

History 677:
The Vietnam War
Spring 2023
Thurs. 7:20-10:00 PM on Zoom

Instructor: Prof. Lair (rhymes with "air")
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Office Hours: on Zoom by appointment



HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT: This is a traditional syllabus, but ours is an online course. You must still engage with Blackboard. There is *additional* information about the course, particularly assignments and required readings, in our Blackboard course page. This document is not a substitute for familiarizing yourself with *every folder and link* in our Blackboard course page.

IMPORTANT DATES

Jan. 26	First day of this class.	Feb. 14-27	Last day to drop (100% tuition penalty).
Jan. 30	Last day to add.	Mar. 13-17	Spring break.
Feb. 6	Last day to drop (no tuition penalty).	May 4	Last day of this class.
Feb. 13	Last day to drop (50% tuition penalty).	May 12	Final paper due.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will provide an introduction to the history and historiography of the Vietnam War, including the origins of the conflict; the strategy and diplomacy of the United States, North Vietnam, and the Viet Cong; individuals' experiences serving in the war on all sides; the environmental history of the conflict; war crimes; the antiwar movement; and the lessons and legacies of the Vietnam War in the United States.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Professional historians recognize that "history" is not an immutable set of facts, but rather a collection of competing interpretations. Historiography is the study of historical writing, bounded in this case by writings related to the Vietnam War. The emphasis in this seminar will be on the historiography of the Vietnam War. That is, we will examine a variety of approaches to the study of the war and its interpretations. We will examine several types of sources (a classic survey text, several argument-driven monographs written by professional historians, a journalist's polemic, a memoir, a diary, and a novel), considering the merits and weaknesses of each approach to the study of the past. For the monographs, we will pay special attention to how the author frames his or her research questions and the design of the research project to answer them.

Skills developed in the course include:

- Formal and informal writing.
- Textual analysis.
- Framing research and discussion questions.
- Researching and assembling bibliographies on a given topic.
- Public speaking, including participation in a discussion.
- Critical thinking.

Assessment will be based on introducing a book to the class, writing book reviews, and writing a lengthy final paper. Through their work, students will demonstrate the ability to:

- Identify, discuss, and evaluate a book's argument, sources, and methodology.
- Frame discussion and research questions.
- Conduct research into relevant secondary sources.
- Evaluate the quality, credibility, and limitations of the arguments presented by scholars working on similar topics.
- Connect issues in the readings to larger intellectual, political, or social concerns in American history.
- Effectively communicate ideas orally and in writing.

ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

Assessment will be based on the following items:

- Informed, constructive participation in every discussion: 20%
- Presenting one of the course readings to the class and drafting discussion questions: 20%
 - Students may not present on a book they review.
- Two short book reviews (750-1,000 words): 20%
 - Students may not review a book that they present.
- A long historiographical review essay on a subtopic of your choosing (4,000-5,000 words + citation and bibliography): 40%

Details on the writing assignments may be found on Blackboard under "Your Class Prep."

Informed, constructive participation in every discussion. (20%)

Our class is a community, at a time when we really need it! Your engagement in our community is appreciated but also required. I will give participation grades quarterly over the course of the semester so that you can track your progress.

Students are expected to come to class every week prepared to engage the evening's readings in depth. The ability to ask questions and discuss ideas is a vital part of your historical training, so silence is not an option. Students should prepare for discussion by taking careful notes and then writing a brief summary of each chapter. (The more prepared you are for class, the more comfortable you will feel sharing your ideas.)

Students who never participate in class will get a zero for their participation grade, meaning that the highest possible course grade would be 80%, or a B-. I track attendance, late arrivals, early departures, cameras on/off, preparation, participation, and the quality of participation for each student in each class. A grade of 0 is definitely possible for students who attend class but never participate.

Calculating Your Course Grade

Students are responsible for knowing how they are doing in their courses. The Blackboard grade center provides some hint at your course grade, but you should not regard the "Total" column (a column that instructors cannot delete) as the definitive statement on your course grade. You will have a clearer picture if you calculate your weighted grade manually using the following formula:

$$\begin{aligned} & (\text{participation average} \times .2) + (\text{reading presentation} \times .2) + \\ & (\text{book review 1} \times .1) + (\text{book review 2} \times .1) + (\text{historiographic essay} \times .4) \end{aligned}$$

If you're not sure how you're doing in the course, or you want to discuss your status or how to improve, you can also reach out to me!

How to Think About Grades

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.

How to Think About Grades as a Graduate Student

Graduate school is much less forgiving than undergraduate, because of how grades are handled.

- Graduate students must have at least a 3.0 to graduate and no more than 6 credits of C. (C+, C-, and D do not apply to graduate courses.)
- Graduate students who maintain less than a 3.0 (a B average) can be terminated from their graduate programs.
- Graduate students with multiple unsatisfactory grades (2 Fs; 3 Cs; or 1 F and 2 Cs) will be terminated from the University without earning their degree.
- In graduate programs with funding, students usually lose their funding with less than a 3.5.
- Students may not repeat classes for credit to replace a failing grade in the calculation of their GPA, as undergraduates are allowed to do.

Graduate programs are governed by a culture of excellence in which receiving a grade of B or B- suggests that there is something wrong with the student's process that deserves their attention. Frequent B grades, of any type, generally preclude admission to a doctoral program.

If you have questions or concerns about how you are doing in the course, please come see me.

Grading Scale

A+	97-100	B+	87-89	C	0-79
A	94-96	B	84-86	D	60-69
A-	90-93	B-	80-83	F	<60

COURSE 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 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. --Dr. Lair

Academic Integrity

Mason students are bound by an Honor Code (<http://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/full-honor-code-document/>), 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.

Plagiarism is the most common form of academic dishonesty in a course of this type. Writers must cite their sources when they quote a source verbatim (and they must use quotation marks); paraphrase a source closely; discuss information that is not common knowledge; rely on or discuss an author's interpretations. It is also academic dishonesty for a writer to deploy fake citations or to convey that they have read sources that they did not read.

The Office of Academic Integrity also discusses plagiarism 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.

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.

Cameras & Audio

In order to foster a productive learning environment, **students must have their cameras on during class** and be able to engage in discussion. If you have technology problems that preclude your camera being on or inhibit your participation in discussion, you will need to discuss that with me.

- I also recommend that you put Zoom in "Gallery" mode during class so that you can see everyone in the class rather than just the person speaking.

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 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 677."** I do not recommend hitting "reply" to the automated emails I send you, nor do I recommend emailing me through Bb, because I have never been able to master the weird "Messages" feature.

Decorum

I expect you to be physically and intellectually present in our synchronous online class, to behave in a professional way, and to be respectful of others. If you wouldn't do it in an in-person class, you probably shouldn't be doing it in our online class sessions. Please review "Our Zoom Classroom" for specifics on etiquette in our synchronous classroom and during office hours.

Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability and need academic accommodations, please see me privately and contact Disability Services (<https://ds.gmu.edu/>). 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. Accommodations 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 you 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.

- **Phones:** Please silence your phone and put it away during our synchronous online class.
- **Computers:** 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: by appointment

I encourage you to meet with me online to discuss any facet of the course. We can address brief concerns after class. For longer conversations, or if you want to speak privately, please reach out about setting up a meeting on Zoom.

Submitting Your Work

You will submit your work as Word documents (not PDFs) via the assignment portals found under "Your Class Prep" in the week the assignment is due. When saving your files, please label them as follows: **Your_Last_Name.HIST677.Name_of_Assignment.SP23.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/.](https://registrar.gmu.edu/calendars/)) Major Registrar deadlines may be found in the course schedule.

Zoom Etiquette

Please visit "Our Zoom Classroom" in the left-hand menu of our Blackboard course page to learn more about course Zoom policies and expectations.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE BLACKBOARD COURSE SITE

This document is not a substitute for familiarizing yourself with the contents of every link and folder in our Blackboard course site. Sections not included in this document:

- Zoom Etiquette, How-To's, and Troubleshooting
- Your Class Prep
 - This section includes details on every night of class, assignment specifics, and the assignment upload portals.
- General Requirements for Written Work (formatting guidelines for every paper)
- Course Handouts
- Discussion Board (where you have homework for the first night of class)
- Supplemental Information:
 - Blackboard Help
 - Research Help for History Grad Students
 - Campus Resources
 - Mental Health and Interpersonal Violence Resources

REQUIRED COURSE READINGS

Students are required to read the following books. Students will sign up for book reviews to ensure consistent attention to each week's readings. Additional details for each night's class, including assignments and assigned handouts, may be found on Blackboard under "Your Class Prep."

Week	Date	Reading
1	January 26	Course handouts
2	February 2	Herring, <i>America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975</i> (4th, 5th, or 6th edition)
3	February 9	Moyar, <i>Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-65</i>
4	February 16	Chapman, <i>Cauldron of Resistance: Ngo Dinh Diem, The United States and 1950s Southern Vietnam</i>
5	February 23	Selverstone, <i>The Kennedy Withdrawal: Camelot and the American Commitment to Vietnam</i>
6	March 2	Longley, <i>Grunts: The American Combat Soldier in Vietnam</i>
7	March 9	Brigham, <i>ARVN: Life and Death in the South Vietnamese Army</i>
8	March 16	Spring break – no class!
9	March 23	Biggs, <i>Footprints of War: Militarized Landscapes in Vietnam</i>
10	March 30	Tang, <i>A Viet Cong Memoir</i> - OR - Tram, <i>Last Night I Dreamed of Peace</i>
11	April 6	Turse, <i>Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam</i>
12	April 13	Daddis, <i>Withdrawal: Reassessing America's Final Years in Vietnam</i>
13	April 20	Bao Ninh, <i>The Sorrow of War: A Novel of North Vietnam</i>
14	April 27	Grace, <i>Kent State: Death and Dissent in the Long Sixties</i>
15	May 4	Appy, <i>American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and Our National Identity</i>
16	May 12	Final paper due.

Style Manual

Graduate students should also have access to a style manual. Standard, for historians, is the *Chicago Manual of Style*, which is condensed in very usable form in Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. The University Library subscribes to the complete [Chicago Manual of Style online](#). (If the link doesn't work: <http://library.gmu.edu/> >> Databases >> *Chicago Manual of Style*.)

Sourcing the Course Readings

There are multiple ways to acquire the course readings:

- Order them through the GMU campus bookstore, which is also a Barnes & Noble.
- Order them through a brick-and-mortar bookstore.
- Purchase or rent them from an online bookseller.
- Borrow a copy from the GMU Library or the Washington Research Library Consortium.
- Borrow a copy from your local public library.

If you have difficulty sourcing the books, please come talk to me.