Historical Methods: Dead in Virginia
(History 300/ver. 4.1)

Professor Mills Kelly
Robinson Hall B 373b
e-mail: tkelly7@gmu.edu
website: http://edwired.org
twitter: @EdwiredMills

Office Hours
http://millskelly.youcanbook.me

Introduction
This class provides you with a firm grounding in the research and writing methods of the historian in the 21st century and does so by focusing on local history through an examination of family cemeteries here in Fairfax County. There are over 400 cemeteries in Fairfax County, most of them family cemeteries, and each one is a historic site that provides us with windows into the past of our local community. Although at first glance a cemetery looks like a place with some headstones and maybe a few wilted flowers, cemeteries are actually filled with stories, and those stories give us starting points for more in depth historical investigation.

We will be starting our work from the ground up—literally. From the cemetery site, we’ll work our way upward into archival resources, then secondary literature, and finally to a digital presentation of our findings. Along the way you will have the opportunity to learn how historians make sense of primary sources, how they fit their analysis into the larger conversations among historians, and how they present their findings to a wider audience.

Finally, please note that we have two class field trips (weather permitting) on February 11 and 25. These trips are mandatory. If you are going to have a conflict with these trips (work, sports team, other activity), start working on resolving this conflict immediately. The first trip is the only time all semester we are going into the field as a group and the second will be central to your learning about how to access local historical records in Fairfax.

How the class works
After an orientation to the project we’re going to undertake, you have to dive in feet (or head) first. The way we are going to do this is as follows:

1. All across Northern Virginia there are hundreds and hundreds of small family cemeteries that the suburbs have long since rolled over, but which still exist behind their often crumbling or crumbled iron and/or wood fences. In those cemeteries are actual historical artifacts called headstones. Those are the first primary sources you are going to work with and will introduce you to your problem.

2. Once you’ve located your cemetery, you will then begin the historian’s task of trying to answer every possible question one could ask about the people buried there including (but not limited to):
   a. Who were they?
   b. Why are they buried there instead of somewhere else?
c. Why did they die?
d. What was their relationship to one another?
e. What was their relationship to other people buried nearby (or elsewhere)?
f. How is their cemetery similar or different from other area cemeteries?
g. Why is it in good/bad/horrible shape today?
h. Are any of their descendants still alive, and if so, where do they live?
i. What did your people do when they were alive?
j. How did what they did relate to what others in the area did?
k. What was happening in the local area while they were alive?
l. Were any of your people historically significant, i.e., did something worth noting by other historians?
m. What can their lives tell us about the lives of others in the area at the same time?

3. Once you have formulated your list of questions, you will need to try to figure out how to answer them. Answering historical questions requires evidence and so your next important task is to figure out (a) what evidence might help you answer your questions and (b) where you can get that evidence. Then you'll have to go and get it.

4. After you have gathered a fair amount of evidence, you'll need to start analyzing it. As you analyze it, you'll also need to begin to read the secondary literature, i.e., books and articles by historians about things related to the story you are starting to construct about your people.

5. Your evidence will need to be entered into our database (http://mycemetery.org) using the metadata standards of the Dublin Core (more on this later).

6. Finally, you will create your a digital exhibit from your research, which will be a mix of evidence, displayed online via our database, that blends what you've learned in your research, and what you've created in the database.

Class Sessions
Because we all will be working on a similar project, we will use class sessions not for me to talk at you, but for each of us to report out what is happening with our projects—I found this, I couldn’t find that, here’s a picture of my headstones, I don’t know what to make of this evidence, etc. In the final third of the semester we spend a lot of time together in a workshop environment trying to complete our projects at the highest level of quality we can.

For this class to work, you have to come to class with something to say – either about your own work about the work of others in the class. What you have to say needs to be generative, meaning it takes us somewhere. If it's about your own work, it should be a question that you need input on. If it’s about someone else’s work, it should be a useful comment that helps them move forward. If you don’t come to class prepared, two things will happen: you will slow us all down because you aren’t helping us speed up; your grade will suffer.

Required Readings
I have ordered three books for the course and we will also be looking at a variety of other online resources as we go along. I will also provide you with a research notebook that you
should use as you go about your work. You will be expected to hand in this notebook on a regular basis so I can monitor your progress as the semester proceeds. You should purchase:

Sherene Baugher and Richard Veit, *Archaeology of American Cemeteries*
David E. Kyvig and Myron A. Marty, *Nearby History. Exploring the Past Around You*
Wayne C. Booth, et al *The Craft of Research*

**Assignments and Grading**

**Class participation:** Every week you must do the assigned readings and come to class ready to talk about them. (20%)

**Research process:** You will select a local family cemetary and will research it in every way you (and we) can think of. At least three times during the semester you will hand in your research notebook for my review. (20%)

**Annotated bibliography:** You will create an annotated bibliography of at least 10 primary and secondary sources that is **due on March 20.** I'll give you more detail on this assignment in class. (10%)

**Digital work:** From among the sources you gather in your research, you will decide which are the most worthy for inclusion in our database, you will convert them to digital formats, and will enter them into the database following a set of rules handed out in class and impressed upon you in a training session early in the semester. From those raw materials you will create a compelling exhibit from your findings using a (mostly) pre-determined format. (25%)

**Two Page Paper:** It’s my belief that the most difficult part of any long form essay (more than five pages) is getting the first two pages right. Those first two pages contain a clearly articulated argument, they draw the reader into the story, and the set the course for the rest of the essay. For that reason, rather than asking you to write a 10-15 page essay at the end of the semester, I’m asking you to write the first two pages of that essay — several times. You will submit your first two pages, I’ll mark them up, then you’ll submit them again, I’ll mark them up some more, and then you’ll submit them a final time. (15%)

**Final Presentation:** At the end of the semester you will use what you created in the database to give a brief presentation to the class. (10%)

**Course policies**

**Attendance:** Because this is a seminar, I place a high premium on arriving on time. Unlike a lecture course, where you can slip in late, in a seminar, it is the height of bad manners to show up while someone else is speaking, disturbing his or her train of thought. Please extend the same courtesy to others that you would expect when you are the one speaking. Also, because class participation is a substantial portion of your grade, you should plan to attend each and every class this semester. How can you participate if you aren’t in class? **Note:** Because our class meets at noon, if it is your first class of the day and you live off campus, realize in advance that noon is about the worst possible time to try to find a parking place. Plan accordingly.
ADA: Any student who requires special arrangements in order to meet course requirements should contact me to make necessary accommodations (before February 5 please). Students should present appropriate verification from the Disability Resource Center.

Medical and other excuses: Every semester someone is forced to miss the due date for 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.

Plagiarism and cheating: In a word, don’t. I refer every case of suspected cheating and plagiarism to the Honor Committee, so do us both a favor and just say no. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism and/or cheating, please see me.

Consumption: In my classes drink is permitted, but food and tobacco products of all kinds are prohibited. If you must chew, whether food or tobacco, do it before you arrive or after you leave.

Cell phones: 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.

Laptops: I am not one of that growing legion of professors who bans laptops from class (see my blog post on this: http://edwired.org/?p=587). In fact, I encourage you to bring your laptop to class. But if you are clearly checked out (Anyone? Anyone? Bueller?) to Facebook, YouTube, AIM, League of Legends, or wherever, expect me to call on you.

Clothing: A pair of sturdy shoes is recommended but not required. Because we are working on this project outside during the worst of the winter months, a good pair of boots (and some warm gloves) will make life better. I have some pairs of each I can loan out.

Planned Course Schedule

Note: Readings should be completed before Monday’s class.

January 23 – Class introduction

January 28-30 – Doing history
Read: Booth, 29-50, 68-83; Baugher and Veit, 1-17.

February 4-6 – Doing Local History
Read: Kyvig, 1-56.
Omeka/Zotero/Tropy training

February 11-13 – Family Cemeteries
Read: Kyvig, 57-82; Baugher and Veit, 78-124.
- Class field trip to a local cemetery on the 11th
- Even numbered notebooks due February 13

February 18-20 – Working in Archives
Read: Kyvig, 83-102; Baugher and Veit, 160-199.
- Library field trip to downtown Fairfax on the 25th
- Odd numbered notebooks due

February 25-27 – Creating arguments from sources

March 4-6 – Presentation of cemetery choices—lightning round!
* No class March 4 *
- Presentations on the 6th

March 11 – No class. Spring Break

March 18-20 – Getting from Argument to Essay
Read: Booth, 120-151.
Using to Omeka to create presentations
- Annotated bibliographies due on the 20th
- Even numbered notebooks due on the 20th

March 25-27 – Presentation of locations/research updates (progress reports).
- First version of the first two pages due
- Odd numbered notebooks due on the 27th

April 1-3 – Presentation of locations/research updates (progress reports).

April 8-10 – Research update/conversations about writing
Read: Booth, 203-212, 249-270.
- Second version of the first two pages due
- Even numbered notebooks due on the 10th

April 15-17 – Research update (progress reports)
- Odd numbered notebooks due on the 17th

April 22-24 – Final presentations
- Final version of the first two pages due

April 29-May 1 – Final presentations

May 6 – Final presentations (if needed) and class party