books to Purchase

I have selected four books for the course. As I drafted this syllabus in May 2016, they could be purchased new online for \$75 and used for \$41. I mention this pricing so that you can comparison shop as you get ready for the semester.

- Bill Bryson, *A Walk in the Woods* (2006)
- Sara Gregg, *Managing the Mountains: Land Use Planning, The New Deal, and the Creation of a Federal Landscape in Appalachia* (2010)
- Sarah Mittlefehldt, *Tangled Roots: The Appalachian Trail and American Environmental Politics* (2013)
- Ben Montgomery, *Grandma Gatewood's Walk* (2016)

There will be some other readings, but these will all be available for free online.

Essays

In the first half of the semester you will write two short, i.e., 3-5 page, papers that give you a chance to dig a little deeper into the topics we will have been discussing in class. For each paper you can rely heavily on the assigned readings, but I will expect you to also find at least a couple of additional sources outside of those I've assigned – preferably primary/original sources. I'll go over the topics and my expectations for each paper in more detail in class, but in general the paper topics will be under the following general headings:

Paper 1 – A focus on the “policy” side of the history of the Trail, including such things as federal land use practices, the role of the various volunteer clubs in acquiring access rights and later ownership of land along the route of the trail, etc. Much of the history of the AT is about who has the right to the land that encompasses the Trail and so we'll need to step back a bit from the readings and think more critically about these issues. Due October 10.

Paper 2 – A focus on the “people” side of the history of the Trail, including such things as the people removed from their land to make way for the Trail in various parks along the

Trail's route, the key figures in the building and preservation of the Trail, and the hikers themselves, whether casual users (day or weekend hikers) or the thru hikers. As important as policy is to the history of the Trail, the history of the AT is also a history of its people. Due October 28.

Course Policies (please read them all)

ADA: Any student who requires special arrangements in order to meet course requirements should contact me to make necessary accommodations (before week two of the semester please). Students should present appropriate verification from the [Disability Resource Center](#).

Medical and Other Issues: Every semester someone is forced to miss an assignment either as the result of an illness or a family emergency. If you find yourself in this situation, fairness to all students in the class requires the proper documentation, without which your excuses will not be accepted. If you need to know more about this process consult me as soon as the emergency is taken care of.

Also, if you are taking part in either (or both) of the optional hikes, I'll need to know if you have any medical conditions or allergies (bees, food, etc.) that I need to be aware of.

Plagiarism: I have every expectation that you will do your own work. If I have reason to believe that you are plagiarizing another's work, we will discuss my concerns. If your explanations don't satisfy me, I'll turn the whole matter over to the university honor committee for adjudication. In addition to my own high expectations when it comes to academic honesty, the university also expects students to demonstrate a high code of personal honor when it comes to academic work. Please read the [George Mason University Honor Code](#). If you have any questions about what is expected of you in this regard. Penalties for academic dishonesty are severe, including, but not limited to failing the assignment, failing the course, many hours of community service, suspension or even expulsion from the university.

Communication: In general, the best way to get hold of me is by email; I will usually respond within one business day. Please be aware that I often don't check email in the evening or on weekends and I spend a lot of time off the grid (in places with no connectivity), so if I don't respond same day, don't worry. You can also tweet me any time at [@EdwiredMills](#), or find me on Instagram at tkelly7029. I will usually contact you by email (gmu email account only if it involves a grade), and I too will try not to expect a response sooner than one business day. I'll give you my cell number in class (we don't have office phones any longer in the History Department) and you should feel free to call me or text me any time between 9:00 am and 8:00 pm. I get up crazy early, so I turn my phone off at 8:00 every night. If you text me, which is fine, be sure to identify yourself, because you won't be in my contact directory and I might wonder just who you are. Also, privacy rules and laws dictate that I cannot send you any grade related information over text.

Enrollment Status: Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment status in this (and every) course. Any change in that status is the responsibility of the student and must be made by the dates listed in the *Schedule of Classes*. After the last day to drop a course, withdrawal from the course must be approved by the Dean and will be approved only for

nonacademic reasons. Attempting to add a class after the last day to add is all but impossible. Undergraduate students wishing to drop a class after the drop date may choose to exercise a selective withdrawal. See the *Schedule of Classes* for [selective withdrawal procedures](#).

Cell phone ringers: Why do I even have to say this? Please turn off your phone or set it to vibrate before you come to class. And if you take a call in class (it's happened), I will penalize you severely in that all important class participation grade. If your phone is your primary access point to the Internet, then by all means use it. Just be sure you are using it for class purposes. Really.

Laptops/Tablets: I am not one of that growing legion of professors who ban laptops or tablets from class ([see my blog post on this](#)). In fact, I encourage you to bring your laptop or tablet to class. But if you are clearly checked out ([Anyone? Anyone? Bueller?](#)) to SnapChat, Facebook, YouTube, AIM, YikYak, League of Legends, or wherever, expect me to call on you.

Food, Drink, Tobacco: No eating in class. It's disruptive and results in ants, roaches, and other beasts infesting the classrooms. Drinks are fine, so long as you don't slurp or burp loudly. No tobacco products of any kind.

Weekly Schedule

August 30 – September 1 – Introduction, Geography, Context

Read MacKaye essay

September 6-8 – What is Public History? Digital Public History?

Readings from NCPH, primary source documents.

September 13-15 – The Trail in Popular Culture

Finish reading *A Walk in the Woods*

September 20-22 – Building the Trail

Read *Tangled Roots* (specific pages)

*** Day hike to Manassas Gap Shelter (4 miles RT), September 24 ***

September 27-29 – Building the Trail

Finish *Tangled Roots* (specific pages)

Primary sources about the Clubs

October 4-6 – Protecting the Trail

Primary sources

October 11-13 – The Human Context

Read *Managing the Mountains* (specific pages)

Film: *Rothstein's First Assignment*

October 18-20 – The Human Context

Finish *Managing the Mountains* (specific pages)

Sources from JMU Oral History and our database

*** No class October 18 – I'm in Romania ***

October 25-27 – Hikers

- Read *Grandma Gatewood's Hike*

- Find a Trail narrative online and research it.

*** Hike to Corbin Cabin, October 28-30 ***

November 1-3 – Project Design, Audience

November 8-10 – Finalizing Exhibits

*** No class November 10 – I'm in Calgary ***

November 15-17 – Finalizing Exhibits, Starting on the Wall

November 22 – Wall Work Time

November 29 – December 1 – Wall Work Time

December 6 – Unveiling the Wall

Appendix A Database Entries

An important of this course will be research that you do on an Appalachian Trail-related topic that interests you. The topic you pick is really up to you and if you don't have one in mind right away, don't worry. As the semester goes along more than one will suggest itself to you. Just to get your juices flowing, I'll mention some general categories of possible research topics:

1. The history of a particular trail club
2. A biographical history of a thru hiker
3. Political issues surrounding land use/property rights
4. Crime on the Trail (there are some unsolved murders, for example)
5. Women on the Trail
6. Disabled long distance hikers (a paraplegic hiker is currently thru hiking)
7. Families removed to make way for the Trail
8. Environmental impacts
9. Local economic development along the Trail ("trail towns", etc.)
10. A history of gear

Your work would need to be much more specific than these broad categories, but these should at least help you start thinking.

Once you settle on a topic, you will do research in various archival collections—some online, some not—and will acquire original/primary sources that can then be entered into the database we are building as part of the course: <http://appalachiantrailhistory.org>. [currently unformatted] Then you will build an online exhibit in this database that will eventually be made public. Your work must include the following elements:

1. At least 10 original sources added to the database, with images, descriptions, and proper metadata (you'll learn about metadata). You can add more than 10, but you must add at least 10.
2. These entries must include a mix of images, texts, maps, and other types of documents. There is no perfect mix, but you can't have all images, or all texts, or all maps.
3. These items must be in the public domain, or you'll need to secure permission to post them online. We'll also spend time on how to do that, so no worries.

Your exhibit will be built via the "exhibit builder" that is part of the database, so formatting will be relatively easy.

Once your exhibit is ready for public viewing, you'll make it public and create an access point to it from our group project (see Appendix B).

Appendix B

Group Project

This is a course about public history, so we are going to make our work public, not only online, but also in Robinson Hall. Just across the hall from my office is a blank wall with one section of blankness that is 82' long. I have secured permission from the powers that be at Mason to use this wall for our class. So, we are going to paint the Appalachian Trail on the wall.

Deciding exactly what that will look like will be a task in itself. As a group we'll have to figure out things like scale, orientation, design, color palette, and lots of other design issues. Then we have to work together to actually paint the Trail on the wall.

Once we have the Trail on the wall, you will then create an access point to your exhibit on that wall map. This will include adding a QR code to the map so passersby can scan the code and go directly to your exhibit. It may also include an image, or some text on the wall that will entice our audience to want to know more.

You'll see in the schedule of the semester, I've set aside most of November to building your exhibit and our group work on the wall map.

Grading for the group project will be based on the following criteria:

1. Were you a consistent contributor? (25%)
2. Were you collaborative? (25%)
3. Did you bring a positive attitude to the work? (25%)
4. What does the final result look like? (25%)

You'll see from this scheme that the only part of your grade on the final project that is dependent on others is the final 25% of the grade. In other words, 3.75% of your grade for the entire course depends on others (25% of 15%).

The rest depends on you.