This course uses the broad topic of the life and times of George Washington (1732-1799) to introduce History majors to the methodology of researching, interpreting, and writing history. Like all sections of HIST-300, this one is part of Mason's Students as Scholars initiative. Students who enroll in this class develop historical research and writing methods by completing several assignments over the course of the semester. HIST-300 also fulfills in part the Writing Intensive requirement for the History major. Note that students must earn a grade of C or better in HIST-300 in order to register for the second required Writing Intensive History course, HIST-499.

The final project for this course will be an annotated bibliography and project abstract on any research topic pertaining to plantation life, slavery and abolitionism, material culture, the American Revolution, the politics and culture of the early republic, or any other aspect of the history of Washington's era. Students will gather and examine the primary and secondary sources needed to write a research paper on their chosen topic without producing the actual paper—though they will prepare a short abstract or overview of the paper's arguments and contents. Class readings during the first few weeks of the semester will familiarize students with Washington's world—and with early American history generally—to prepare them to select their research topics by 23 September.

Our class meets once a week, remotely via Zoom, on Wednesdays between 1:30 and 4:10. There are three easy ways for you to access our remote classroom:

- Access this syllabus and click on this link: https://gmu.zoom.us/j/98615032721?pwd=QWVnRzE0VDVKcmMxOVlwenIvZHhDdz09
- Access your welcome email and click on the same link, which is also included there
- Go to the course Blackboard site and click on "Zoom Link for Class Meetings," which you will find on the green margin on the left side of the course homepage

The instructor will be available to meet with you outside of class, as needed, either by phone or videoconference. Please schedule meetings either after class or via email.

**Rules/Suggestions for Online Learning:**

This course meets synchronously—in other words, on a specific day and time—and the objective is to come as close to an in-person seminar as possible. That goal should be
attainable in part because our group is relatively small. These simple protocols should further enhance the quality of our weekly discussions:

- All participants should try to remember to mute their audio unless they are speaking. Background noise from multiple sources can be extremely distracting.
- Please consider using live video during our seminar. Ideally, we should all get to know each other, which would be very difficult if we cannot see each other. If you are in a weird place, if your house is a mess, or if you just want some privacy, Zoom allows you to insert a generic or custom virtual background. Go to https://its.gmu.edu/knowledge-base/virtual-backgrounds/ for some university-provided options.
- To avoid confusion and to make sure that everyone has a chance to participate in class, we will use the hand-raising function during class discussions.

**Weekly Format:**

Students should do assigned reading before coming to class and be prepared to participate in class discussions. You should have access to the assigned readings, either electronically or on paper, to refer to them as needed during class time.

For the first three class meetings, we will acquire a basic understanding of Washington's world and of early American history. When class meets, we will discuss the readings, both as a class and in smaller groups. We will also spend some time thinking about the readings as potential sources of ideas for topics for final projects.

Subsequent weeks will introduce students to different types of primary sources that historians use for their research. Each week, we will explore a different kind of source, as listed on the course schedule below. During those weeks, unless we have a guest speaker/presenter, the class will be organized more or less as follows:

1. Going around the (virtual) circle: each student should be prepared to share something they find interesting or important (or perhaps confusing) about the assigned reading.

2. Overview of the week's primary source by instructor or guest speaker/presenter.

3. BREAK

4. In-class activities and small group work.

5. Return to the virtual circle: What have you learned from this class? What might be useful for your final project?
Course Requirements:

Students are expected to follow the course schedule, which is set out in detail here (below). **We will meet remotely via Zoom on Wednesdays at 1:30 unless otherwise noted.**

Attendance is essential for success in this course, which meets only once weekly. In-class work is significant and often useful for completing the graded written assignments. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to keep up with the work on your own and to submit assignments on time. If you come to class unprepared for the day's work, you may be asked to leave.

**Reading:** There is required reading for nearly all class sessions. **Students who miss class must submit a brief summary (200-250 words) of each of that day's assigned readings to avoid losing significant points for participation/discussion.** Unless otherwise noted, all class readings are available in the "Course Content" section of Blackboard.

**Written work:** Students will complete several written assignments, each of which must be submitted electronically through the course Blackboard site. For these assignments, please see the course schedule and also the specific directions in the "Assignments" section of Blackboard. Late submissions will be penalized, typically by a deduction of one letter-grade.

**Oral work:** Students will do one informal presentation, in addition to participating regularly in group work and class discussions. Because discussion and in-class work are integral to this course, attendance will be taken.

**Grading:**

Course grades will be determined as follows:

- Secondary source analysis (due 9/23) 10%
- Primary source analysis (2 due by 10/21: 2 x 10%) 20%
- Petitions essay (due 11/11) 20%
- Final project abstract (due 12/2) 10%
- Final project annotated bibliography (due 12/2) 20%
- Overall class participation/discussion 20%

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact Disability Services at 703-993-2474, [http://ds.gmu.edu](http://ds.gmu.edu). All academic accommodations must be arranged through Disability Services.

Finally, please note that all students are subject to the George Mason University Honor Code (see [http://jiju.gmu.edu/catalog/apolicies/honor.htm](http://jiju.gmu.edu/catalog/apolicies/honor.htm)). The penalty for cheating or plagiarism on any assignment will be—at a minimum—a grade of F for this course.
Course Schedule

We will spend weeks 1-3 acquiring a basic understanding of Washington's world and, more generally, of early American history.


In-class: Analysis of articles and Mount Vernon virtual tour.


In-class: Analysis of articles and tentative discussion of topics for final projects.

For the remainder of the semester we will explore a variety of research sources and methods.

Wed. 16 Sept.: Secondary Sources (books and articles). Using the library catalog and *America: History and Life*. Guest: Dr. George Oberle, History Librarian and Affiliated Faculty

In-class: Secondary source searches and how to do Chicago/Turabian style citations.

Wed. 23 Sept.: Individual virtual meetings to discuss final projects. Students should prepare for their meetings by

1. Choosing a topic (either from the list on Blackboard or on your own)
2. Finding a relevant journal article by using *America: History and Life*
3. Completing and submitting (prior to their meeting) a secondary source analysis of that article. Directions for this assignment are on Blackboard.
**Primary sources:** Part of the purpose of exploring different types of primary sources is to help you to find research materials for your final projects. To that end, students must complete a Primary Source Analysis for one document from two of the next three weeks’ work (i.e., correspondence and personal papers; America’s Early Imprints; newspapers and magazines). **Regardless of which documents you choose, all work must be submitted by 1:30 on 10/21.** You may submit your analyses separately, especially if you think that having my comments (and a grade) from the first one will be useful for doing the second.


In-class: Search these databases and find more freely accessible digitized collections of personal papers pertaining to early American history.


In-class: How to search America’s Historical Imprints (video) and AHI scavenger hunt.


In-class: *Virginia Gazette, America’s Historical Newspapers, American Periodicals.*


In-class: Reading and evaluating historical prints; HarpWeek. Also, preparation for 10/28: group transcription of Hanover County anti-slavery petition (on Blackboard).

and Hampshire County anti-slavery petition. Guest: Prof. Christopher Hamner, Editor-in-Chief, Papers of the War Department, 1784-1800.

In-class: Transcribing emancipation petitions and interpreting War Department documents.


In-class: Fairfax County Historic Records (video) and Probing the Past digital archive.


**Wed. 18 Nov.: Historical Maps.** Read James P. Ambuske, et al., Visualizing Early America: Three Maps that Reveal the World at http://www.viseyes.org/mapscholar/?1019. (Read 25 pages of text and click on hyperlinks to see details of maps.) Guest: Dr. Jim Ambuske, Mount Vernon digital historian. Drafts of abstracts and annotated bibliographies due (optional).

---Thanksgiving Break---

**Wed. 2 Dec.: Presentations/Abstracts and Annotated Bibliographies Due**

**A Note on Research during the Pandemic**

Your annotated bibliographies must include primary and scholarly secondary sources—and, for the latter, both books and articles. Fortunately, for research in early American history, many credible and useful sources are available digitally, including the following:

- Open-source collections of primary sources, the most important of which is Founders Online.

- Databases to which the Mason library subscribes, which are available via the library catalog/website, the most important of which include America's Historical Imprints, Early American Newspapers, and American Periodicals. For more information, go to https://infoguides.gmu.edu/early-american.
• Digital editions of scholarly journals, also available from Fenwick Library. The best way to search for journal articles is by using the database *America: History and Life.*

That being said, you will also need to read or consult books to complete your final project. Fenwick Library has some (mostly recent) scholarly monographs available as ebooks; many other books are available electronically during the pandemic via Hathi Trust. For more information on Hathi Trust Emergency Access, see [https://timesync.gmu.edu/libnews/?p=10303](https://timesync.gmu.edu/libnews/?p=10303).

In addition, you will have access to actual books from the stacks via preorder and contactless pick-up. Inter-Library Loan is also available, albeit not as extensively as usual. For more information on library services during the fall semester, go to [https://library.gmu.edu/faq-page#t127n34362](https://library.gmu.edu/faq-page#t127n34362).

In the unlikely event that you cannot otherwise obtain access to a book that is absolutely essential for your topic, you can obviously buy it.