

Senior Seminar: The JFK Presidency – revised Sept. 6, 2017

History 4399

Online, CRN 80139

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This is the senior “capstone” course in history in which students research and write history at a high level. The goal is for each student to write a research paper of conceivably publishable quality at the end of term. The vehicle we shall use for this purpose is the presidency of John F. Kennedy (1961-63). The reason is twofold. The first, of course, is its significance to modern American history. The second, more important for our purposes, is that the archive of the Kennedy presidency is essentially wholly online and accessible to us. The John F. Kennedy Presidential Library has digitized a great portion of its collections, and we can consult these materials digitally.

Thus the course is not so much a content course in the JFK presidency so much as it uses this presidency as a vehicle so that we might hone our skills as budding historians. The availability of the sources ensures that this experience will be a rich one.

Topics taken up in the course include the nature of historiography, how to choose a topic, the difference between “topics” and “problems,” embarking on research, the difference between primary and secondary (and tertiary) sources, the assembling of evidence in view of a topic, making arguments from evidence, and writing narrative. In the offering, we shall also have a great deal to say about this momentous presidency itself.

There is one book which the students are required to read, John Lukacs: *A Student's Guide to the Study of History* (ISI Books). It sells for about \$8 online.

The website we shall use is at the JFK Library is this:
<https://www.jfklibrary.org/Research.aspx>

Assignments:

Early/mid-Sept.: Brief reflection on Lukacs (5%)

Mid-Sept: Topics exercise (5%)

Late Sept: Topics and sources exercise (10%)

Early Oct.: Secondary source exercise (10%)

Mid-Oct.: Topics and sources redux (10%)

Late Oct: Precis (10%)

Early December: Final Paper (40%)

Participation (10%)

Fine print: <http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/> and This is a “W” course, which means that at least 50 percent of your course grade will derive from writing activities designed to help you master course objectives. Writing in this course is one of the tools your instructor will use to help you learn course material. Some writing activities will require you to draft and revise your work, with or without instructor feedback. Others may not receive a grade but are designed to assist you in critical reflection of the course material. You should approach writing in this course as a tool to use as part of your learning as well as a tool your instructor will use to assess your level of learning.