HISTORY 319--THE VIETNAM WARS  
Department of History  
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Fall 1992  
Mr. McCoy

I. COURSE PROCEDURES:-

Class Meetings: Lectures by Mr. McCoy on Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:30 to 3:45 pm. In addition, students will attend a one-hour discussion section each week conducted by Mr. Dave Streckfuss.

Office Hours: For Mr. McCoy, in Room 5131 Humanities, Monday, 1:00-2:00 p.m. and 5:00-6:00 p.m. and other hours by appointment (TEL: 263-1855). For Mr. Streckfuss, Room 5269 Humanities (TEL: 263-1868), Tuesdays, 11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. or other hours by appointment.

Readings: Reflecting the controversy surrounding the subject, there is no single text for the study of the Vietnam Wars. Instead, the syllabus covers each topic with journal articles and book extracts, divided into "Required" and "Background" readings. To follow the lectures and their unfamiliar material, students should read selections from the "required" materials before the relevant lecture. In preparing essays on subjects related to the lecture topics, consult the "background" readings for bibliographic references. These readings are available from several sources:

a.) Textbook--Required:
   James Gibson, The Perfect War.
   Ngo Vinh Long, Before the Revolution.
   Neil Sheehan, Bright Shining Lie.

b.) Textbooks--Strongly Recommended:
   George McT. Kahin, Intervention.

c.) Xeroxed Course Pack:
   The Letters & Sciences Copy Center in Room 1650, Humanities Building is selling a photocopied course-pack with most of the required readings. Note: Readings found in the course-pack are marked with an asterisk (*).

d.) Libraries:
   The Reserve Room in H.C. White Library has most of the required and many of the background readings on reserve.
   The Memorial Library has, with few exceptions, all the books and journal articles cited in the syllabus.

Grading: Students shall complete three pieces of written work. In mid-October students shall take a mid term examination, comprising a take-home exam and an in-class quiz. On November 24th, students shall submit a 2,500 word research essay with full footnotes and bibliographic references. During examination week, students shall take a two-hour final examination. Final grade shall be computed as follows:

--mid term take-home examination: 15%
--mid term in-class quiz: 10%
--research essay: 30%
--discussion section mark: 20%
--final examination: 25%
Course Requirements: For each of these assignments, there are different requirements for both the amount and form of work to be done:

a.) Mid term in-class quiz: A list of definitions (people, places and terms) will be distributed in class on Monday, October 12th, and a 20 minute in-class quiz based on this list will be given on Wednesday, October 14th.

b.) Mid term take-home examination: Select a single question from list distributed in the lecture on Wednesday, October 14th, turn in a five-page typed essay, with full endnote citations, at the start of class on Monday, October 19th.

c.) Research Essay: Following format instructions under Paragraph V below, complete a 15 page research essay on one of the topics listed in Paragraph III below. Students should meet with Mr. Streckfuss personally during the week of November 2nd to discuss their listings of sources and present brief outlines for the essay. Essays should combine primary and secondary sources, specifically a minimum of 12 references to journal articles and books (at least two not found on the syllabus) for all essays and at least 12 articles from the New York Times for topics after 1945. The essay must be turned in at the History Department office, 3211 Humanities, by 4:00 p.m., Tuesday, November 24th.

d.) Discussion Section Mark: Based on your attendance and participation, the instructor, Mr. Streckfuss, will assign you a mark for your performance in the discussion section.

e.) Final Examination: The examination will be held at 5:00 pm on Saturday, December 19th at a place to be announced. In the space of two hours, students will answer two questions to be selected from a longer list. In the penultimate lecture, students will be asked to suggest examination questions which will be edited and distributed during the final lecture. Thus, the examination will require answers to two questions--one seen in advance and one unseen.

f.) Film: The 13-part PBS television documentary by Stanley Karnow will be shown after the Monday lecture each week. Since this film was broadcast as a companion to our textbook, it is well worth viewing. Time and place to be announced.

Skills Training: As explained in Part IV below, a portion of the course will be devoted to teaching basic skills necessary for the study of history at the university level.

II. LECTURES & READINGS [*Reading in Course Pack]:-

WEEK 1 (September 2): The Historic Vietnamese State

Required Reading:-


Background Reading:


WEEK 2 (September 9): French Conquest of The Last Dynasty

Required Reading:


Steinberg, David Joel, ed., In Search of Southeast Asia (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1987), pp. 69-75, 128-138.*

Background Reading:-


Truong Buu Lam, Patterns of Vietnamese Response to Foreign Intervention: 1858-1900 (New Haven: Yale University, Southeast Asia Studies, 1967), pp. 1-34.

WEEK 3 (September 14): Economic & Social Impact of French Rule

Required Reading:-


Background Reading:-


Hue-Tam Ho Tai, Millenarianism and Peasant Politics in Vietnam (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1983), chapters 1, 4, 5, 6, 7.


**WEEK 4 (September 21): Origins of Nationalist Resistance**

**Required Reading:--**


**Background Reading:--**


WEEK 5 (September 28): Rise of the Indochina Communist Party

**Required Reading:**


**Background Reading:**


WEEK 6 (October 5): World War II in Vietnam

**Required Reading:**


**Background Reading:**


WEEK 7 (October 12): The First Indochina War, 1946-1952

**Required Reading:**


**Background Reading:**


**WEEK 8 (October 19): Revolutionary Victory in North Vietnam**

**Required Reading:**


**Background Reading:**


**Background Reading--North Vietnam's Social Revolution:**


**WEEK 9 (October 26): Rise & Fall of the Diem Regime**

**Required Reading:**


**Background Reading:**


WEEK 10 (November 2): The NLF vs. CIA--The Battle for the Villages

Required Reading:-


Background Reading:-


Nguyen Thi Dinh, No Other Road To Take (Ithaca: Data Paper #102, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1972).


Race, Jeffrey, War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province (Berkeley: University of California, 1972), pp. 3-43.


Required Reading:-


Background Reading:


Race, Jeffrey, War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province (Berkeley: University of California, 1972), pp. 105-140.


WEEK 12 (November 16): The American War In Vietnam, 1969-1972

**Required Reading:**


**Background Reading:**


WEEK 13 (November 23): Second Indochina War--Laos & Cambodia

**Required Reading--Laos:**


Required Reading--Cambodia:-


Background Reading--Laos:-


Background Reading--Cambodia:-


WEEK 14 (November 30): American Retreat & Defeat in Vietnam

Required Reading:-


Background Reading:-


Snepp, Frank, Decent Interval: The American Debacle in Vietnam and the Fall of Saigon (New York: Random House, 1977), pts. 2, 3

WEEK 15 (December 7): Postwar Indochina--Crisis of Socialism

Required Reading:-


Background Reading:-


III. MAJOR ESSAY QUESTIONS:-

1.) Analyze the role of Confucianism in traditional Vietnamese society. Did it facilitate Vietnam's later acceptance of Marxism?
2.) Analyze the nature of Vietnamese nationalism, discussing both its traditional roots and modern variations.

3.) Discuss the French economic impact upon Vietnam and its relation to the emergence of an anti-colonial movement.

4.) Analyze the factors underlying the emergence of the Indochina Communist Party as the dominant group within the nationalist movement by 1941.

5.) Discuss the impact of World War II upon the Vietnamese nationalist movement.

6.) Discuss the reasons for France's defeat in the First Indochina War (1946-1954).

7.) Analyze the role of the United States in the rise and fall of Ngo Dinh Diem. Why did he fail to become a credible alternative to the communist movement?

8.) Discuss the character of the Vietnamese village and explain why the US directed pacification policy failed there between 1959 and 1968.

9.) Discuss the nature of US political military strategy in Vietnam from 1965-1969 and explain its limitations.

10.) Analyze the US "Vietnamization" policy between 1969 and 1975, and explain the factors that inhibited its success.

11.) Compare and contrast the impact of US political and military policy upon Cambodia and Laos between 1968 and 1975.

12.) Explain the factors underlying North Vietnam's defeat of the Saigon government between 1972 and 1975.

IV. BASIC SKILLS FOR HISTORY COURSES:

1.) Learning Basic Skills: Aside from some basic understanding of Vietnam's history, the main objective of this course is to teach certain basic research, writing, and analytical skills. In lectures and discussion sections, we will try to improve skills essential to success in most liberal arts courses.

a.) Definitions: Much of the conceptual content in liberal arts courses is encapsulated and conveyed through a limited number of basic terms that must be defined to be understood. Hence, we will seek to help you learn to identify such conceptual terms and define them.

b.) Questions: Most students approach the study of History as a pursuit of answers, while many professional historians often view their discipline as a search for better questions. This course will try to make students more aware of the nature and construction of historical questions.

c.) Reading: Faced with a mass of information, students must learn to read both intensively and extensively--summarizing key theses and skimming a range of sources for evidence.
Argument: As you write, you must try to be self-conscious in the construction of your argument.

1. Thesi s: Define your question and form a thesis to answer it.

2. Evidence: Learn the nature of appropriate evidence to defend your thesis.

3. Illustration: Illustrate your evidence with specific examples appropriate in kind and quality to your thesis.

4. Correspondence: Seek a close correspondence of thesis and evidence.

5. Comparison: After learning to summarize individual arguments, students should learn to compare—both the theses of contradictory arguments and parallel historical cases.

V. FORMAT & PROCEDURES FOR RESEARCH ESSAY:

1.) Prose:
   a.) Procedure:
       1.) By hand write out an outline of about 2 pages for a 10-page essay. Each projected paragraph in the essay should be a line in your outline.
       2.) Write a first draft. If using a personal computer, there is a very real possibility that it will read like a long, chatty letter home, not a major research essay.
       3.) Reading aloud to yourself, if necessary, edit the prose and produce a second draft.

   b.) Sentences:
       1.) Each sentence should be a complete sentence with subject, verb, and direct object.
       2.) Vary your sentences—short, periodic sentences; simple compound sentences; compound sentences with clauses in apposition; and longer sentences communicating detail.

   c.) Paragraphs:
       1.) Start your paragraph with a periodic or compound sentence stating the basic message of this particular paragraph.
       2.) Varying your sentence structure, elaborate and expand this theme into a fully developed paragraph.
       3.) Within the paragraph, try to link your sentences so that they flow from one to another.
       4.) Paragraphs should not be too long. If you need a crude guide, have 3 to a page, or 8 to 10 typed lines each.

   d.) Aspire to style:
       1.) There is a music—with melody and rhythm—to prose. Sensitize your mind’s ear to the music of prose and try to make your own word music. Try to make your writing an expression of your inner voice.
       2.) As in all forms of social discourse, there is an appropriate style for an academic essay.
           a.) Use a formal voice—not ponderous, just formal.
           b.) Avoid contractions (can’t, didn’t).
           c.) Avoid colloquialisms (e.g., “Colonialism in Southeast Asia was really heavy.”)
       3.) In short, adopt a tone or voice somewhere between the chatty colloquial and the ponderous.
2.) Argument:
   a.) Overall structure: Every scientific report, whether natural or social, has 3 basic elements:
      1.) The Problem: In your introduction, state the problem clearly.
         a.) If necessary, you should give your definition of any key terms that
             require a specific usage (e.g., "revolution," if the question asks, for
             example, "Was the 1896 revolution in the Philippines a social revolution?")
         b.) In stating your problem, refer to the literature in the syllabus, not
             something you have seen recently on CNN.
         c.) A standard and often effective device is to identify two differing schools
             of thought about a single problem.
         d.) Make sure you are examining the main point, not a minor side issue.
      2.) The Evidence: In the middle part of your essay, you must present evidence--in
         logical order--to deal with the problem posed at the beginning of your essay. Be
         specific--give the reader brief narratives of an event, or provide some statistical
         evidence.
      3.) The Conclusion: In the final page or two of your essay, reflect on the problem
         as stated in the introduction in light of the evidence you presented in the middle part
         of the essay. Stretch the data you present for clarity, but do not exaggerate or over­
         extend the usefulness of your data.
   b.) Level of Argument: It is difficult to spell out in precise terms what I mean by "level of
      argument."
      1.) To overstate the case, you should not deal with the question of "the impact of
          French colonialism in the Mekong Delta" by probing the problem of whether "the
          French made life in Vietnam happier for the natives."
      2.) How do you define an appropriate question and level of analysis? Simple.
          You can sensitize yourself to the question by reading several sources with diverse
          viewpoints and approaches.
   c.) The Nature of History Questions: In courses such as this one, history involves the
      study of change in large-scale human communities, societies and nations, over time. Most
      history essays ask you to understand or explain two aspects of change--events and their
      causes, or, simply, what happened and why it happened. Thus, most history questions
      ask you to explain elements of the following
      1.) In a limited time period, explain the factors underlying a given event. Why did
          that event happen?
      2.) Explain the impact that an event, such as a war or revolution, had upon a human
          community within a period succeeding the actual event.
      3.) Over a longer period of time, explain how and why complex communities
          changed in a given way.

3.) Sources/Research:
   a.) Need to Read:
      1.) Like most essays, a history term paper is a distillation of its author's reading
          and reflections upon the subject at hand. The quality of an essay's expression and
          analysis reflects, subtly but ineluctably, the depth and diversity of its author's
          reading.
      2.) Conversely, if you do not read, then you cannot have anything of any
          substance to say on a subject.
   b.) Basic Format:
      1.) Assuming 3 paragraphs per page, you should have one source note per
          paragraph.
      2.) Every idea that is not your own and every major body of data you use in your
          essay should be sourced. In particular, quotations must be sourced.
3.) You may use end notes or footnotes in the following format:


c.) How to Read for an Essay:

1.) Using the course syllabus, begin with a general text to get an overview of the problem.

2.) Using the syllabus or textbook references, select more specific sources.

3.) As you read, begin forming ideas in your mind about:

(a) your overall hypothesis, and;

(b) the evidence you need or have found to support your argument.

4.) As you read, take notes, either on paper, or in the margin of a photocopy of the source. As you take notes, make sure you have the bibliographic information for your source: author, title, place of publication, publisher, and relevant pages.

5.) Towards the end of your reading, draw up an outline of the essay. If you are missing sources for the argument you would like to present, then do additional reading.