

HIST688
Digital Methods for Antebellum Military History
Fall 2020

[This document is a truncated and less-interesting version of the course website, available at <http://abbymullen.org/hist688/>. You should go there instead of looking at this.]

Welcome to the course website for HIST688: Digital Methods for Antebellum Military History (but if it's ok with you, I'm going to ditch the "digital methods for" part of the title; we will do digital stuff but as a means to an end, not an end to itself).

This is an online course, where we'll divide our time between synchronous and asynchronous activities. These activities will all direct our learning toward some specific objectives.

By the end of this class, you will:

Analyze how the antebellum military was used to cement American principles, explicit and implicit.
Evaluate the impact of the military on the antebellum United States and world.
Create a piece of digital historical storytelling about the antebellum military.

About

This class is a research seminar, but it might not look like you're used to. You should know a few key things about it.

First, the work you'll be doing in this class is not primarily for academics. Many, if not most, of you will not end up in an academic job, and so if you have a career in history, you'll likely be developing history for the public. Therefore, you need to practice creating historical content for non-historians and non-specialists.

Second, the work you'll be doing in this class will have a digital component. Don't be afraid! You don't need any prior digital experience in order to succeed in this class. But you do need to be willing to try things, fail, and try something else. This is the heart of digital work: iteration toward a goal. The more you're willing to be creative, the more success you'll have in this class.

Third, the work you'll be doing in this class is collaborative. I'm not going to force you to collaborate on your final project, but you may do so in groups of up to five people. But you are going to be collaborating on other portions of this course. No historian works alone, no matter how much they say they do. And nearly every historian works better when they receive feedback from their peers. So that's what we're going to do.

Fourth, the course will be a mixture of synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities. Neither of these parts is less important than the other; I expect full participation in both the sync and async bits.

What is the format of this class?

This is a 100% remote class. This means that you will interact with me and with your classmates online only. I will not be available for in-person office hours at any point during the semester.

This is a mostly synchronous class, though. We'll be using Zoom for our class meetings every week. There will be a few weeks that you may or may not have to attend class, but you should plan to be available every Tuesday from 7:20-10:00pm. If that isn't possible, that's ok—I'd appreciate a heads-up if possible, but I fully understand that life happens.

What do I need in order to make this class work?

This is, at its heart, a discussion class, so you'll need access to all the readings. However, I've made sure that all the books and articles assigned are available online either openly or through the library.

You'll need a computer in order to succeed in this class—it is, after all, a digital history class. It would be useful if you had a GMail address but I'm not going to force it. It would also be ideal if you had headphones that you can use during class, and an external microphone (which could be attached to your headphones), just so it's easier to be heard by your colleagues.

Why does this class exist?

This class exists because I care a lot about the antebellum military and I think you should too. You can't understand the early days of the United States without at least a little understanding of the military. Also, I'm a naval historian by discipline, but I'm a digital historian by praxis. I study the First Barbary War, and you'll probably hear a bit about that throughout the semester.

This class is also designed to help you gain some real-life skills that historians might need out in the wide world. I've never been anything but an academic myself, but military historians are, for the most part, not academics. They work in government, in museums, in the military itself, and in the private sector. So we're going to be prioritizing innovative ways of telling stories that can reach audiences that a typical military historian might encounter—in other words, the public!

Hopefully, you're also going to get to hear from some fantastic historians who are working in the field of military history, both academics and non-academics. One of the beauties of the online format is that we can talk to many people who would ordinarily be out of our reach. I hope you'll learn a lot from them.

Policies

You're all graduate students. I want you to be involved in creating the policies we'll observe in this class. But there are a few that are hard and fast ground rules that I will impose. They are these:

Be respectful. This is a discussion class, and you'll be interacting with your colleagues frequently, both synchronously and asynchronously. If you're prone to speak your mind, let others speak first. If you're certain you have the answer, listen before you speak.

Be responsive. I understand that this is a very tough semester for all of us. Things might go awry; you might not be able to get to all the things you want to get to. We can work through all of these problems, but only if you talk to me, and respond when I try to talk to you.

Be flexible. Things are going to change in this class as we go. Our lives might all change drastically. We'll certainly shift in our focus as I take into account what you want to think about. Be willing to go with the flow. I'll do my absolute best not to make changes without sufficient notice.

Life

We're all humans. This class is not your only responsibility. I know that. If there are things in your life that are making it hard for you to do your work, please let me know. If you're struggling with mental health, or

your work schedule is overwhelming, or you need help with time management or workload management, please talk to me privately.

University policies

See the George Mason University catalog for general policies, as well as the university statement on diversity. You are expected to know and follow George Mason's policies on academic integrity and the honor code. Please ask me if you have any questions about how these policies apply to this course. Please note the dates for dropping and adding this course from the academic calendar.

Accommodations for disability

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please talk to me and contact the Office of Disability Services at 703-993-2474 or <http://ods.gmu.edu>. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office. If you need to give me an accommodations form, you can send it to me via email. That said, if you need help about anything, or you have special circumstances that I need to know about to help you succeed in this class, please come talk to me. Special circumstances could be a disability, or childcare issues, or an aging parent who needs help, or a full-time job, or any number of other things. I can't help you unless you tell me that you need help.

Enrollment in this class

Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class.

Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes.

Last Day to Add: August 31

Last Day to Drop: September 15

After the last day to drop a class, withdrawing from this class requires the approval of the dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons. Undergraduate students may choose to exercise a selective withdrawal. See the Schedule of Classes for selective withdrawal procedures.

Assignments

This is a research seminar, so you will be creating a project that includes research. However, it is also going to require some technological skill as well. I'll be helping you with the process, but at some point, you may have to do some independent work to troubleshoot tech problems.

I'd strongly suggest that you not work too far ahead, as I reserve the right to alter the assignments as we go, due to shifts in student interests, new materials being released, or societal upheaval.

The assignments in this class boil down to three main categories: (1) participation; (2) responses; and (3) final project.

Participation

Participation in an online class can look like a lot of different things, and you're going to be assessing yourself on how well you do.

Our classes are mostly going to be synchronous, held on Zoom, but there will be a few weeks where you may not be part of the group that is meeting with me. You'll have asynchronous tasks to do during that time. Of course, showing up to the Zoom synchronous meetings is pretty important for participation. I

fully understand that things happen and you might miss a few; that's ok, but the more you miss, the harder it's going to be to make meaningful connections in the class.

Participation also looks like interacting with your classmates and me on our class Slack group. That's where we'll be doing some discussion and where you'll get help from me or your classmates. It's really important that you're engaged there.

You will be collaborating with one or more of your colleagues to lead discussion for one of our class periods. You may use your classmates' responses as a springboard, but be prepared with some of your own analysis as well.

Responses

Every week, you'll have some material to read, watch, or listen to. Doing the "reading" is a given; I expect you to come to every class meeting prepared. I'll also expect you to post a short response to the materials in our Slack channel for the week. This response should include:

Questions you still have after "reading"

Ways that you can synthesize all the materials

Thoughts you have on the reach or audience of these materials

Notice that a critique is not part of the response. If you have a critique, save it for our in-class discussion.

Final project: Virtual Staff Ride

The final project for the semester, which you'll actually be working on all semester long, is a virtual staff ride. Find more info about the project on its own page.

Schedule

Details about assignments and class activities are on the individual week's page. Please check there! All readings and activities are due on the day they're listed.

Week 1 (Tuesday, August 25, 2020): Why study military history? + American Revolution

Week 2 (Tuesday, September 1, 2020): Debates over a standing army and navy

Week 3 (Tuesday, September 8, 2020): Early naval wars / Podcasts

Week 4 (Tuesday, September 15, 2020): War of 1812 / Social media

Week 5 (Tuesday, September 22, 2020): Project workshop #1

* First self-assessment due by today at class time *

Week 6 (Tuesday, September 29, 2020): Seminole Wars and Indian removal* / Video games

* General topic and format for final project due by today at class time *

Week 7 (Tuesday, October 6, 2020): Slave rebellions + Africa Squadron*

Week 8 (Tuesday, October 13, 2020): No class—Mason Monday

Week 9 (Tuesday, October 20, 2020): Military science

Week 10 (Tuesday, October 27, 2020): Project workshop #2

* Second self-assessment due by today at class time *

Week 11 (Tuesday, November 3, 2020): Exploration in the West*

Week 12 (Tuesday, November 10, 2020): Mexican-American War*

Week 13 (Tuesday, November 17, 2020): Civil War

Week 14 (Tuesday, November 24, 2020): Project workshop #3

Week 15 (Tuesday, December 1, 2020): Final project presentations

* Final self-assessment due by today at class time *

Final project due December 8, 2020, at 12:00am

Topics with asterisks indicate student discussion leaders.