

The University of Western Ontario
HISTORY 4711F
The First World War: A Revolutionary Experience
Fall/Winter 2024-25

Instructor: Jonathan F. Vance

Office Hours: Mondays, 1 – 2PM, Wednesdays noon – 2PM

Department of History, Lawson Hall 2247

Email: jvance@uwo.ca

Course Description:

This course provides an examination of selected aspects of the First World War, including its origins and aftermath, in a variety of combatant nations. Among the themes to be discussed are the causes of the war, the experience of battle, conflicts on the home front, war culture, social factors, strategic and tactical decision-making, and the memory of the war. Students will have an opportunity to debate the most contentious historiographical issues surrounding the war and use a wide range of primary sources, both in discussions and assignments.

Antirequisite(s):

History 4709E

Course Syllabus:

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- show familiarity with accurate factual information about a wide range of people, groups, events, and documents relating to the First World War, and understand their significance;
- demonstrate superior oral and written communication skills;
- analyze secondary sources, including their documentary basis, methods, arguments, strengths, limitations, implications, and significance for the field;
- spell your name with semaphore flags;
- appreciate and understand the nature of the First World War in the context of its own time;
- grasp the ongoing impact of the First World War in various societies.

Course Materials:

Students should secure the following texts, which will be used throughout the term:

Hew Strachan, *The Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War* (any edition)

George Walter, *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* (2006)

Additional readings are available on the course website.

Methods of Evaluation:

Students may choose between a number of different grading schemes. You must indicate your choice of grading schemes **no later than** 1 October 2024. Once you have made your choice, it cannot be changed.

	#1	#2	#3
Assignments:			
Poetry analysis	20%	30%	35%
Public history exercise	25%	-----	-----
Postcard analysis or family biography	35%	45%	50%
Seminar presentation and participation	20%	25%	15%

Poetry analysis – due the week of 8 October

Students will write a short analysis, roughly 500 words in length, of a poem from George Walter’s *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* (you may not write about a poem that appears on the syllabus for the first four weeks of the course). It should not be a literary analysis, but rather should focus on the poem as an historical document, discussing the author and the context of the work and identifying any terms or proper names that are significant. Although some research beyond the course materials may be required, the assignment is intended to evaluate your writing skills – grading will be based primarily on the clarity of expression. A sample poetry analysis can be found on the course website.

Public history exercise – due the week of 5 November

For this assignment, you have two options:

- 1) Research (using secondary sources) and write the text for an historic plaque to be erected on a site connected with the First World War. It should be directed at the general public, the passer-by who has little or no prior knowledge of the war. Your plaque text can be no more than 60 words in length. You should also submit a bibliography and a brief statement (roughly 500 words) that provides the rationale for the location of your plaque.
- 2) Individually or in a group of up to four people, create a display on some aspect of the First World War, for one of the History Department’s cabinets. Once the subject has been chosen, each person in the group will be responsible for selecting one artifact or image to display, and researching and writing an explanatory text (no more than 60 words in length) to accompany it. You should also submit a bibliography and a brief statement (roughly 500 words) outlining the factors that went into your choice of an object to display.

Postcard analysis or family biography – due the week of 26 November

You will be given an original postcard from the First World War to research and analyze. You should approach it as an exercise in historical detection – how much can the postcard tell you about the time, and about the people and events to which it refers? Your analysis should be at least 20 pages in length. Because of the nature of the assignment, it does not need a thesis statement, like a conventional research paper, nor does it need to be presented in prose paragraphs – point form or bulleted sections is acceptable. It should include reference notes and a bibliography. The grading will be based primarily on the depth and quality of the research – asking the right questions rather than getting all of the answers. A sample analysis can be found on the course website.

Alternatively, you may write a biography of a family member who was involved in some way in the First World War. If you can’t find a family member, I can provide you with one! The paper should be roughly 20 pages in length and must be presented in proper scholarly format.

To ensure that work on the family biography is not left to the last minute, you will submit a one-page proposal during the week of 1 October 2024. The proposal should include a paragraph about your subject and a list of the sources that might be used.

*** Note: All written assignments have **flexible deadlines**, meaning that they may be submitted on any day of the week in which they are due. For this reason, assignments in History 4711 are **NOT** eligible for a request for academic consideration without supporting documentation. Late assignments (ie. those submitted after the Friday of the week in which the assignment is due) will be subject to a deduction of two marks per day, including weekend days, and those submitted more than seven days after the due date will not be graded. Permission to submit a late assignment **without penalty** can only be given by the Academic Counselling office of your home faculty.

Seminar presentation and participation

The success of the seminar depends on the willingness of students to keep up with the readings on a weekly basis and to take part fully in the discussion. Your participation will be assessed on an ongoing basis throughout the term. Each student will be required to prepare a brief oral presentation (of no more than 10 minutes – time limits will be enforced) on an aspect of that week’s readings (the specific question to be addressed will be given to you two weeks before your presentation). A schedule of presentations is posted on OWL in the Wiki tab. You should sign up early to secure the subject of your choice.

Students **MUST** obtain permission before using generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, for any assignments in this course. Such tools must be plainly acknowledged in your paper. Using these tools without prior permission and/or without acknowledgement may be considered as a case of academic dishonesty.

Seminar Schedule:

10 September – Introduction

17 September – The Road to War

Samuel R. Williamson, ‘The Origins of the War’ [in Strachan book]

Thomas H. Russell, *The World’s Greatest War* (1914), ch. 1

J. William White, *A Primer of the War: Written and Compiled by an American* (1914), ch. 2

24 September – August 1914

L.M. Montgomery, *Rilla of Ingleside* (1920), ch. 3 and 4

Robert Rutherford, ‘Canada’s August Festival: Communitas, Liminality, and Social Memory,’ *Canadian Historical Review* 77 (1996)

Geoffrey Faber, 'The Eve of War' (4)
Isaac Rosenberg, 'On Receiving the First News of the War' (5)
John Masfield, 'August, 1914' (8)
Rupert Brooke, '1914: Peace' (11)
John Freeman, 'Happy is England Now' (12)
Rudyard Kipling, 'For All We Have and Are' (13)

1 October – Atrocities and Propaganda

Paul G. Halpern, 'The War at Sea' [in Strachan book], esp. on unrestricted submarine warfare
John H. Morrow, 'The War in the Air' [in Strachan book], esp. on strategic bombing
John Horne and Alan Kramer, 'German "Atrocities" and Franco-German Opinion, 1914: The Evidence of German Soldiers' Diaries,' *Journal of Modern History* 66/1 (1994)
Edward Thomas, 'This is no case of petty Right or Wrong' (15)
Charles Hamilton Sorley, 'To Germany' (15)
Wilfred Owen, 'Dulce et Decorum est' (141)
Wilfrid Gibson, 'Air-Raid' (185)
Nancy Cunard, 'Zeppelins' (186)

8 October – War as a Gendered Experience?

Gail Braybon, 'Women, War, and Work' **OR** Susan R. Grayzel, 'The Role of Women in the War' [in Strachan book]
Jim Tomlinson, 'The First World War in a Women's Town: Dundee, 1914-22,' *Women's History Review* 31/2 (2022)
Jessie Pope, 'War Girls' (169)
Jessie Pope, 'Socks' (189)
Theresa Hooley, 'A War Film' (190)
Vera Brittain, 'The Superfluous Woman' (255)
May Wedderburn Cannan, 'Lamplight' (261)
****poetry analysis due this week****

15 October – Reading week – no seminar

22 October – Childhood in Wartime

Susan R. Fisher, *Boys and Girls in No Man's Land: English-Canadian Children and the First World War* (2011): ch. 1
Carolyn Kay, 'War Pedagogy in the German Primary School Classroom during the First World War,' *War & Society* 33/1 (2014)
Else Ury, *Nesthäkchen and the World War* (1916): ch. 1-4

29 October – The First WORLD War?

David Killingray, 'The War in Africa' [in Strachan book]

Dan Bullard, "'Loyal until Death": Memories of African Great War Service for Germany,' in Kellen Kurschinski et al, *The Great War: From Memory to History* (2015)
Joe Lunn, 'The Great War and Senegalese Memory: The Veterans' Legacy,' *First World War Studies* 10 (2019)
Michelle Moyd, 'Centring a Sideshow: Local Experiences of the First World War in Africa,' *First World War Studies* (2016): 111-30

5 November – Morale and Disobedience

David Englander, 'Mutinies and Military Morale' **OR** Alexander Watson, 'Mutinies and Military Morale' [in Strachan book]

Rudyard Kipling, 'Epitaphs: The Coward' (162)

Gilbert Frankau, 'The Deserter' (163)

Ivor Gurney, 'Portrait of a Coward' (206)

****public history exercise due this week****

12 November – Selling the War to Americans

David Trask, 'The Entry of the USA into the War and its Effects' [in Strachan book]

Robert Lansing and Louis F. Post, *A War of Self-Defense*

Andrew C. McLaughlin, *The Great War: From Spectator to Participant*

John S.P. Tatlock, *Why America Fights Germany*

Woodrow Wilson, 'Peace Without Victory,' 22 January 1917

Woodrow Wilson's speech to Congress on the Declaration of War, 2 April 1917

Woodrow Wilson, 'Fourteen Points,' 8 January 1918

19 November – Russia

John Horne, 'Socialism, Peace, and Revolution, 1917-1918' [in Strachan book]

Igor V. Narskii, 'The Frontline Experience of Russian Soldiers in 1914-1916,' *Russian Studies in History* 51 (2013): 31-49

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, 3 March 1918

26 November – War Literature

Modris Eksteins, 'The Memory of the War' [in Strachan book]

Charles Yale Harrison, *Generals Die in Bed* (1930)

Jonathan F. Vance, 'The Soldier as Novelist: Literature, History and the Great War,' *Canadian Literature: A Quarterly of Criticism and Review* 179 (2003)

Ivor Gurney, 'War Books' (265)

****postcard analysis / family biography due this week****

3 December – War Memorials

Ivor Gurney, 'Butchers and Tombs' (152)

Laurence Binyon, 'For the Fallen' (235)

Charlotte Mew, 'The Cenotaph' (237)

Siegfried Sassoon, 'Memorial Tablet (Great War)' (244)
Rudyard Kipling, 'Epitaph: Common Form' (245)
Siegfried Sassoon, 'On Passing the New Menin Gate' (247)

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