

George Mason University

Department of History & Art History

History 499 / Fall term 2017
Tuesdays, 1:3—4:10
Music/Theater Bldg #1008

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THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS: THEN AND NOW

This seminar is the capstone experience of your history major. It is designed to help you research and compose a professional historical essay, the sort of paper your professors write. The experience will give you the opportunity to incorporate historical methods and analysis that you have learned in previous history classes. The process will proceed in three steps. First, we will read and discuss a variety of texts related to the seminar topic. Second, you will quickly choose a research topic. Third, classes will be devoted to advancing the research and writing of your papers. Finally, near the end of the semester each student will have the opportunity to present a synopsis of his/her paper to the class. Details TK.

Grades will be based on class participation, the progress of your paper drafts, the quality of your oral presentation, and (especially) the quality of your final paper.

All students should have a GMU e-mail account.

(This seminar is one of two departmental “writing-intensive” courses mandated by the university, the other History 300.)

Soon after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki nuclear weapons began to shape the military and diplomatic policies of the United States and the Soviet Union. Both superpowers rationalized their burgeoning nuclear arsenals as deterrent forces. Yet it was the amassing and deployment of these weapons that led directly to the Cuban Missile Crisis, the seminal event in international politics that came close to precipitating a nuclear holocaust.

The readings, discussions and films associated with the course are provided as background and intellectual stimulation. ***Your research papers are the focus of the course and will be 80% of your grade.***

Class attendance is mandatory.

The honor code (see GMU catalogue) is strictly adhered to.

Final Paper = 80% of your grade

Class participation (including attendance) and oral presentation of your paper = 20% of your grade.

Note: While the Senior Seminar counts 3 academic credits like other classes, the work is intensive and demanding—more analogous to a graduate level seminar. You should be prepared for an ongoing engagement with the assignments and your research paper. If you do that, you will succeed. Your paper will be a demonstration of your research and writing skills (you will be, at least for this semester, a “practicing historian”). Your paper can be used for future job interviews, as an example of your best work in applying to graduate or law schools, etc.

*The seminar’s goal is for each student to produce a near publishable research paper based on primary and secondary sources. Articles in **Diplomatic History** are your guide to the structure of a properly written scholarly article.*

COURSE FORMAT AND REQUIREMENTS: (NOTE: I reserve the right to alter the assignments below if I think a change will benefit your research and writing.)

1. Weekly discussions of the assigned readings and your progress on your research papers. Each week during the early part of the term a short essay (300-500 words) on the week’s reading assignment is due as an email attachment to me **no later than 1 pm on Monday** prior to that assignment’s discussion.

2. All your emails to me should be identified in the SUBJECT LINE beginning with: H499F17.

WHY? This is the only way to assure that your submission is not overlooked in the sea of emails I receive daily. When I am ready to read your submissions I enter **H499F17** in my email search box. Your correctly labeled emails appear and I read them. **REMEMBER: H499F17.** No variation please. If you send me an attachment it too should be identified as: **H499F17_Your-last-name_assignment ID.** For example: **H499F17_Smith_date.**

3. A **final research paper** of approximately 20-25 pages in length, the topic to be selected in consultation with me. I recommend that you begin **IMMEDIATELY** to make a list of possible topics. (Your paper need not focus on policy issues. You could write on cultural, social, or intellectual history, but I must approve the topic.)

4. **During our class meeting on November 28, each of you will present a formal 10 minute lecture to the class based on your research paper.** The format will simulate an **Organization of American Historians** panel on “The Cuban Missile Crisis Then and Now.” Your presentation must be written (6 pages max.) and you must read it as a formal lecture.

5. Early in the semester most of our classes will include a documentary film, a discussion of the reading assignment and conversations about your topics and your research progress.

YOUR FINAL PAPER (an electronic copy emailed to me) is **due on Tuesday, December 5 at 5pm.**

Assigned books (available in the Book Store). **Additional readings** will be provided electronically

Robert Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*

Fursenko+ Naftali, *One Hell of A Gamble: Kennedy, Khrushchev, Castro*

Michael Dobbs, *One Minute to Midnight*

CLASS SCHEDULE + ASSIGNMENTS:

1. 8/29 INTRODUCTION: AN OVERVIEW OF THE COURSE

The Cuban Missile Crisis As a Research Topic

Read: Sherwin, "One Step From Nuclear War," *Prologue*

Magazine, (Oct.2012), see email attachment sent prior to class.

<https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2012/fall/cuban-missiles.html>

and <https://www.thenation.com/article/what-the-cuban-missile-crisis-can-teach-us-about-the-north-korean-missile-crisis/>

Lessons from the Cuban Missile Crisis for the North Korean Missile Crisis

Film: TBA

2. 9/5 TO THE BAY OF PIGS INVASION

Read: Fursenko & Naftali, *One Hell of A Gamble* Introduction + chapters 1-5

Film: "The Bay of Pigs"

ASSIGNMENT #1 YOU ARE FURSENKO (RUSSIAN) OR NAFTALI (AMERICAN). FROM YOUR NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE WRITE AN OPED (400W) FOR A RUSSIAN OR USA NEWSPAPER ON THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BAY OF PIGS INVASION.

ASSIGNMENT #2 SUBMIT 4 POSSIBLE PAPER TOPICS. WRITE SEVERAL SENTENCES ABOUT EACH EXPLAINING WHY YOU THINK IT'S IMPORTANT.

3. 9/12 MEMOIR AS HISTORY?

Read: Robert Kennedy, *Thirteen Days* (complete)

Film: “The Missiles of October: What the World Didn’t Know”

ASSIGNMENT #1: SUMMARIZE RFK’S VIEW OF HOW THE CMC WAS RESOLVED. NOTE ESPECIALLY HIS VIEW OF HIS ROLE AND HIS VIEW OF EXCOM THE MEMBERS. (No more than 2 pages / 500w)

ASSIGNMENT #2: SUBMIT 1 OR 2 POSSIBLE PAPER TOPICS. WRITE SEVERAL SENTENCES ABOUT EACH EXPLAINING WHY YOU THINK IT’S IMPORTANT.

4. 9/19 THE CMC FROM THE ARCHIVES

Read: Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of A Gamble*, chaps 6-14

Film: JFK Speech + CBS News Reports Oct 24 and 26

ASSIGNMENT #1: ONCE AGAIN YOU ARE FURSENKO OR NAFTALI, BUT IF YOU WERE FURSENKO LAST TIME YOU ARE NOW NAFTALI. FROM YOUR NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE WRITE AN OPED (400W) FOR A RUSSIAN OR USA NEWSPAPER ON THE CURRENT RELEVANCE OF THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS.

ASSIGNMENT #2: SUBMIT YOUR PAPER TOPIC. WRITE 2 PAGES DESCRIBING WHAT YOU THINK YOU WILL COVER AND WHY IT IS IMPORTANT.

5. 9/26 THE DAY NUCLEAR WAR ALMOST BEGAN

Read: Dobbs, *One Minute to Midnight* (complete)

Film: Sorensen discusses CMC

ASSIGNMENT #1: REFERENCING *One Minute to Midnight* WRITE AN ESSAY ON THE MOST DANGEROUS MOMENT OF THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS. (300W)

ASSIGNMENT #2: SUBMIT A PRELIMINARY BIBLIOGRAPHY (LIST OF BOOKS, ARTICLES AND PRIMARY SOURCES) THAT YOU INTEND TO RESEARCH FOR YOUR PAPER. EXPLAIN WHERE YOU WILL SEARCH FOR YOUR PRIMARY SOURCES.

ASSIGNMENT #3: ACCESS THE JOURNAL *DIPLOMATIC HISTORY* AND CHOOSE ONE RELEVANT ARTICLE FROM ITS BACKLIST. SEND THE ARTICLE (or link to the article) AS AN ATTACHMENT TO ME BY NOON ON THURSDAY. (I WILL SHARE THEM WITH THE OTHER MEMBERS OF OUR CLASS.) BE PREPARED TO DISCUSS YOUR ARTICLE ON 10/3.

6. 10/3 **DISCUSSION OF *DIPLOMATIC HISTORY* ARTICLES AND STUDENT PAPERS.** (Be prepared to discuss the progress you have made on your paper)
7. 10/10 **RESEARCH WEEK —NO CLASS — MONDAY CLASSES MEET ON TUESDAY THIS WEEK** (due to Columbus Day)
8. 10/17 **STUDENTS PRESENT THEIR PAPERS**
COME TO CLASS PREPARED TO (1) PRESENT YOUR TOPIC (2) DISCUSS IT'S RELEVANCE TO THE CMC (3) BRIEFLY SUMMARIZE THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE SUBJECT (4) EXPLAIN YOUR THESIS (ARGUMENT) IN RELATION TO THE HISTORIOGRAPHY (5) DESCRIBE YOUR SOURCES AND YOUR RESEARCH PLAN.
- ASSIGNMENT:** WRITE UP YOUR PRESENTATION AS A ROUGH DRAFT FOR YOUR PAPER. INCLUDE NOTES. IT SHOULD COME TO ABOUT 10 PAGES. (SEND TO ME AS USUAL)
9. 10/24 Subj: MEETING IN FENWICK LIBRARY FOR INTERVIEWS WITH CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS VETERANS. (More info in class.)
10. 10/31 REVIEW OF YOUR DRAFTS — ONE ON ONE.
11. 11/7 **All Research Week** - maybe no class? - DEPENDS ON YOUR PROGRESS
12. 11/14 **Last Draft and one on one discussions as necessary with Professor Sherwin.** Details TK.
13. 11/21 Research Week and Thanksgiving — Drive Carefully
14. 11/29 INDIVIDUAL FORMAL PRESENTATIONS OF YOUR ESSAYS
15. 12/5 **Final papers due**

NOTE: *No extensions or Incomplete. Please Plan carefully.*

Guidelines for Paper

You may choose any topic related to the nuclear arms race ***and*** the Cuban Missile Crisis. The key to a successful paper, however, is to select a issue specific enough so

that your paper does not read like a general text book. At the same time, the topic should not be so narrow that you have difficulty finding source materials. I will review every student's topic and if necessary make suggestions for revision.

The paper's length should be about 20-25 pages (+ notes and bibliography) typed, double-spaced, with notes either as footnotes or endnotes. You must include several primary (original) sources together with secondary sources in your bibliography. There is no limit to the number of sources, but at a minimum, you should have 3-4 primary sources and 7-10 secondary sources (books and articles).

Read ***Diplomatic History*** for examples. (Many good articles on CMC). During the following weeks you will receive additional instructions regarding your papers.

Instructions for Oral Presentations

You will have approximately 10 minutes to present the findings of your research before the class. Your presentation must explain your major conclusions and the supporting evidence. If it is a controversial topic explain the interpretations your research supports and contradicts. If you wish, you may bring in audio-visual materials, such as handouts, transparencies, slides, or power point. You must read your presentation. Figure roughly 2 minutes of double-spaced typed pages read at a moderate pace per page. Do not try to include too many details. Focus on the main ideas and evidence. You do not want to summarize your paper. You want to present its main argument(s) and the strongest evidence that supports your thesis.

Items to remember in writing the seminar paper

An "A" paper is one that is on track to be considered for publication in a scholarly journal. It should be well organized and well written. It should have a clear thesis (interpretation) that is supported by adequate evidence. It should reference at **least** 3-4 primary sources (contemporary newspapers, journal articles, memoirs, diplomatic documents, film, artworks, etc.) and at **least** 7-8 secondary sources (books and articles *about* the topic written later). More can be used, of course! The paper will cite sources correctly in either footnotes or endnotes. It will not be sufficient merely to list the sources, your paper will be judged on how well you incorporate the information from the primary and secondary sources into your analysis. The bibliography will be separated into two sections: primary and secondary sources.