

The University of Western Ontario
HISTORY 4711F
The First World War: A Revolutionary Experience
Fall/Winter 2025-26
Tuesdays 9:30-11:30AM – location TBA

Instructor: Jonathan F. Vance
Office Hours: Mondays, 1 – 2PM, Wednesdays noon – 2PM
Department of History, Lawson Hall 2247
Email: jvance@uwo.ca

This is a **draft** outline. Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace for a final version.

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

Learning Expectations:

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

- show familiarity with 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:

Seminar readings are available on the Brightspace website. There are no texts to purchase, but if you would like to consult a survey text on the First World War, the following are excellent and are widely accessible:

Ian F. W. Beckett, *The Great War* (Longman, 2007)

Eric Brose, *A History of the Great War* (OUP, 2010)

David Stevenson, *Cataclysm: The First World War as Political Tragedy* (Basic, 2004)

Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (Viking, 2004)

Methods of Evaluation:

Students may choose between two different grading schemes. You must indicate your choice **no later than** 14 October 2024. Once you have made a choice, it cannot be changed.

	#1	#2
<i>Assignments:</i>		
Poetry analysis	30%	35%
Postcard analysis / family biography / research paper	45%	50%
Seminar presentation and participation	25%	15%

Poetry analysis – due the week of 13 October

Students will write a short analysis, roughly 500 words in length, of a poem from the website of the Poetry Foundation: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/70139/the-poetry-of-world-war-i>. 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.

Postcard analysis, family biography, OR research essay – due the week of 1 December

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.

OR, 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.

OR, you may write a research paper on a topic of your choice, to be arrived at in consultation with the instructor. In selecting a topic, you should be as imaginative as possible, bearing in mind the availability of sufficient primary materials (upon which the essay must be largely based) and the soundness of the topic in a theoretical sense. The paper should be roughly 20 pages in length and must be presented in proper scholarly format.

*** 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 Advising office of your home faculty. Assignments may **NOT** be submitted after the last day of classes (Fall term) without the approval of Academic Advising.

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 in discussion, and in the regular exercises to be held during the seminar, will be assessed on an ongoing basis throughout the term. In addition, 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 Brightspace in the Presentations tab. You should sign up early to secure the subject of your choice.

Note:

You may not make any use of generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, in History 4711. Any use of such tools for assignments in this course may be considered a form of academic misconduct.

Seminar Schedule:

9 September – Introduction

16 September – The Road to War

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

23 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)

30 September – National Day for Truth & Reconciliation – no seminar

7 October – War as a Gendered Experience?

Ethel M. Bilbrough, *My War Diary, 1914 – 1918*

14 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

Else Ury, *Nesthäkchen and the World War* (1916): ch. 1-4

****poetry analysis due this week****

21 October – The First WORLD War?

Oliver Coates, ‘Beyond Anonymity: Nigerian Participation in World War One Commemoration: 1919-1939,’ *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 53 (2025)

Michelle Moyd, ‘Centring a Sideshow: Local Experiences of the First World War in Africa,’ *First World War Studies* 7 (2016)

28 October – Morale and Disobedience

Lynsey McCulloch and Rob Tovey (2019), 'Shot at Dawn: Late Photography and the Anti-war Memorial,' *Visual Studies* 34 (2019)

4 November – Reading week – no seminar

11 November – Atrocities and Propaganda

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)

Bryce Report (excerpt)

18 November – Spiritualism and the Occult

Robert Dixon, "'Where are the dead?': Spiritualism, Photography and the Great War,' *History of Photography* 28 (2004)

Rachel Patrick, "'Speaking across the borderline': Intimate Connections, Grief, and Spiritualism in the Letters of Elizabeth Stewart during the First World War,' *History Australia* 10 (2013)

25 November – War Literature

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)

2 December – War Memorials

Kent Ahrens, 'The World War I Memorials of Giuseppe Moretti,' *Pennsylvania History* 92 (2025)

Jonathan Cherry, 'Creating Commemorative Spaces in Independent Ireland: The Construction and Use of Publicly sited First World War Memorials, 1919–1970,' *First World War Studies* 11 (2020)

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

9 December – Conclusion

Please review the Department of History's shared policies and statements for all undergraduate courses at: https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html for important information regarding accessibility options, make-up exams, medical accommodations, health and wellness, academic integrity, plagiarism, and more.