Seminar Description: This seminar is about the American experience in Vietnam. Through the medium of film, you will be afforded opportunities to consider and evaluate the various ways that Vietnam has been portrayed in relation to its influence on American foreign policy, institutions, and individuals.

So much for the catalog blurb. For someone of my generation, it is amazing to me that for each of you, this could be a seminar devoted to the Peloponnesian War, given that you were not around to directly experience the events that we will consider. Thus, this seminar is designed to accomplish a number of educational objectives.

First, it will expose you to one of the most important conflicts in American history, one which was highly controversial at the time, and which continues to be a multifaceted touchstone for American foreign policy and society. At once a threatened “domino” in the Cold War between the United States and China and the Soviet Union, Vietnam ultimately became a catalyst for profound changes in American culture and society. The United States lives with these legacies down to the present day.

Second, although this is not a course in film history or criticism, my expectation is that over the term you will be able to hone your skills of observation and interpretation. That is, as you view films selected to depict important aspects of the Vietnam experience, I anticipate that your capacity to evaluate how and why you were (or were not) persuaded by the film’s message will improve over time.

Third, there are myriad “lessons of Vietnam,” and it will be up to you to identify some of the most salient of those lesions, and to reflect on whether or not they are applicable to contemporary American policy. Indeed, your final examination will provide an a “capstone” opportunity to reflect on what lessons of the American experience in Vietnam are the most important to you, and whether or not these “lessons” have any relevance in today’s world.

Seminar Administration: Our seminar will meet Tuesdays from 2:30-3:45 p.m., and Thursdays from 2:30-5:00 p.m. in FH 108. Our Thursday meetings will be primarily devoted to viewing films associated with the seminar.

My office is 111B in Johns Hall. Office hours are by appointment. My office phone is 294-3185, and my email is cleve.fraser@furman.edu.

Readings: There are four texts which will provide a framework and more nuanced context for our film experience:

Films: There are a number of ways to sequence our film experience. I have chosen to present the films in a chronological fashion; each movie—some with the benefit of hindsight—depicts a particular era, or slice, of the totality of the American experience in Vietnam. And, of course, all films (as well as printed material) approach its subject from a particularly point of view:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Film</th>
<th>Runtime</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>The Quiet American</em> (1958)</td>
<td>122 min</td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Go Tell the Spartans</em> (1978)</td>
<td>114 min</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Path to War</em> (2003)</td>
<td>164 min</td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Green Berets</em> (1968)</td>
<td>142 min</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Apocalypse Now</em> (1979)</td>
<td>153 min</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Deer Hunter</em> (1978)</td>
<td>183 min</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Platoon</em> (1986)</td>
<td>120 min</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Beautiful Country</em> (2005)</td>
<td>125 min</td>
<td>R</td>
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Note that many of the films carry an R rating, indicative of strong language and (sometimes) graphic violence. Of course, given the subject matter, this is almost unavoidable.

A further point of interest: three of these films won Academy Awards. Name them!

Documentaries:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documentary</th>
<th>Runtime</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>A Strong Clear Vision</em> (1995)</td>
<td>83 min</td>
<td>PG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Vietnam: A Television History</em> (1983)</td>
<td>120 min</td>
<td>NR</td>
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The first two documentary films serve as bookmarks for the seminar. The first provides us with an initial context, base of knowledge, and point of departure for our intellectual journey. The second will be our final film, and will serve as a basis for reflection on your “Vietnam experience.” Both have won the Academy Award for best documentary film.

We will also view the first two installments of a comprehensive documentary history of the Vietnam War, which will lay the groundwork for a better understanding of why the United States undertook its quest to protect Vietnam from the “Reds” in the first place. This “television history” won the Peabody Award for 1983.

Additional material and conversation will be available over the course of the seminar via our Moodle portal.

Seminar Requirements: Your grade for the seminar will be based on the following exercises:
Seminar leader: 100 points

Reviews (8): 160 points

Participation: 40 points

Final Exam (Thursday, May 1, 3:30-6:00 p.m.): 100 points

Total: 400 points

Seminar leader: This is an opportunity to be an intellectual agent provocateur. On a week of your choice, you will be responsible for generating a five-page, double-spaced paper which summarizes and analyzes the assigned reading. Your paper should discuss the most important arguments and/or insights of the reading(s), and indicate how they may provide a context for the film that we will be viewing. Your written comments, and your oral summation of them, will serve as launching pads for our general discussion.

Film Reviews: Each of you will be expected to submit a three-page double-spaced “review” of the eight films we will watch over the term. Your papers should summarize the most important themes and insights of the films, and evaluate how well they reflect the information/perspectives contained in the texts. Of course, each review should indicate whether or not you “liked” or “disliked” the film. I will provide more specific information about content, page-length, formatting, citation style, and due dates in the near future.

Participation: Given the nature of this seminar, your participation grade will be based on both attendance and your contribution to class discussion. With respect to attendance, given that the accumulation of knowledge in this course is cumulative—that is, it builds on consideration of prior topics, your presence is also absolutely essential for you and your colleagues to derive maximum benefit from this experience. With respect to participation, the accumulation of systematic knowledge about near neighbors is enhanced by:

- Thorough preparation and mastery of the material.
- Effective expression of well thought out questions and comments.
- Constructive critiques and/or insights related to the work and ideas of colleagues.

Legitimate excuses for missing an assignment include but are not limited to: (1) an illness vouched for by a physician, (2) an extracurricular activity approved by the relevant university officials, and (3) the death or incapacity of an immediate family member. Other reasons may also be considered, although they must be documented in writing. If an absence is unexcused, it will result in a five (5) point reduction in your participation grade.

Final Exam: The final exam is designed to be synthetic and reflective, and structured to have you think about the legacies and lessons of the American experience in Vietnam. Its format will be short answer/essay.
Course Grade: Your course grade will be determined by aggregating the number of points received for each assignment/exam (out of a maximum of 400) and dividing that number by assignments (4). The grading scale is as follows: 100-98=A+; 97-92=A; 91-90=A-; 89-88=B+; 87-82=B; 81-80=B-; 79-78=C+; 77-72=C; 71-70=C-; 69-68=D+; 67-62=D; 61-60=D-; 59 and below=F.

A final note: I am a technophile by nature—that is, I usually embrace and use the latest electronic gadgets. I suspect that many of you are technophiles too, but during our class time together please insure that all of your electronic communications devices are turned off for the duration of the class. The owner of a ringing PDA/cell phone will lose four (4) points per occurrence on his/her participation grade. In-class texting will extract a similar penalty.

Students with disabilities who need academic accommodations should contact the Office of Disability Services in a timely manner prior to contacting me. The number is 294-2320. The Office is located in Room 202, Earle Infirmary.

Seminar Outline: Note that the instructor reserves the right to add or delete topics/materials at his discretion.

January 14: Introduction

January 16: Movie: *A Strong, Clear Vision* (documentary)

January 21: Echoes of a War (The First Vietnam War)

READING: Herring, chapter 1


January 28: Vietnam and the Cold War

READING: Herring, chapter 2

January 30: Movie: *The Quiet American*

Recommended: *China Gate* (1957)

February 4: American Domino

READING: Herring, chapters 3

February 6: Movie: *Go Tell the Spartans*

February 11: Escalation (Part 1)

READING: Herring, chapter 4
February 13:  **Movie:** *Path to War (Part 1)*

February 18: Escalation (Part 2)

READING: Herring, chapter 5

February 20:  **Movie:** *Path to War (Part 2)*

February 25: America’s War

READING: TBA

February 27:  **Movie:** The Green Berets

Recommended: *The Anderson Platoon (1967)*

March 4:  **Movie:** Turning Point

READING: Conrad, Heart of Darkness (entire)
Herring, chapter 6

March 6:  **Movie:** Apocalypse Now

Recommended: *Full Metal Jacket (1987)*

March 11: **Spring Break (no class)**

March 13: **Spring Break (no class)**

March 18: The Vietnam Experience (Part 1)

READING: O’Brien, pp. 1-85
Nihn, pp. 1-74

March 20:  **Movie:** *The Deer Hunter (Part 1)*

March 25: The Vietnam Experience (Part 2)

READING: O’Brien, pp.86-136
Nihn, pp. 74-146

March 27:  **Movie:** *The Deer Hunter (Part 2)*

Recommended: *Born on the Fourth of July (1989)*
April 1: The Vietnam Experience (Part 3)

READINGS: O’Brian, pp. 137-246
Nihn, pp. 146-233

April 3: Movie: Platoon

Recommended: 84 Charlie Mopic (1989)

April 8: Peace with Honor

READING: Herring, chapter 7

April 10: Furman Engaged schedule (no class)

April 15: Aftermath/Legacies

April 17: Movie: The Beautiful Country

Recommended: When Heaven and Earth Changed Places (1993)

April 22: The Lessons of Vietnam

READING: Herring, chapter 8

April 24: Movie: The Fog of War (documentary)

Recommended: The Most Dangerous Man in America (2009) (documentary)

April 29: Seminar wrap-up and review

May 1: Final Examination (3:30-6:00 p.m.)