

**HIST-300**  
**Introduction to Historical Methods: Washington's World**  
**Fall 2023**

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Office: Horizon Hall 3165

Office hours: M 12-1, W 4-6, or by appointment (in-person or via Zoom)

Class meets in Innovation Hall, rm. 330, unless otherwise noted below.

This course uses the broad topic of the world of Fairfax County's most prominent citizen (George Washington) to introduce History majors to the methodology of researching, interpreting, and writing history. Students who enroll in this class develop research and writing skills by completing various 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 content of this course focuses primarily on the development of research and writing skills. A library skills session will introduce students to different types of sources historians use for their research; follow-up sessions on each of these various categories of resources will take up much of our class time for the remainder of the semester.

The final project for this course will be a 10-12-page paper based substantially on research in primary sources. For their final papers, all students will utilize documents from the [Library of Virginia's Legislative Petitions collection](#), which have been digitized and are accessible online. In particular, this class will be using eighty petitions that an individual or group of citizens from northern Virginia counties (Fairfax, Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William) submitted to the state legislature between 1776 and 1800 concerning the following issues: divorce, religion, slavery, and war claims/pensions.

As we shall see, petitions are incredibly rich sources for both political and social history. On the one hand, most legislation enacted by Virginia's General Assembly during this period was passed in response to citizens' petitions. On the other hand, in asking legislators for their favor or assistance, petitioners often told detailed personal stories. Because anyone, regardless of their status, had the right to petition, these documents are especially good sources for insights into the lives of non-famous people, including women, enslaved people, free Black people, and poor white men—all of whom, in this period, lacked most other political rights.

Your final paper need not be about petitions or draw entirely on these documents. Reading some petitions is intended to simulate the experience of going to the archives, the process by which historians often come up with the questions to begin their research projects. What were the experiences of disabled veterans of the American Revolution? How did white Virginians think about slavery in this revolutionary era? How did some Black Virginians find opportunities to escape enslavement? How and why did some Virginians begin to seek divorces during this period? What was the community-level impact of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, which established the separate of Church and State in the commonwealth?

Our workshop-style class is scheduled to meet once weekly, on Mondays between 1:30 and 4:10. Some weeks we will devote that entire (very long) class period to course-related subject matter. Other weeks, when we have less material to cover, our meetings may be shorter. The workshop approach is designed to enable students to do some—though certainly not all—of their research in class with the help of the instructor, who will be available during and after class to help students with their research projects. The requirement to submit a draft of the semester project approximately two weeks before the final due date should help students to produce quality work (and get quality grades).

Because there are relatively few class meetings and because we will be doing a significant amount of work in class, missing class increases the likelihood of receiving an unsatisfactory grade for this course.

A few other points:

- You will need a Mason ID card for this class (to check books out of the library). If you do not have a Mason ID, go to Sub 1, Room 1203, to get one sometime before our 10/2 library session. For more information, see <https://masonid.gmu.edu/about-mason-id/>.
- Please bring a laptop to class. Students will need access to online materials for all class sessions. A tablet might suffice, but please do not expect to use your phone to do research.
- On class days, all written work is due by 1:30 (when class meets); essay drafts and final projects (which will be submitted on non-class days) must be submitted by 5:00 p.m.
- The university provides many student services—including help with writing, counseling, and accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information on resources and support services for undergraduates, go to <https://historyarthistory.gmu.edu/undergraduate/resources-and-support-services>.

Finally, HIST-300 is designated as Mason Impact + RS course and is part of [Mason Impact](#). As a result, several opportunities are available to you as students in this course:

- You can receive a line on your transcript that highlights the name of their your research project by uploading your project via the portal on the [student section of the Mason Impact website](#).
- You can receive a [MINI Grant](#) for up to \$500 to complete your research project. Applications will be considered on a rolling basis until April 20, 2024.
- You can continue your work from this course as part of the [Undergraduate Research Scholars Program \(URSP\)](#).
- You can share the results of your research project at the [Celebration of Student Scholarship and Impact](#).

### **Course Requirements:**

Students are expected to follow the course schedule, which is set out in detail below. 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 a modest amount of required reading to prepare 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 Reading" section of Blackboard.

**Written work:** Students will complete several written assignments, each of which must be submitted via Blackboard. For these assignments, please see the course schedule and also the specific directions for each 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 in-class work and 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 of book (due 10/10) 10%
- Secondary source analysis of article (due 10/16) 10%
- Primary source analysis (due 10/30) 15%
- Annotated bibliography (due 11/6) 10%
- Draft of paper introduction (due 11/13) 10%
- Draft of final essay with un-annotated bibliography (due 11/17) 10%
- Final essays (due 12/4) 20%
- Participation (including oral presentation) 15%

### **Course Schedule**

**Monday 21 August: Introductory Session.** Read "Legislative Petitions," at <https://lva-virginia.libguides.com/c.php?g=1230709&p=9006439> and "Two Revolutionary War Petitions," at <https://uncommonwealth.virginiamemory.com/blog/2022/03/09/two-revolutionary-war-petitions/> (Use these lives links or cut and paste them via Course Readings in Blackboard.)

**Monday 28 August: The Revolutionary Era and Its Petitioners.** Read Brent Tarter, *Virginians and their Histories*, chap. 8, "Independence and Revolution"; "Petitions—What Can We Do with a List of Names?," at <https://evidenceexplained.com/index.php/content/quicklesson-14-petitions%E2%80%94what-can-we-do-list-names> Guest: Brent Tarter, Library of Virginia. (Modality TBD.)

**Monday 4 September: Labor Day—no class**

**Monday 11 September: Historical background/context (divorce and religion).** Read Glenda Riley, "Legislative Divorce in Virginia, 1803-1850," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 11 (1991): 51-67; John A. Ragosta, "Fighting for Freedom: Virginia Dissenters' Struggle for Religious Liberty during the American Revolution," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 116 (2008): 226-61; and six pre-transcribed representative examples of divorce and religion petitions.

In-class: reading and transcribing [select] divorce and religion petitions; brainstorming possible research topics utilizing these documents.

**Monday 18 September: Historical background/context (slavery and war/pensions).** Read Fredrika Teute Schmidt and Barbara Ripel Wilhelm, "Early Proslavery Petitions in Virginia," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., 30 (1973): 133-46; Cynthia A. Kierner, *Southern Women in Revolution, 1776-1800: Personal and Political Narratives*, chap. 2, and six pre-transcribed representative examples of slavery and war/pensions petitions.

In-class: work on [select] slavery and war/pensions petitions; brainstorming possible research topics utilizing these documents.

**Monday 25 September: Individual meetings to discuss specific topics and research strategies (Horizon 3165).** Please send me an email stating your area of interest and a tentative topic in advance of our meeting.

**Monday 2 October: Library instructional session with Dr. George Oberle, Fenwick Library 1014A.** Read Zachary M. Schrag, *The Princeton Guide to Historical Research*, chapter 8, "Finding Sources" (pp. 172-85).

In-class: During the library instruction session, each student will:

1. Use the library catalog to find a book that is relevant to their research topic. If the book is a physical object (as opposed to an ebook), they will go to the stacks, find the book, and check it out of the library. Students will read the relevant parts of their books and report on them in our next class meeting (Tuesday 10 October).
2. Use the *America: History and Life* database to find a scholarly article that is relevant to their research topic. Students will read the entire article and report on it in our next class meeting (Tuesday 10 October).

**Tuesday 10 October: Secondary sources: books, articles, and citations.** Read Lindsay M. Chervinsky, "Why Bad History Isn't Just Bad, It's Dangerous," *Reviews in American History*, 47 (2019): 559-63; Zachary M. Schrag, *The Princeton Guide to Historical Research*, chapter 12, "Taking Notes" (pp. 246-58); "History Citation Guide."

In-class: Discussion of assigned reading; (informal) book/article reports; finding articles using *America: History and Life*; note-taking strategies; notes and bibliographies.

**\*\*Secondary source analysis (book) due.**

**Monday 16 October: Primary sources: Correspondence and Personal Papers.** Read David S. Ferriero, "The American Founders Online," *History News*, 66 (Spring 2011): 7-11, and *People of the Founding Era* (database); Zachary M. Schrag, *The Princeton Guide to Historical Research*, chapter 13, "Introductions" (pp. 281-90) and "Topic Sentences" (pp. 294-97). Guest: Katie Blizzard, Research Editor, Center for Digital Editing and Papers of George Washington.

**\*\*Secondary source analysis (article) due.**

**Monday 23 October: Doing Local History Research. Visit to the Virginia Room, Fairfax County Public Library, with librarian Jenna Wolf.**

**Monday 30 October: Primary sources: Government documents.** Guest: Prof. Christopher Hamner, Editor-in-Chief, *Papers of the War Department, 1784-1800*. Read John P. Resch, "Federal Welfare for Revolutionary War Veterans," *Social Service Review*, 56 (1982): 171-95.

In-class: Explore *PWD* and *Southern Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements & Rosters*.

**\*\*Primary source analysis (three petitions) due.**

**Monday 6 November: Primary Sources: *America's Historical Imprints (non-periodical print culture)*** Read A. G. Roeber, "'The Scrutiny of the Ill Nattered Ignorant Vulgar': Lawyers and Print Culture in Virginia, 1716 to 1774," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 91 (1983): 387-417.

In-class: Discussion of reading; scavenger hunt and research; writing your introduction.

**\*\*Annotated bibliography due.**

**Monday 13: November: Primary sources: *Periodicals (newspapers and magazines)*.** Read Roger P. Mellen, "An Expanding Public Sphere: Women and Print in Colonial Virginia, 736-1776," *American Journalism*, 27 (2010): 7-35; Richard R. John and Thomas C. Leonard, "The Illusion of the Ordinary: John Lewis Krimmel's Village Tavern and the Democratization of Public Life in the Early Republic," *Pennsylvania History*, 65 (1998): 87-96.

In-class: Discussion of assigned readings; scavenger hunt and research in early American newspapers and magazines.

**\*\*Draft of final paper introduction due. I will return them with my comments in time to revise, if needed, before submitting full drafts on Friday.**

**Friday 17 November: Drafts due by 5:00 p.m.** I will return these drafts, with comments, before we meet on Monday.

**Monday 20 November: Individual meetings to discuss drafts and revisions (Zoom).**

**Monday 27 November: Student presentations.**

**\*\*Revised final papers due on Monday 4 December by 5:00 p.m.\*\***