

History 4399 online  
History Senior Seminar  
3 hours  
Spring 2018  
CRN 21215

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This senior seminar is a “capstone” course for history majors—and other interested parties—the aim being to introduce students to the methods of producing written history from scratch. This will be our objective, and our vehicle will be one of the legendary episodes in modern American history, the presidency of John F Kennedy.

Here is how the course works. The final goal will be for each student to write a substantial research paper based on primary sources, upwards of 10-15 pages, handed in at the end of term. Throughout the term, we learn how to do that, as students embark on research projects of their own choosing, with other smaller assignments coming in tow. We learn how to choose a topic, find and analyze sources, assess secondary literature, make an argument, and write. While doing all this, we turn over much fascinating material about the Kennedy era, the early 1960s. We write a good research paper, and we learn about that time – that’s what we end up with in this course.

Why JFK? First, because of his magnetic hold on the American imagination, uninterrupted to this day. Second, more practical: his archives are accessible to us, about 3 million documents’ worth. The John F. Kennedy Presidential Library in Boston has put an enormous amount of its material online. Here is the site:

<https://www.jfklibrary.org/Research.aspx>

There is one book all of us will read, and it comes at the beginning. This is John Lukacs’s *A Student’s Guide to the Study of History* (ISI Books). You can get it online for \$8. This is the first thing we shall read, so please lay your hands on it. After that, we shall wade into the JFK presidency and the archives over the successive weeks.

Assignments are as follows:

1. A 1-pp. reflection of Lukacs’s perspective on history. Due **Feb. 2**.
2. A sample of two sources from the JFK period with brief commentary and analysis. Due **Feb. 16**.

3. A brief summary of a historian's treatment about some theme in the JFK period. (Sometimes called "annotated bibliography.") Due **March 2**.
4. A "précis" (or summary) of your research project. Due **March 9**.
5. A brief discussion of (at least) two sources of different genres which you will be calling on in the paper. Due **March 30**.
6. Optional: draft of paper. Due **April 13**.
7. Paper Due **May 4**.

Since this is an online course, it is understood that the flow of student schedules can warrant deadline flexibility. It is important that we do each of these items in sequence, but if any particular deadline is a problem, we can work it out together.

**Grading:**

Assignments 1-5: 10% each; assignment 7, 40%; class participation, 10%.

Fine print: <http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/>