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### GBLD 194.01: Seminar - Afghanistan: Legend and History

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# GBLD 194: Afghanistan: Memory, Legend, History

Spring 2020

## Instructor information

- Instructor: Matthew Semanoff
- Office: LA 425
- Email: [matthew.semanoff@umontana.edu](mailto:matthew.semanoff@umontana.edu)
- Phone: 243-5637
- Office hours: TBA

## Course information:

- Time: MWF 1:00-1:50 pm
- Room: UC 220
- CRN 34655
- 3 Credits

## Course description:

Afghanistan: Memory, Legend, History is a case study in history as a construct of memory. This is a course examination of how events are remembered and re-imagined over time. Students will begin by studying the Eastern Campaign of Alexander the Great. Through a close study of the history of the first Western campaign in Afghanistan, students will examine the range of sources and will be introduced to the rhetorical purposes and strategies used in compiling a historical narrative from disparate and fragmentary sources. Throughout the semester, students will turn to the recent history of US involvement in the region, considering the history of insurgencies and withdrawal through the lens of the historians of Alexander. Putting to work what they have learned about writing historical narratives, the participants of this seminar will become the curators of sources that will contribute to the historical narrative of the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This seminar culminates in an oral history project, in which students will be paired with student veterans to record the experiences and reflections of participants in events that continue to shape our lives.

## Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion of this class, a successful student will

1. become familiar with the major events of the campaign of Alexander the Great in Afghanistan and Pakistan
2. begin to understand the limitations of ancient historical sources
3. develop skills to overcome limitations of historical sources and to use even imperfect sources to create a historical narrative
4. begin to practice the examination and analysis of contemporary historical sources from multiple perspectives to develop an understanding the causes and

consequences of historical developments and events in the region arising in the course of Operation Enduring Freedom

5. begin to develop an historical narrative of US involvement in Afghanistan based on the first-hand experiences of veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom.

### Required textbooks:

- Holt, Frank, *Into the Land of Bones: Alexander the Great in Afghanistan*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Pr., 2005. (978-0520274327)
- Arrian. *Alexander the Great: The Anabasis and the Indica*. Trans. M. Hammond. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Pr., 2013. (978-0199587247)
- Pseudo-Callisthenes. *The Greek Alexander Romance*. Trans. R. Stoneman. London: Penguin, 1991. (978-0140445602)

Additional Readings will be available on Moodle.

### Required assignments and tests:

#### *Student Veterans Oral History Project:*

Throughout the second semester, the class will be building towards recording the accounts of personal experiences of veterans now enrolled as students at the University of Montana. Seminar students will be required to formulate interview questions, submit those questions for approval, complete training on the use of human subjects for social research (as required by UM Institutional Review Board), and conduct interviews. These oral histories will follow the Principles and Best Practices established in 2009 by the Oral History Association (<http://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices/>). This project is also required to comply with Veterans History Project (<https://www.loc.gov/vets/>) sponsored by the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress, to which the accounts of UM Student Veterans produced by the students of this seminar will be submitted and archived. The final project submitted will be a video or audio recording of the interview, written transcription of the interview, the informed consent form and release form signed by the veteran interviewed and biographical data form for the veteran interviewed.

We will also be exploring the means of archiving and exhibiting the work of the class for a broader audience.

There will be a number of assignments leading up to the completion of the Student Veterans Oral History Project, including:

1. Successful completion of the UM Institutional Review Board online Ethics course required for Human Participation in ([http://ori.hhs.gov/education/products/montana\\_round1/human.html](http://ori.hhs.gov/education/products/montana_round1/human.html))

2. Development and submission of interview questions for approval for use prior to interview (as required by the IRB).
3. "What is Missing?" Paper: a 3-5 page paper that describes the process of producing history. In this paper, students will choose an episode from Alexander's campaign in Bactria and Sogdiana described in one of the ancient historians and explore the limitations of the surviving historical accounts. Students will focus on the questions that remain even after reading ancient sources that overlap this episode. The paper will require students to consider what types of sources would be required to answer those questions remaining, and posit whether such sources were likely to exist in antiquity, and draw conclusions contrasting the interests and aims of historians in antiquity and today.
4. Practice Oral History Project: Students will demonstrate understanding of the process and requirements for ethical collection of Oral History, as well as demonstrate facility for the use of recording equipment by working in groups to record a fictional oral history. The groups will be required to go through the complete process of conducting an interview (explain the informed consent form, review the interview questions, record a 10 minute interview, explain the legal release document, and produce a recording that meets the standards of the LOC Veterans History Project. The fictional oral history will be based on the Alexander histories. This assignment will be assessed based on (1) technical skills required for conducting oral histories, (2) accuracy of the representation of the ancient sources, and (3) creativity/empathy of interpretation of ancient events.

The final Oral History Project will follow the requirements necessary for submission to the Veterans History Project (<https://www.loc.gov/vets/kitmenu.html>):

1. Cover Letter
2. Biographical Data Form
3. Veteran's Release Form
4. Interviewer's Release Form
5. Media meeting the specific requirements
6. Audio and Video Log
7. A transcript of the interview

*The Historiography of Operation Enduring Freedom Paper:*

Students will be required to write a 6-8 page paper based on the experience of veterans in Operation Enduring Freedom. Students will be required to use the oral histories produced by the seminar as well as other sources (e.g. University of Oregon Veterans' Oral History Project, From Combat to Kentucky). In this paper, students will be required to analyze the historical value of the memories of participants in historical events, how these memories compare to other traditional historical sources, and how they contribute to the writing of history. This paper will also address the variety of documents (journalists "embedded in combat units", memoirs of high ranking military officers, documentaries, films, etc.) which scholars may eventually call upon to write the history of

US involvement in Afghanistan. In this paper, students will consider the theory behind oral history, its advantages and disadvantages. More details to follow.

#### *Reaction Papers:*

Students will also be required to write six two-page informal reaction papers over the course of the semester. Topics will be assigned based on the readings and discussion topics. Papers will be required to have a clear thesis statement and argue a specific point relying on a close reading of the text for support. A schedule of topics, due dates, and other requirements will be distributed separately. Often, these reaction papers will be used to prompt class discussion. Students may drop their lowest score.

#### *Examinations:*

Students will take two essay examinations (a midterm and a final exam). These will be take-home examinations. Students will be expected to make full use of the primary sources studied to develop clear and concise responses.

### Course guidelines and policies:

#### *Grading policy*

Students' grades will be determined by the following breakdown:

- Engagement: 5%
- Examinations: 10%
- Reaction Papers: 15%
- "What is Missing?" Paper: 15%
- Historiography of Operation Enduring Freedom: 25%
- Student Veterans Oral History Project: 30%

#### *Expectations*

The importance of civil discourse and respect: This class may challenge our ability to remain objective and still be empathetic. It is absolutely vital that we treat one another's opinions and experiences with respect. Our discussion may touch on emotional topics and traumatic experiences. It is expected that we will all be mindful of this and treat one another with dignity and empathy. This is especially true for the oral history project; the Institutional Review Board requirements are one layer of safeguards, but we will rely on our personal acknowledgement about the importance of this as humans not only as researchers.

In addition to these written assignments, students are expected not only to attend but also to participate actively in class discussion. Repeated absences or tardiness will affect your grade. I expect you to make every effort to attend class. Please not that digital interruptions disturb not only your ability to attend but your classmates' and professor's as well. Text-messaging, phone calls, or any other indications that you are distracted, distracting, or otherwise not participating will also affect your grade. If you are unable to do so, please contact me; you are responsible for making any necessary arrangements for

what you missed in class. Late papers will be penalized by one grade per day, unless prior arrangements have been made.

There will be a Moodle Course Supplement for this class. I will use this to make periodic announcements, to post copies of handouts and assignments, and to make various electronic resources available. Through this course supplement, students will also access a majority of the readings for the class. Please note that I will also use Moodle to send email. The Moodle system requires the use of your university student email account; if you prefer to use a different account, you must set the university account to forward. Even if you do not login to the Moodle Supplement, you are expected to check your email regularly.

Although classical authors had different attitudes regarding what constitutes plagiarism, you are expected to use contemporary standards for citing sources. Whenever you refer to any idea that is not considered common knowledge – whether in a direct quotation or paraphrase – you must cite your source according to the MLA style. If you have any questions or concerns regarding plagiarism, please ask.

#### *Disability modifications*

The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and [Disability Services for Students](#). If you think you may have a disability adversely affecting your academic performance, and you have not already registered with Disability Services, please contact Disability Services in Lommasson Center 154 or call 406.243.2243. I will work with you and Disability Services to provide an appropriate modification.

#### *Student Conduct Code*

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The Code is available for review online at <https://www.umt.edu/student-affairs/community-standards/default.php>.