

History 677 001:
The Vietnam War
Spring 2017
M 7:20-10:00 PM
Hanover Hall L002



PROF. LAIR
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Office Hours: M 5-6:30 & by appointment
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will provide an introduction to the history and historiography of the Vietnam War, including the origins of the conflict; the strategy and tactics of the United States, North Vietnam, and the Viet Cong; U.S. nation building in South Vietnam; individuals' experiences serving in the war on both sides; the antiwar movement; war crimes; and the war in fiction.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Professional historians recognize that "history" is not an immutable set of facts, but rather a collection of competing interpretations. Historiography is the study of historical writing, bounded in this case by writings related to the Vietnam War. The emphasis in this seminar will be on the historiography of the Vietnam War. That is, we will examine a variety of approaches to the study of the war and its interpretations, paying special attention to its social history, especially as it relates to American social history in general. We will examine several different types of sources (a classic survey text, several argument-driven monographs written by professional scholars, a diary, a memoir, a strategic analysis, a journalistic expose, and a novel), considering the merits and weaknesses of each approach to the study of the past. For the argument-driven monographs, we will pay special attention to how the author frames his or her questions and the design of the project to answer them.

Skills developed in the course include formal and informal writing, textual analysis, public speaking, framing questions, leading others in discussion, and critical thinking. Assessment will be based on leading discussion, writing book reviews, and writing a lengthy historiographic essay. Through their written work, students will be able demonstrate the ability to: identify, discuss, and evaluate a book's argument, sources, and methodology; frame discussion and research questions; conduct research into relevant secondary sources; evaluate the quality, credibility, and limitations of the arguments presented by scholars working on similar topics; situate findings within the scholarly literature of the topic; connect issues in the readings to larger intellectual or social concerns; effectively communicate ideas orally and in writing; and effectively lead others in a productive discussion of scholarly work.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment will be based on the following items, which are explained more fully in the Assignment Guide:

- Informed, constructive participation in every discussion: 20%
- Presenting one of the course readings to the class and helping to lead discussion: 25%
- One short (750 words) book review: 15%
- A long (15-20 pp.) historiographic essay on a subtopic of your choosing: 40%

A Note on Grades: Grades represent an assessment of your work, not of you as a person. They are not a reward or a sanction. In graduate school, every student is expected to excel. In programs with funding, students get cut off if their GPA dips below a 3.5. As a result, throughout the profession, Bs are generally regarded as a sign that a student is not doing well. Grades of B- and below are a sign that something is seriously wrong. (At Mason, the academic dean will terminate graduate students who earn 2 F's or 3 C's.) There is no "curve" in the class, so any distribution of grades is possible.

If you have questions or concerns about how you are doing in the course, please check in with me.

COURSE POLICIES

Please read these policies and make sure you understand them. If you have questions, please ask. You are expected to know these policies and to plan your work schedule, transportation, etc. accordingly.

Academic Integrity

Mason students are bound by an Honor Code (<http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/>), which states, "Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work." The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously, and violations are treated gravely. In this course, academic integrity means that:

- When you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task.
- When you rely on someone else's work in any aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form.
- All aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions.
- You will tell the truth about the status of your work.

For a discussion of what constitutes plagiarism, go here: <http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/plagiarism/>

If you have questions, please ask for guidance and clarification. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. I will report students suspected of dishonesty to the University's Honor Board for disciplinary action, including failure of the course and even expulsion.

Attendance, Punctuality, and Coming to Class Sick

Regular attendance is required; you can't participate if you're not in class. Also, please arrive to class on time. If you need to arrive late or leave early, please sit near the door to minimize the disruption. Please do not come to class if you have a serious illness, especially a fever or an uncontrolled cough.

Communication & Office Hours

I encourage you to meet with me to discuss any facet of the course. Quick questions can be addressed before/after class or in email. More substantive conversations are best reserved for a meeting. Please email me if you would like to set something up. **I will only be using GMU email addresses to communicate with students. Please write to me from your GMU account, and check your GMU account regularly or forward your email.**

Decorum

Students are expected to be physically and intellectually present in class, to behave in a professional way, and to be respectful of others. Please refrain from eating, sleeping, talking when others have the floor, passing notes, multitasking, or anything else that demeans our class. Please silence your phones and put them away before class.

Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability and need academic accommodations, please see me privately and contact the Office of Disability Resources at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation in this course or have questions about physical access, please talk to me as soon as possible (though you can wait until office hours, in the interest of privacy). <http://ods.gmu.edu>

Diversity

George Mason University strives to maintain a quality environment for work, study and personal growth. Diversity is broadly defined to include such characteristics as, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation. Diversity also entails different viewpoints, philosophies, and perspectives. Attention to these aspects of diversity will help promote a culture of inclusion and belonging, and an environment where diverse opinions, backgrounds and practices have the opportunity to be voiced, heard and respected. **If you feel uncomfortable or unwelcome in class for any reason, please come and talk to me.**

Inclement Weather

On bad-weather days, consult the University's homepage for cancellation information. If the University is open, we will be having class, including scheduled exams and in-class writing exercises.

Late Assignments

Writing assignments will be accepted late, but there will be penalty of one-half of a letter grade for every 24 hours, starting at 12:01 AM on the night an assignment is due.

Submitting Your Work

Your written work should be submitted via email attachment in Microsoft Word using the email subject line and document file name below:

- Email subject line: "HIST 677: [Name of Assignment]"
- File name for the document: [Student Last Name].HIST679.[Name of Assignment].SP17.doc(x).

(By sorting these attachments by last name, I can quickly tell whose is missing. Also, "Vietnam Paper" makes a lot of sense as a file name on your computer, but it renders your work invisible on mine. If I can't find your paper, I can't read your paper.)

Using Laptops in Class

I would like my students to be present in class, and it is my responsibility to forge a productive classroom culture that encourages best-practices for learning. Studies have shown that students retain more information when they take notes by hand. Further, laptops with Internet connections provide intense temptation to multitask, dividing the user's attention. The screens' contents are distracting to other students, and the glazed look of disengaged students staring at said screens is distracting to me. If you have to use a laptop to take notes, you should be prepared to send me your notes on a moment's notice via Mason's wireless. If you plan to multitask during class, you should stay home. Please join me in creating a space for learning and discussion, in which we are all focused on this important topic, our own learning and improvement, and each other.

USEFUL CAMPUS RESOURCES

Advising Resources for History Graduate Students: <http://historyarthistory.gmu.edu/graduate/for-graduate>

Blackboard: <https://mymasonportal.gmu.edu/>

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), SUB I Room 3129, 703-993-2380, <http://caps.gmu.edu>

Free Academic Skills Workshops: <http://caps.gmu.edu/students/academic-skills-workshops/>

The Mason Honor Code: <http://oci.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/>

Patriot Web: <https://patriotweb.gmu.edu/>

University Policies

The University Catalog, <http://catalog.gmu.edu>, is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university academic affairs. Other relevant policies are available at <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/> and <http://chssundergrad.gmu.edu/>. All members of the university community are responsible for knowing and following established policies.

Writing Center, Robinson A114, 703-993-1200, <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>