

## LIBA 497

### *Dien Bien Phu to Paris: America's Involvement in Vietnam, 1954-1975*

Instructor: Randy Pease  
Department of English  
[rpease@usi.edu](mailto:rpease@usi.edu)  
LA3047, 812/461-5211

#### **Required Texts:**

1. Baritz, Loren. *Backfire*. Johns Hopkins. Baltimore, 1998.
2. Hayslip, Le Ly. *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*. Penguin. New York, 1990.
3. Herr, Michael. *Dispatches*. Vintage. New York, 1991.
4. Katsiaficas, George. *Vietnam Documents*. Sharpe. New York, 1992.
5. Sheehan, Neil. *A Bright Shining Lie*. Vintage. New York, 1988.
6. Small, Melvin. *Antiwarriors*. Scholarly Resources. Wilmington, 2002.
7. O'Brien, Tim. *The Things They Carried*. Broadway. New York, 1998.
8. Chung & Bowen, eds. *6 Vietnamese Poets*. Curbstone. Willimantic, CT, 2002.

#### **Course Objectives:**

A senior level seminar that synthesizes politics, pop culture, literature, and social concerns through the examination of America's involvement in the internal affairs of Vietnam, beginning with covert operations in 1954 and ending with the evacuation of American personnel from Saigon in 1975. The class will utilize literature, historical archives, declassified government documents, film, and music to objectively analyze the perspectives and the continuing impact of the Vietnam War. The primary objective in this class is to get you to think more critically and intelligently about how a democracy works through an educated and active citizenry so that you may have the option of becoming a more integral part of that citizenry when you graduate.

#### **Assignments:**

This course is reading intensive. To pass, you must keep up with the reading assignments and provide evidence of that through meaningful and intelligent classroom discussion. There will be written reading responses at my discretion. In addition to reading responses, you will write a compare and contrast essay, do a research project that includes a paper and an oral presentation, and complete a creative project of your own design that may be art, fiction, film, or music, or you may do a take home final essay in lieu of the creative project. There will also be an in-class mid-term essay. The compare and contrast essay, research project, and creative project, or take home final, will be turned in during the scheduled date for your final exam in a portfolio. No one can pass this course without the portfolio.

**All essays should be written with persuasion in mind, no matter what expository form dominates. Your goals should be to gain agreement on your thesis through the use of logic and evidence and to learn something in the process that may be mutually beneficial to you and your readers.**

#### **Grading:**

Compare and Contrast essay – 15%  
Creative Project or final exam – 20%  
Research Project – 25%  
Mid-term - 15%  
Class participation, reading responses, and attendance – 25%

**Assignments turned in late will receive a lowered grade.**

## **Attendance:**

***More than 3 absences will result in your grade being lowered. There is also a breaking point. If you miss enough classes after three that I feel you cannot complete the work necessary for passing the course, you will be asked to either drop the class or be willing to receive an "F" by remaining in the class.***

**Plagiarism (that includes cutting and pasting from a variety of internet sources) will result in a failing grade. If you are not clear what plagiarism is by now, ask me.**

**If you have a documented disability, or emergency medical information, tell me immediately and I will make sure you are accommodated.**

## ***Research Project Assignment***

Choose a topic concerning the Vietnam War that interests you and write an 8-10 page essay that argues for your position on this topic. The topic may be related to questions raised during the war itself or as a result of it. This would include questions generated by our class discussions. Support your argument with references to scholarly interpretations, magazine articles, and appropriate sources for the topic. Your final bibliography should include seven sources outside of class, including at least three print sources. Part of this project is an oral presentation of the arguments in your paper. **The project requires prior approval.**

## ***Creative Project Assignment***

The creative project can be virtually anything, **but it must have my prior approval.** You should confine yourself to 1) the limits of your imagination, 2) relevance to the subject matter of this course, and 3) a concept that educates the audience. If you decide to make a video, limit it to around five minutes. Also, a video may be a joint project of up to three students.

## ***Or – Take Home Final***

Michael Herr's *Dispatches* and Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* are two of the most ambitious and challenging literary attempts to convey the experience of the Vietnam War for the individual American soldier. Both writers assume that conventional modes of writing, whether nonfiction reporting or realistic fiction, are insufficient for conveying what was unique about the Vietnam War. In your opinion, which of these books best represents the experience and meaning of the war? Why? Write a five page comparative analysis of these two books that defends your choice, supporting your argument with evidence from both books.

## ***Compare/Contrast Essay***

There are limitless possibilities for this four page essay. Some examples: Ho Ch Minh's concept of communism – the Soviet ideology; French Colonialism – American Imperialism; Vietnamese nationalism – American solipsism; Limited Response – Total War; Pacification – Attrition; etc. I will accept almost any subject, **but it must have my prior approval.**