

Fall 2020  
HIST 389: THE HISTORY OF THE ELECTION OF 2020  
MW 3-4:15, Synchronous Online

Instructor: Dr. Lair, [mLair@gmu.edu](mailto:mLair@gmu.edu)  
Office Hours: MW after class & by appointment



### COURSE DESCRIPTION & LEARNING OUTCOMES

American presidential elections are obviously historic, because they mark the transfer or continuity of political power at the highest level in American life, if not the world. But US presidential elections are also an opportunity to think historically, about the context of innumerable societal concerns, such as the role of the executive branch in government, the use of force to resolve international disputes, the United States' place in the world, the role of the state in the individual's life, the distribution of public resources, social justice and human rights, civil-military relations, media coverage and influence, and the design, function, and history of the electoral process itself. This course will be responsive to developments within the US presidential election of 2020 by considering the histories of issues that will inform the election and by providing historical antecedents to current events as they unfold. It will also emphasize the skills required to research, consider, question, discuss, and write about current events from an historical perspective.

The course will combine lectures, guest lectures, readings, student presentations, and discussion. Skills developed in the course include formal and informal writing, discussion participation, public speaking, basic research methods, textual analysis, and critical thinking.

### REQUIRED READINGS

The required readings will be documents, articles, and excerpts posted on Blackboard (<https://mymasonportal.gmu.edu>). You should read each piece carefully, take notes on its contents, and be prepared to discuss it or answer questions about it when you come to class.

### GRADING

Grades represent an assessment of your work, not a reward, sanction, or evaluation of you as a person. A's are for excellent work; B's are for accomplished work; C's are for average work; D's are for below average work; and F's are for work that suggests a lack of comprehension or care. Any distribution of final grades is possible; there will be no "curve" in this class.

Course grades will be assigned based on the following scale:

A+	97-100	B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D	60-69
A	94-96	B	84-86	C	74-76	F	<60
A-	90-93	B-	80-83	C-	70-73		

## ASSESSMENT

The course grade will be based on fulfillment of the following requirements. Details about these assignments will be available under “Assessment” on our Blackboard course page.

### **4 essays due Sundays by 10 PM (40%)**

Each student will submit 4 essays that summarize one development in the previous week’s election coverage and consider that development’s historical significance. Students will submit 2 of these essays for any week in the first half of the semester and 2 for any week in the second half. Students may not write about the same topic for more than one paper, and they may not write a paper in the same week they give their oral presentation. Students may write a 5<sup>th</sup> essay and drop their lowest essay grade.

### **Oral Presentation using PowerPoint (20%)**

Each student will be assigned a week when they carefully follow the news and then report to the class on historically significant developments. These presentations will be 5-10 minutes long plus Q&A. The oral presentation must not coincide with the 4 papers described above.

### **Final Project (20%)**

The final project will consider how historians will write and teach about what happened in the election of 2020 to future undergraduate students. Each student will design and prepare a lesson plan for teaching what happened in the election.

### **Homework & consistent, substantive participation in the life of our class. (20%)**

Our class is a community, at a time when we really need it! Your engagement in our community is required and appreciated. This grade will be given weekly. It grade will be based on attending class, appearing on camera in class, participating in discussion, participating in the discussion boards, doing short homework assignments, and the quality of your participation & work.

- **How to participate in the life of our class:**
  - Ask/answer a question or make a comment in class, orally or in chat.
    - Oral participation is better than using the chat feature, because it is good practice. However, some students may not have an audio connection that will facilitate oral participation. And I would rather have very shy students participate via the chat feature than not at all.
  - Attend office hours or email me to discuss course material.
  - Post and/or comment on threads that I create on the course Discussion Board.
- **Being an effective discussant orally and in writing:**
  - **Use your words.** Discussion boards provide a great opportunity to practice rendering complete thoughts in writing.
  - **Be informed.** Spend time with the course readings, and stay current on current events.
  - **Make connections** between lectures & readings and/or between our course materials & what you have learned or observed elsewhere.
  - **Support your ideas with evidence.** Be concise but specific. Explain unfamiliar terms. Quote or cite your sources (but try to put ideas into your own words).
  - **Stay on topic** and have a relevant point to make. Answer the question being asked. Practice being thorough but succinct. (“Brevity is the essence of wit!”)
  - **Innovate, don’t replicate.** Don’t just say, “I agree with so-and-so.” Offer your own opinion in your own words. We want to hear what *you* think!

## COURSE & UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Please read these course 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 accordingly. That being said, I understand that we are all facing a lot of uncertainty in our health, our loved ones' health, employment, and housing. Please keep in touch with me about your circumstances.

### **Academic Integrity** <http://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/full-honor-code-document/>

Mason students are bound by an Honor Code, 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 plagiarism, go here: <http://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/what-is-plagiarism/>

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**

Our class is synchronous online, and I expect you to attend. If you take ill, have technical problems, or have other emergent circumstances that cause you to miss class or a deadline, please notify me by email at your earliest convenience.

### **Communication**

I will be using Blackboard to email the class via the Announcements feature. Emails sent through Blackboard may be found under "Announcements" on the course Home Page for the duration of the semester. Please write to me only from your GMU account, and please check your GMU account regularly or forward your GMU email. **Please preface the subject of your emails to me with "HIST 389."**

### **Decorum**

I expect you to be physically and intellectually present in our online class, to behave in a professional way, and to be respectful of others. Please review the handout "Guide to Online Learning" for specifics on etiquette in our synchronous classroom and during office hours.

### **Disabilities** <https://ds.gmu.edu/>

If you are a student with a disability and need academic accommodations, please see me privately and contact Disability Services. All academic accommodations are codified by that

office, but implementing them will fall to me. Accommodations begin only once I am notified about them in writing, and they cannot be retroactive.

### 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. Please strive to keep your politics out of the classroom and your work. **If you feel uncomfortable or unwelcome in class for any reason, please come and talk to me.**

### IT Policy

I would like my students to be physically and intellectually present in our online 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, though this is admittedly problematic for saving notes and making them searchable. Further, computers and cell phones provide intense temptation to multitask, dividing the user's attention. Please **silence your phones and put them away** before our synchronous online class. If you use your computer to take notes during our synchronous online class, **please refrain from multitasking.**

Please join me in creating an online space for learning and discussion, in which we are all focused on the course topics, our learning and improvement, and each other!

### Late Assignments

Assignments will be accepted late, but a grade penalty may attach. Please notify me at your earliest convenience if your circumstances require an extension on an assignment.

### Office Hours: MW 4:15-4:45 PM and by appointment

I encourage you to meet with me online to discuss any facet of the course. I will remain in our course meeting room after class ends. If you're not able to linger after class, or if there are multiple students in the "room" and you want privacy, reach out about meeting at another time online.

### Submitting Your Work

You will submit written work as Word documents (not PDFs) via Blackboard. When saving your files, please label them as follows:

**Your\_Last\_Name.HIST389.Name\_of\_Assignment.FA20.doc(x).**

### University Enrollment Policy

Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes. (Deadlines each semester are available on the Registrar's website: <https://registrar.gmu.edu/calendars/>) The last day to drop this class (with 100% tuition liability) is September 28. The Selective Withdrawal Period is September 29 to October 28.

## USEFUL CAMPUS RESOURCES

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

**Career Services:** For networking, mentors, career counseling, and assistance applying for grad school and jobs. SUB 1 Room 3400, 703-993-2370. [careers@gmu.edu](mailto:careers@gmu.edu), <https://careers.gmu.edu/>

**Chosen Name & Pronoun Policy:** How to update your chosen name and pronouns. <https://registrar.gmu.edu/updating-chosen-name-pronouns/>

**Citing Sources in Chicago Style:** <http://vle.credoreference.com/george-mason/citing-sources-chicago>

**Counseling and Psychological Services:** Free counseling. SUB I Room 3129, 703-993-2380. <http://caps.gmu.edu>

**COVID-19 Safe Return to Campus:** <https://www2.gmu.edu/coronavirus>

**COVID-19 Student Emergency Assistance Funding:** <https://ulife.gmu.edu/student-emergency-assistance-funding/>

**Disability Services:** <http://ods.gmu.edu>

**Financial Literacy:** Assistance understanding your finances and financial aid. <https://www2.gmu.edu/admissions-aid/financial-aid/financial-literacy>

**Learning Services:** Free coaching & academic skills workshops. <https://learningservices.gmu.edu/>

**LGBTQ Resources:** <http://lgbtq.gmu.edu>

**Mason Alerts:** For alerts related to emergencies and closings. <https://ready.gmu.edu/masonalert/>

**Office of Academic Integrity:** <https://oai.gmu.edu/>

**Patriot Pantry:** Free food assistance. Email [pantry@gmu.edu](mailto:pantry@gmu.edu) to make a private appointment to use the pantry. <https://ssac.gmu.edu/patriot-pantry/>

**Patriot Web:** For registration, transcripts, and degree evaluations. <https://patriotweb.gmu.edu/>

**Stay Mason Student Support Fund:** For students in financial distress who are at risk of dropping out. <https://ulife.gmu.edu/forms/stay-mason-student-support-fund-application/>

**Student Involvement:** Find support, show support, manage a project, demonstrate leadership. Student organizations are essential to the college experience! <https://si.gmu.edu/>

**Student Support & Advocacy Center:** For health, well-being, and support. SUB I Suite 3200, 703-993-3686, <https://ssac.gmu.edu/>

**University Policies:** All members of the Mason community are responsible for knowing and following established policies.

- The Catalog, <http://catalog.gmu.edu>
- University Policies <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/>
- CHSS Policies <https://chss.gmu.edu/graduate>

**Writing Center:** Multiple locations + online help, 703-993-1200, <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>

## REPUTABLE & HELPFUL COVID-19 RESOURCES

**COVID-19 Safe Return to Campus:** <https://www2.gmu.edu/coronavirus>

**COVID-19 Student Emergency Assistance Funding:** <https://ulife.gmu.edu/student-emergency-assistance-funding/>

**Virginia Department of Health:** <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/>

**The CDC:** <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

**WHO Situation Reports:** <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports>

### **Good data:**

- JHU Coronavirus Resource Center: <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>
- *New York Times*: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-us-cases.html>
- Worldometer: <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/#countries>

**Understanding the Phrase “Flatten the Curve”:** <https://www.flattenthecurve.com/>

**Understanding “Herd Immunity”:** <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/health/coronavirus-herd-immunity-simulation-vaccine/>

**How You Can Help:** <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/03/21/how-you-can-help-during-coronavirus/?arc404=true>

**How to Talk to Kids:** <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/talking-with-children.html>

**Corgi Puppy Compilation Video:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltH2\\_EPmDpE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltH2_EPmDpE)

## WEEKLY COURSE TOPICS

Classes will consist of pre-determined presentations/discussions on the history of issues that will animate the 2020 Election (sometimes with guest speakers) and more spontaneous examinations of the historical context around major issues that come up in the news. Check the corresponding week's folder for readings and assignments. This schedule is subject to change at my discretion, but you will be notified in writing if that happens. If you're unsure where we are in the syllabus, just ask!

WEEK	DATE	TOPICS
1.	Aug. 24 & 26	Introductions Course overview & norms Thinking Historically about Current Events
2.	<b>August 31</b>	<b>Last Day to Add</b>
	Aug. 31 & Sept. 2	The Electoral College Labor
3.	September 7	<b>No Class -- Happy Labor Day!</b>
	<b>September 8</b>	<b>Last day to drop with 100% tuition refund.</b>
	September 9	The Vote
4.	Sept. 14 & 16	Black Lives Matter
	<b>September 15</b>	<b>Last day to drop (50% tuition refund).</b>
	<b>September 16</b>	<b>Unrestricted withdrawal period begins (0% tuition refund).</b>
5.	Sept. 21 & 23	"Defunding" the Police
6.	<b>September 28</b>	<b>Unrestricted withdrawal period ends (0% tuition refund).</b>
	<b>September 29</b>	<b>Selective withdrawal period begins (0% tuition refund).</b>
	Sept. 28 & 30	Civil War Memorials
7.	Oct. 5 & 7	Civil-Military Relations
8.	Oct. 13 (Tues.) & 14	The United States Postal Service
9.	Oct. 19 & 21	The Pandemic
10.	Oct. 26 & 28	Climate Change
	<b>October 28</b>	<b>Selective withdrawal period ends (0% tuition refund).</b>
11.	November 2	Fake News
	<b>Tuesday, November 3</b>	★ ★ ★ The General Election ★ ★ ★
	November 4	Processing the [Preliminary?] Results
12.	Nov. 9 & 11	Immigration
13.	Nov. 16 & 18	#MeToo
14.	November 23	Russia
	<b>November 25</b>	<b>No Class -- Happy Thanksgiving!</b>

15.	November 30	Corruption & Disinterestedness
	December 2	Final Thoughts
16.	<b>December 9</b>	<b>Final projects due by 10 PM!</b>
<b>We made it! Thank you for all your hard work this semester, and best wishes for whatever comes next!</b>		