Vietnam Study Abroad

Syllabus – Preliminary

**Professors:** Dr. Stuart Kewley, stuart.kewley@eurasia-eu.com

Robert L. Deitz, rdeitz@gmu.edu (phone: (703) 993-3480). I am in my office (Rm 674) most week days and do not at all mind drop-ins. To schedule an appointment, please phone or email.

Michal McElwain Malur, mmcelwai@gmu.edu (Rm 544)

**Purpose of Course:**

Vietnam has one of the oldest civilizations in the world. The people of the area began cultivating rice in the Red River Valley two millennia ago. For much of its history, Vietnam has been ruled by various nations: China, the Mongols, the Khmer empire. In late 19th Century, France seized Vietnam as a colony. The French maintained control until it was finally booted out after the Battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954. A Geneva Conference divided Vietnam between the north and the south. North Vietnam, under Ho Chi Minh introduced Communist rule; the south maintained a nominally capitalist society. The US became involved in Vietnam in the early 1950s providing military advisors. Full blown US involvement in Vietnam arose in 1964 when Congress passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution authorizing President Johnson to take all measures necessary to prevent further aggression from the North. The war went badly, and the US left Vietnam in 1973. In 1975 North Vietnam captured Saigon, now Ho Chi Minh City. Unified Vietnam was initially a robust Communist society and economy. That began to change in the 1980s.

Although the country remains a communist society, it has opened up its markets and become a major exporter. Competitive wages have allowed Vietnam to compete on world markets. It is a member of ASEAN and the World Trade Organization. Aside from a low cost of labor, Vietnam has a number of economic advantages. Its ports are modern and well-situated on shipping routes, making it easy to integrate exports into global supply chains. Its population is young, with 40% of the population aged 15-49. Finally, the government is actively promoting foreign investment and has committed to reforming the country’s inefficient public sector, a holdover from Vietnam’s communist past.
In the midst of Vietnam’s impressive economic progress, socio-economic disparities remain entrenched. Poverty continues to be a predominantly rural phenomenon with 91 percent of the poor living in rural areas. In 2010 minorities accounted for nearly half of the total poor, but only 15 percent of the population. Today many ethnic minority children live in households earning less than a US$1 per day.

In addition, the Trump Administration’s America First trade policies are creating stresses on Vietnam and other Southeast Asia countries. Vietnam has relied on the US as a check on its Bigfoot neighbor, China. That reliance may now be misplaced.

**Learning Outcomes:**

Upon successful completion of this course students will be able to: 1) Demonstrate a broad understanding of the background of Vietnam with respect to governance and politics; trade and investment; and stability and security; 2) Analyze contemporary, emerging issues and challenges related to governance and politics; trade and investment; and stability and security; 3) Understand how Vietnamese culture survives and adjusts to modernization and alternative lifestyles; and 4) Identify the challenges that Vietnam faces.

**Required texts:**

**Fiction:**


**Non-fiction:**


**Semi Non-fiction:**


**Other readings:**

I was unable to find any history of Vietnam of reasonable length. Please google Vietnam history and read articles that look interesting.

The PBS documentary series, The Vietnam War, particularly the first episode: *Dejavu (1858-1961).*  [http://wwwpbsorg/kenburns/the-vietnam-war/home](http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/the-vietnam-war/home)
The CIA World Fact Book is useful. The World Bank reports on Vietnam are helpful. With respect to foreign affairs, you have five free articles of “The Diplomat,” https://thediplomat.com/2017/01/vietnams-foreign-policy-balancing-act/.

Three videos:  

While not required viewing, I think three videos would provide a great background for the Vietnam trip. Two excellent movies are about American involvement in Vietnam: “The Deer Hunter” and “Apocalypse Now.” “Indochine,” a marvelous movie starring Catherine Deneuve about Vietnam under French control, is also worth watching. Warning: This movie has subtitles. (Oh horror of horrors!)

Written Work:  

1) Each student will be required to write a policy memorandum of his/her own choosing. The paper must demonstrate good writing and editing skills, include a bibliography, and use proper scholarly citations. Length: 8-10 pages. The paper will be due March 29, 2019.  
2) Each student will be required to write two book reviews, at least one of which must be on a fictional title set forth above. Length: 3-5 pages. These reviews will be due January 7, 2019.

Class Preparation:  

Given the brevity of our trip to Vietnam, it is important that students read all of the assigned materials before we embark. Study time will be limited by jet lag and the busy schedule of classes, briefings, and visits.

Class Participation:  

Active class participation is a must. Much of what we will learn will be based on class discussions. Quality class discussion requires contributions from all members.

Course Evaluation:  

Course grades will be evaluated on the totality of: class participation 10%, the policy memorandum 40%, and the two book reviews 25% each.