

# Technology in the Contemporary World: Cars and the Environment

Syllabus updated 20 January 2011.

## **Honors 353, section 2. George Mason University. Spring 2011**

Innovation Hall 207. Mondays and Wednesdays, 12 - 1:15 pm.

Course Blackboard site: <http://mymason.gmu.edu>.

General advice: <http://historyprofessor.org>

Chicago-Style Citation Quick Guide: [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)

Professor Zachary M. Schrag

E-mail: [zschrags@gmu.edu](mailto:zschrags@gmu.edu) (please include "353" in subject header).

Office: Robinson B 357A. Tel. 703/594-1844.

Office Hours: Thursdays, 3-5 pm.

While I greatly enjoy meeting students individually, department meetings and other commitments occasionally force me to cancel scheduled office hours, so please let me know in advance if you are coming to office hours. If you would like to meet some other time, please send me an e-mail with two or three proposed times.

## **Course Description**

This course will ask how people can travel to work without destroying the planet. It will explore policies that seek to provide alternatives to driving alone in a gasoline-powered car, including alternative fuels, traffic and road rules, city and regional planning, and mass transit. Readings and student research will cover policies in the United States and abroad.

## **Goals**

In this course, students will:

- Reflect on the significance of the automobile in shaping the world we know today, including their own daily lives.
- Consider who has the power to shape the use of technology.
- Use history as a guide to the present and future.
- Practice critical reading of primary and secondary sources, including texts, images, music, and motion pictures.
- Practice research skills using sources in electronic databases, on paper, and in the world around us.
- Practice skills of writing, editing, and revision.

## Administrative Information

The **University Catalog**, <http://catalog.gmu.edu>, is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university academic affairs. Other policies are available at <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/>. All members of the university community are responsible for knowing and following established policies.

In case of **inclement weather**, please call the main switchboard at 703-993-1000 or consult the main web page at <http://www.gmu.edu/> to see if classes are cancelled. I expect to cancel class only when the university cancels all classes.

If you are a **student with a disability** and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS. <http://ods.gmu.edu>.

## Citation and Collaboration

All assignments are governed by the George Mason University **honor code**, online at <http://www.gmu.edu/departments/unilife/honorcode.html>. Except as instructed, you are expected to work independently and to acknowledge all sources, including assigned texts and materials found online.

This course is designed to encourage the kind of collaboration that makes scholarship so much fun. While you are responsible for your own essays, you will get a great deal of help from each other identifying and interpreting primary and secondary sources, and revising your work. Please credit this help as appropriate. You may not submit work based whole or in part on work you have done for credit in **other courses** without written permission of the instructor.

Gordon Harvey's *Writing with Sources* is required reading and should answer most questions about **citation**, but ask me if you need clarification. In general, any sentence in your work that can be traced to a single sentence in someone else's work should bear a footnote. Any collaboration, such as consultation with the Writing Center, should also be acknowledged. Violations of academic integrity will be reported to the administration and may result in grade penalties, including failure of the course. Papers should include footnotes written according to the *Chicago Manual of Style*; bibliographies are not necessary.

## Online Components

Except for the peer-editing, this course is designed to be paperless; all assignments except for the essay drafts should be posted on Blackboard, <http://mymason.gmu.edu>. (Please note we are using Blackboard Learn 9.1, accessible through the My Mason portal.) You will also receive feedback on Blackboard. Please include your last name in the file name of any attachment you post to Blackboard or send by e-mail; e.g., jones\_essay2.doc, not essay2.doc. Please do not send **Microsoft Works** (.wps) attachments; I cannot open them. Please do not send **Microsoft shortcuts** (.lnk) which work only on your local computer. Please save your files as .doc, .rtf, or .pdf formats.

Students must use their **Mason email accounts**—either the existing “MEMO” system or a new “MASONLIVE” account—to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. See <http://masonlive.gmu.edu> for more information..

## Classroom Rules

**Laptops, cell phones, and other electronic devices may not be used in the classroom** expect by written permission.

**Please do not eat** in the classroom, before or during class.

## Readings

- Tom McCarthy. *Auto Mania: Cars, Consumers, and the Environment*. Yale University Press (2009), Paperback. ISBN-10: 0300158483. ISBN-13: 9780300158489
- Daniel Sperling and Deborah Gordon. *Two Billion Cars: Driving Toward Sustainability*. Oxford University Press (2009). ISBN13: 9780195376647. ISBN10: 0195376641
- *TR News* (July-August 2009): *Pricing Road Use to Address Congestion*, 3-42.  
<http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/trnews/trnews263.pdf>.
- Virginia HOT Lanes, <http://www.virginiahotlanes.com/>
- Gordon Harvey. *Writing With Sources: A Guide for Students*. Second edition. Hackett, 2008. ISBN13: 9780872209442
- Zachary M. Schrag, "Guidelines for History Students," <http://www.historyprofessor.org>.

## Collaboration

This course is designed to encourage the kind of collaboration that makes scholarship so much fun. While you are responsible for your own essays, you rely on each other to identify primary sources and to help you revise your work.

You must credit your classmates for the help that they give you, since a scholar should be proud of the use she has made of others' work. Citation need not be terribly formal, but I suggest the following form for citing sources discovered by your classmates:

- Lisa Rein, "Daring to Dream of Reducing Tysons Traffic," *Washington Post*, 10 December 2009 (posted by Joanna Student).

## Online Components

Except for the peer-editing, this course is designed to be paperless; all assignments except for the essay drafts should be posted on Blackboard, <http://courses.gmu.edu>. You will also receive essay comments electronically.

## Assignments

A total of 100 points are available, plus 3 points of extra credit.

### Attendance and Participation (12 points)

Much of this course is discussion based, which means that each student's learning depends on the other students' being prepared, punctual, and active. The participation grade is designed to encourage you to help other students learn, and to prepare you for a lifetime of meetings.

The participation grade is based on your prompt arrival and active participation in discussions. You should be in your seat, ready to take notes at the start of class; chronic tardiness will lower your grade. To be counted as on time, you must sign in by start of class. To be counted present, you must sign the late attendance sheet. If you need to leave early, please speak to me before class. If you leave early without notifying me, you will be counted absent. Occasional absence or tardiness is not a big deal, but chronic absence or tardiness will affect both your participation score and the grades on your written work. Attendance is particularly important on peer-editing days.

**Perfect attendance is not sufficient for full credit.** The highest participation grades will go to students who animate class discussions by asking questions of their peers. The most valuable contributions often

begin with the words, "I don't understand." Answering such questions, and questions posed by the instructor, is also helpful.

At the end of each unit, you will submit a **unit memo**. This should include a description of your contribution to the class discussions and your plans for future discussions. Please include this at the end of the final draft of each essay.

You will receive a participation grade at the end of each unit.

Note: To give you full credit for participation, I need to know your names. To help me learn them, we will use name cards for the first few weeks of class. In addition I will photograph students using an application designed for the purpose. If you do not wish to be photographed, please let me know by e-mail.

### **Reading Responses (7 points. 1 point each)**

On eight occasions during the course, you are assigned secondary readings and short responses. Since there are a maximum of 7 points available, you may skip one response without penalty. Responses are **due at 9 am on the day indicated**.

Questions will be posted on Blackboard. Choose one of the questions for that day's reading and write a one-paragraph response, roughly 125 – 175 words. Write your response as if it were part of a longer essay. Begin with a clear topic sentence (See <http://historyprofessor.org/organization/topic-sentences/>) that makes an argument rather than just stating facts. Then support that argument with specific facts and quotations from the reading. Use parentheses to indicate page numbers. I suggest you compose your response in a word processor or text editor, then paste it into the discussion board.

On discussion days for which you submit a response, you should be prepared to be called on to describe your findings to the class.

### **Research Responses (12 points, 3 points each)**

On four occasions, you are asked to complete small research assignments. The class will be divided into four groups, with each group responsible for specific assignments.

Specific assignments will be posted on Blackboard. All research assignments require the following steps:

1. Find a document or image according to the specific assignment instructions.
2. Write a one-paragraph analysis of the document or image following the examples at ""Examples of Critical Reading" or "Image Analysis" <<http://historyprofessor.org/research/>>
3. Post the document on the appropriate Blackboard discussion, along with the document as an attachment.

### **Essays (69 points. 23 points each)**

On three occasions, you are assigned essays that will address the main themes of the course. Each essay should run between 1000 and 2000 words, roughly 4 to 8 pages. This is a broad range, so I will be disappointed to receive papers outside those bounds.

Please keep in mind the instructions at <http://historyprofessor.org>, especially those on thesis statements and topic sentences.

The essays require the following steps:

1. Read the essay question, posted on Blackboard. Then define a narrower question for yourself.

Each unit poses a broad question about how people make choices about transportation technology. You are not expected to answer the question definitively, but you do have the power to contribute to an answer by choosing a smaller, more focused question.

To frame a smaller question, you need three elements:

1. The individual or group of people who most interest you.
2. A debate in which that individual or group took part or are taking part.
3. A surprising thing that that group did or said.

## 2. Assemble evidence

The most important source of evidence for your answer are the primary sources gathered by you and your classmates. **You must use at least four primary sources gathered by other students for this unit.** Papers that do not meet this requirement will receive limited credit. I *recommend* you also use **at least two primary sources** that you yourself have gathered from the designated databases and websites.

Other evidence may come from the assigned readings, from lecture, and from music and films played in class. Evidence from other units of the course may be helpful as well. And you may wish to conduct additional research using the databases for the course. But such research is no substitute for engagement with your classmates' sources.

**All sources must be cited properly.** This includes assigned readings and handouts, sources gathered by your classmates, and sources you find yourself. (See "Collaboration.") Citations should be written in *Chicago Manual of Style* format.

When citing a source gathered by a classmate, please credit that person I suggest the following forms for citing work by your classmates:

For a comment written by a student:

- Joanna Student, "Lincoln's Imagery," 26 January 2011, History 332 Discussion Board.

For a document posted by a student, but written by someone else:

- Lisa Rein, "Daring to Dream of Reducing Tysons Traffic," *Washington Post*, 10 December 2009 (posted by Joanna Student).

## 3. Read your sources critically

Read your sources slowly and carefully. Look not only for facts, but for surprises. See <http://historyprofessor.org/research/> for additional guidance.

## 4. Develop a thesis.

Develop a thesis statement that answers the question and can be supported by your evidence. See <http://historyprofessor.org/argument/> for suggestions.

I strongly recommend your thesis statement take the following form: Why did [person/persons] [do/say/write something surprising]? [Plausible explanation], but in fact [better or more complete explanation]. If you choose not to use this form, I suggest you explain your decision in your edit memo.

## 5. Outline your paper

For an ten-paragraph essay (about 1250 words), I suggest a two-paragraph introduction, two paragraphs to present one point of view, two paragraphs presenting an opposing point of view, two paragraphs analyzing the similarities and differences, and a two-paragraph conclusion. If you need more space for

the body sections, you will end up with a longer paper. Make sure that each body paragraph begins with a strong topic sentence.

#### 6. Write and rewrite your paper.

Write a rough draft of your essay. **Bring two copies to class.** Share your rough draft with two of your classmates during the peer editing session. If you do not receive helpful comments, demand them. Revise the draft according to the helpful comments you received.

#### 7. Describe your experience of the unit

Add your **unit memo** at the end of the final draft. This should include at least two sections:

- **Participation.** Describe your contribution to the class discussions and your plans for future discussions.
- **Revision.** Explain how you revised your essay in response to feedback from your peers and (for essays 2 and 3) the comments you received from me on previous work.
- **Course evaluation** (optional). Add any comments you wish about how the unit met the goals of the course and what could be improved.

#### 8. Post your essay

Post your final draft to Blackboard before the start of class on the day it is due. Bring your marked-up drafts to class on that day.

#### Essay evaluation

Your essay score will break down roughly as follows, though I reserve the right to score elements above the maximum (e.g., 6 points out of 5) for exceptional work.

- **Question and thesis: 5 points.** A *why* question about the words or deeds of people, the weighing of alternative explanations, and a compelling claim.
- **Topic sentences and organization: 4 points.** Topic sentences that support the thesis, summarize the evidence, interpret the evidence, and relate to one another in a clear way.
- **Evidence and critical reading: 8 points.** Ample primary evidence from sources posted by classmates. Analysis as well as summary.
- **Mechanics and style: 4 points.** Clear grammar, adequate citation.
- **Peer editing and revision: 2 points.** Good comments on your peers' work and good use of the comments you received.

#### Peer Editing Instructions

On three occasions you will exchange drafts with classmates and edit their work. Your job as a peer editor is not to correct spelling and minor errors, or to provide uncritical encouragement. Rather, it is to demand that your peers teach you something you did not know before. Your comments should begin with one of the following forms, or a close approximation:

1. Your paper corrected a misconception I had. Before reading it, I thought \_\_\_\_\_. But you showed me . . .

2. Your paper answered a question I had. Before reading it, I could not understand why \_\_\_\_\_. But you showed me . . .

3. Your paper explained the significance of \_\_\_\_\_. Before reading it, I couldn't understand why \_\_\_\_\_ was important. But you showed me . . .

4. For the most part, this paper did not teach me anything that wasn't pretty obvious from attending class and reading the book. But I was struck by your comment that "\_\_\_\_\_." This comment [insert phrase 1, 2, or 3]. Could you expand this point into a thesis for the whole essay?

### **Extra Credit (1 point each; up to 3 point)**

The goal of this assignment is to get you to think about the course in relation to your daily life. Up to three entries will count toward course credit, but you may only submit one per unit. The first paragraph should describe something that happened to you or that you witnessed involving decisions about transportation that relates to the material we are studying. It can be something that just happened, a news story or article you saw, or a story from your past—but make it something you're willing to share with the class. The second paragraph should explain how that event or item illustrates or complicates the themes of the course.

To receive credit, you must post your item on Blackboard **before the final discussion** of the unit and be prepared to speak about it to the class.

Extra credit points will not raise the final course grade above a B+. To earn an A- or A, you must do so with the other assignments.

## **Evaluation**

- Students who do everything that is asked of them for a given assignment can expect to earn B's. Students who challenge themselves to exceed expectations earn higher grades, while students who do not meet the expectations earn lower grades.
- There is no fixed curve for the course. At the end of the course, I rank students according to the points they have accumulated on various assignments, and then set cut-off points for letter grades to reflect the level of achievement represented by various point totals. For example, the cut-off between a B and a B+ may be 88 or 89 depending on which grade I feel better reflects the achievements of students with 88.5 points.
- Extra credit points will not raise the final course grade above a B+. To earn an A- or A, you must do so with the other assignments.

## **Enrollment**

Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes. (Deadlines each semester are published in the Schedule of Classes available from the Registrar's Website registrar.gmu.edu.)

Last Day to Add: February 8. Last Day to Drop: February 25.

After the last day to drop a class, withdrawing from this class requires the approval of the dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons.

Undergraduate students may choose to exercise a selective withdrawal. See the Schedule of Classes for selective withdrawal procedures.

## **Schedule**

### *Week 1*

January 24 Introduction—Cars and Choices

January 26 Workshop: reading primary sources.  
Read: "How to Read a Primary Source," "Examples of Critical Reading," and "Image Analysis."

### **Unit 1: Choosing a Problem**

### *Week 2*

January 31 Movie: Industry Films

February 2 Discussion. **Reading 1 due:** *Auto Mania*, 99-129, 148-75

*Week 3*  
 February 7 Discussion. **Group 1: Research 1 due:** government documents  
 February 9 Discussion: **Group 2: Research 1 due:** government documents

*Week 4*  
 February 14 Discussion. **Reading 2 due:** *Auto Mania*, 176-230  
 February 16 Discussion: **Group 3: Research 2 due:** historical newspapers

*Week 5*  
 February 21 Discussion: **Group 1: Research 2 due:** historical newspapers  
 February 23 Peer Editing. **Essay 1 draft due**

## Unit 2: Choosing a Vehicle

*Week 6*  
 February 28 Movie: *Who Killed the Electric Car?*  
**Essay 1 final due. Edit memo due. Participation memo due.**  
 March 2 Discussion. **Reading 3 due:** *Auto Mania* 130-147, 231-52

*Week 7*  
 March 7 Discussion: **Group 2: Research 3 due:** advocacy websites  
 March 9 Discussion: **Group 3: Research 3 due:** advocacy websites

## SPRING BREAK

*Week 8*  
 March 21 Discussion. **Reading 4 due:** *Two Billion Cars*, 1-45  
 March 23 Discussion: **Group 1: Research 4 due:** advertisements

*Week 9*  
 March 28 Discussion: **Reading 5 due:** *Two Billion Cars* 47-77, 151-178.  
 March 30 Discussion: **Group 2: Research 4 due:** advertisements

*Week 10*  
 April 4 Peer Editing. **Essay 2 draft due**

## Unit 3: Choosing a Road

April 6 Movie: *Contested Streets*  
**Essay 2 final due. Edit memo due. Participation memo due.**

*Week 11*  
 April 11 Discussion: **Reading 6 due:** TBD  
 April 13 Discussion: **Group 3: Research 5 due:** foreign periodicals

*Week 12*  
 April 18 Discussion: **Reading 7 due:** *TR News* (July-August 2009): *Pricing Road Use to Address Congestion*, 3-42. <http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/trnews/trnews263.pdf>  
 April 20 Discussion: **Group 1: Research 5 due:** foreign periodicals.

*Week 13*  
 April 25 Discussion: **Reading 8 due:** Virginia HOT Lanes, <http://www.virginiahotlanes.com/>  
 April 27 Discussion: **Group 2: Research 6 due:** blogs

*Week 14*  
 May 2 Discussion: **Group 3: Research 6 due:** blogs  
 May 4 Peer Editing. **Essay 3 draft due.**

Monday, May 16 **Essay 3 final due on Blackboard. Edit memo due. Participation memo due.**  
 1:15pm