The subfield of civil-military relations deals with the relationship between civil government and the military institutions charged with protecting that government. That relationship usually involves some tension: how to maintain a military system strong enough to provide security for the government without allowing the military to become so strong that it threatens the government? For the majority of its history, the United States has balanced this tension very effectively. But global events of the past decade, and the challenges accompanying an unconventional new presidential administration, have provided vivid demonstrations that effective civilian control of the military is by no means a given. History and current events abound with examples of the perils of strained civil-military relations.

Scholars who study civil-military relations often straddle different fields. Some are historians; some are political scientists; some are sociologists. The field has a historical dimension, built on empirical research; it also has a theoretical dimension, concerned with abstracts and institutional structures. This seminar offers an opportunity to become familiar with some of the most important scholarship focusing on civil-military relations, particularly the American experience, by analyzing some seminal works and some of the best recent scholarship. A selection of current articles and editorials rounds out the reading list.

In addition, the seminar affords an opportunity to practice some of the most important skills of the working historian. Over the course of the semester, each participant will write book reviews, formulate questions about the readings, and have an opportunity to help guide the class discussion. By the end of the course, students will develop an appreciation for the complexity of this field and be able to apply theoretical lessons to real-world problems.

Reading List

Andrew Bacevich, *The New American Militarism*
Beth Bailey, *America’s Army*
Eliot Cohen, *Supreme Command*
Peter Feaver, *Armed Servants*
Peter Feaver and Dick Kohn, *Soldiers and Civilians*
Samuel Huntington, *Soldier and State*
Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*
H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*
Mackubin Owens, *US Civil-Military Relations After 9/11*
Thomas Ricks, *The Generals*
T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals*

**Recommended:** Suzanne Nielsen and Don Snider, eds. *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era*
Assignments and Grading

Performance in the course will be determined by three short book reviews, participation in individual discussion sessions, and an oral final exam that models an abbreviated version of the comprehensive exams that doctoral students take as they advance to candidacy.

**Book Reviews:** Each student will prepare three short, 750-word book reviews on three of the course’s reading assignments. Each review should follow the standard format for academic book reviews demonstrated in the *Journal of Military History*, the *Journal of American History*, or the *American Historical Review*. The review should briefly introduce the work (its topic, its author, the details of its publication) before analyzing the substance of the author’s discussion. What questions does the book seek to address? What is the author’s argument? What kind of evidence does the author employ to support that argument? How effective is the argument? Why? What are the book’s chief strengths and weaknesses? Fitting that information into a brief essay is enormously challenging; writing reviews offers class participants practice in synthesis, criticism, and brevity—essential skills for the professional historian.

The choice of which books to review is up to the student; reviews are due in class the day the book is discussed. Students may submit more than three book reviews; the three highest scores will count towards the final grade.

All written work submitted for the class should be in double-spaced, 12-point Times Roman font with standard one-inch margins. Please number the pages and staple them together.

**Participation:** Participation in every class discussion is a vital part of an effective seminar. Moreover, the ability to think critically and quickly and to present one’s ideas verbally is a prized trait in the historical profession.

Effective participation in a graduate seminar comprises several skills: preparing for discussion, contributing to the give-and-take of an academic conversation, and listening effectively to the contributions of others to advance the analysis collaboratively. The weekly discussions offer class participants an opportunity to develop those skills in an encouraging environment. Participation is weighted significantly in the course grade precisely because being prepared to discuss each week’s material in a thoughtful manner is so important to professional development.

To aid you in these preparations, students will frequently be asked to bring a short thought, question, or response to the week’s reading (specifics will be circulated the week before each discussion) to share at the beginning of the class. In aggregate, these responses will initiate the longer discussion that week and help ensure that every student contributes at least one idea to each discussion.

**Oral Examination:** The ability to formulate cogent arguments about a body of scholarship is another important skill for a professional historian. The importance of this skill is one of the reasons that doctoral students sit for comprehensive exams before formally advancing to candidacy: it allows faculty members to evaluate a candidate’s breadth of knowledge and capacity to synthesize ideas in response to direct questions. Sitting for the exam also serves another valuable function: it forces students to prepare for the exam, reviewing notes and making connections throughout a particular literature.

Because of the utility of the exercise—and because it is an area in which most graduate students can benefit from additional practice—the final assignment for the course will be sitting for an abbreviated, 30-minute oral exam. That exam will feature two or three open-ended questions that require complex
synthesis among all of the readings of the semester. To help prepare for the exam at the semester’s end, students should formulate a draft question of their own for class on **November 11**. We will discuss the questions, and analyze what makes for a successful comprehensive question, in that session. Students should submit a revised version of their question in class on **November 18**. Those student submissions will serve as the basis for pool of questions in the exam sessions on **November 25** and **December 2**.

**Grading:**
Final grades will break down as follows:
- Book reviews, 10% each
- Participation, 30%
- Comprehensive exam question: 10%
- Comprehensive exam: 30%
Class Schedule

**August 26:** Introductions and expectations

**September 2:** LABOR DAY—NO CLASS

**September 9:** Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*


**September 16:** Peter Feaver, *Armed Servants*

Don Snider, “Rethinking Civil-Military Relations,” *The Cipher Brief*, February 17, 2017

[https://www.thecipherbrief.com/rethinking-civil-military-relations](https://www.thecipherbrief.com/rethinking-civil-military-relations)

**September 23:** Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*

**September 30:** T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals*

**October 7:** Eliot Cohen, *Supreme Command*

**October 14:** FALL HOLIDAY—CLASS SHIFTED TO TUESDAY

**October 15:** H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*

**October 21:** Thomas Ricks, *The Generals*


**October 28:** Beth Bailey, *America’s Army*

**November 4:** Peter Feaver and Richard Kohn, *Soldiers and Civilians*

SAMPLE EXAM QUESTION DUE

**November 11:** Mackubin Thomas Owens, *US Civil-Military Relations After 9/11*


[http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/22222/is-there-trouble-brewing-for-civil-military-relations-in-the-u-s](http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/22222/is-there-trouble-brewing-for-civil-military-relations-in-the-u-s)

EXAM QUESTION DUE

**November 18:** Andrew Bacevich, *The New American Militarism*

**November 25:** Comprehensive exam

**December 2:** Comprehensive exam