Don’t believe we can win in South Vietnam. If we send 100,000 more, the North Vietnam will meet us. If the North Vietnam run out of men, the Chinese will send in volunteers. Russia and China don’t want for us to win the war. If we don’t win, it is a catastrophe. If we lose, 50,000+ it will ruin us. Five years, billions of dollars, 50,000 men, it is not for us. At the end of monsoon, quietly probe and search out with other countries – by moderating our position – to allow us to get out. Can’t see anything but catastrophe for my country…… Clark Clifford, senior Democratic statesman, LBJ advisor, in a note to the president, 25 July 1965.

OVERVIEW: The Vietnam War split the nation, killed nearly 59,000 Americans and perhaps as many as 3 million Vietnamese, nearly ruined the US Army, brought down a president, set the stage for America’s opening to Communist China and for arms control with the Soviet Union, and effected for better or worse (often worse) American foreign policies and domestic politics for three decades afterward. The “politics” in the title of this class will be employed in a very broad, macro perspective. “Politics” will cover everything from bureaucratic politics within one government agency to the politics between the Executive and the Congress; from the politics between the civilian leadership and the military commanders to domestic elections and public acts; and from the politics towards the Vietnamese to America’s diplomacy with China and the Soviet Union. While we will not be able to come close to wrapping our arms around all that is relevant, we will at least gain a much better understanding of what the war caused, cost, destroyed, and created.
NOTE: Some **warnings** are in order:

What is generally – and too easily – referred to as the “Vietnam War” is actually a complex series of interlocking events involving several dozen nations occurring over a 30+ year period. Not forgetting that the history of Vietnam, its culture, and society began around 3000 BC. **You will not begin to comprehend the scope of war, nor all that is presented in class unless you read the books early in the semester. And without knowing the material in the books, you will not be able to participate effectively in class discussions. Therefore, all the books save the “encyclopedia” (which is your basic reference) MUST be read by no later than the end of January. If you are not prepared to do the reading as required, please drop the course.**

The war was and remains controversial; many Americans are still emotional about the conflict, even today. It is perfectly fine, even encouraged, to disagree in the classroom, but it must be done in a civil manner while taking the opinions and feelings of others seriously.

Vietnam was not a “good” war, as World War Two is often referred to. While the focus of the class is on the political aspects of the war (as explained above), it is intended that there be frank discussions in the classroom on all aspects of the conflict. There may be scenes and “impolite language” that some might find disturbing in the videos, and ideas presented that one may find offensive. Understand that I will neither censor the class nor scrub the material for the sake of political correctness. Vietnam was very nasty, often brutal war, and if this is a problem for you, then please drop this course.

**HONOR CODE:** All sections of the AASU Student Honor Code and Code of Conduct will apply to this class. Under the Honor Code, plagiarism, cheating, facilitating academic dishonesty, and fabrication in any form or manner are forbidden. Additional restrictions or instructions given in class on any individual assignment, whether verbal or written, will also fall under the Honor Code. Absence from the class when any additional instructions are given is not a valid excuse if a violation of the instructions results in an Honor or Conduct Code violation. Continued enrollment in the class after receiving this syllabus constitutes acceptance of these provisions.

**MY HONOR VIOLATION POLICY:** I will accuse no student of violating the Honor Code unless I can prove beyond a doubt that the student is guilty. At that time, the student will receive an Incomplete and be dropped from the course. The student’s name will transmitted to the Dean of Student Affairs along with the proof, for a formal hearing before the Honor Court. Although the Honor Code permits a professor an option to handle the transgression in an “informal” manner, vice submitting the case to the Honor Court, I will not do so. Once the Honor Court is convened, I will urge that the student: receive an F in the course; be suspended from the University for a full year; and have a formal record of this placed in the student’s permanent file. If any student is tempted to challenge this by violating the code, you should know that I have never lost before the Honor Committee.

**EXPECTATIONS:** This is a 3000-level course aimed at Juniors and Seniors who posses some mix of knowledge including American foreign policy, international relations, world history, and geography. I expect each student to be prepared, able, and willing to do Junior- and Senior-level work. At a minimum, this means faithfully attending class, arriving at class on time, being prepared for class by reading the assigned material, staying awake, taking notes, exercising good study habits, displaying
interest in the subject, asking questions, participating in discussions. It also means possessing sufficient refined writing skills to be able to produce well-researched and well-written papers with a minimum of technical/grammatical errors. Good writing is hard work, and I expect all the papers to reflect the necessary effort.

I expect students to participate actively and to demonstrate in that participation that you have learned the many of the basics from the readings. Thus, as the semester passes mid-term, I expect that your questions and discussions reflect the acquisition of new knowledge. Because this class contains discussions of war and military activities, you should be prepared to spend extra time in the “Encyclopedia” text to familiarize yourself with military terminology and operations. Many of these military issues and terminology will be explained in class, but we won’t get to all of them; it is important to the quality of discussions and to the successful completion of your papers that you take the time to educate yourself with the Encyclopedia. **If you are unable or unwilling to meet these expectations, then you should not take this class, because your chances of passing the class will be minimal.**

**GRADING:** I do not give grades; I record the grade that each student earns through their performance on their papers and in the classroom. Grades in this class will depend upon the successful completion of two papers of 7-10 pages each, written on the assigned topics and in accordance with the writing guidance handed out in class. Points for class participation will be added – or subtracted. Each paper will be worth 100 points, while class participation ranges from +40 to -10 based solely upon my judgment of your performance (both quantity and quality). There is a total of 240 points possible, and your final grade will equate to the percentage of points earned against points possible: A = 216-240; B = 215-192; C = 214-168; D = 167-144.

**CLASS NOTES:** If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to obtain the class notes and any instructions from one of your classmates. I will not give out my lecture notes.

**EXTRA CREDIT:** No extra credit will be given to an individual. Extra credit will be granted only in situations in which the entire class is able to participate (e.g., attending an off-campus lecture). The success to passing this course is to do well in class and on the papers.

**ABSENCE POLICY:** Because this is a summer course with a compressed schedule, attendance is required. **Four absences will result in your being dropped from the course** (unless excused for good cause in advance, or bona fide emergency, the validity of which I will be the judge). If you miss class, it is your responsibility to obtain the class notes, and any instructions for the assigned papers, from one of your classmates.

**PAPERS:** Paper due date and guidance, for both subject matter and compositional/style requirements, will be handed out by the second class period, and all students are expected to follow that guidance without deviation. **All papers are due at the assigned date and time. Late papers will NOT be accepted and a grade of zero will be assigned.**

**SYLLABUS:** This class will consist of lectures, class discussions, and videos. I intend for the class to follow to the extent possible the chronological course of the war and history. Therefore, the reading assignment is simple: you have three texts to read within one month; start at the beginning of each and read through to the end (including comments in end/foot notes). Reading should precede class discussions. January.
However, at times it will be necessary to deviate from a strict chronological treatment. Thus, I also intend for the class to be flexible, hence the general, vice specific, listing of subjects and topics. I retain the discretion to change the following as necessary. There will be many times when we will be tempted to go off on interesting digressions. We will do so, time permitting. But it is vital that our discussions (and your questions) be relevant to the material under discussion. Throughout all of the below mentioned subjects will run the common thread of the development and implementation of American policy towards Vietnam, with special attention placed on the politics of the decision-making processes at the highest levels of the US government.

The class will focus mainly on the Johnson years, although key elements of key elements

1. Vietnam’s history, culture and society from 3,000 BC. Focus will sharpen as history takes us to the beginnings of the French occupation in 1858 and the Japanese occupation of Vietnam from 1941 to 1945; and the rise of the Vietnamese independence movement under the Viet Minh led by Ho Chi Minh.

2. French-Viet Minh war from 1946 to 1954 and the Viet Minh under the military leadership of General Vo Nguyen Giap and the political leadership of Ho Chi Minh; the French military defeat at Dien Bien Phu in May of 1954; the subsequent Geneva Conference on Indochina in June of 1954.

3. The settlement that created the two Vietnams: the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam – the DRV) under the control of the Viet Minh and the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam – the SVN) under the leadership of President Ngo Dien Diem; the growth of the American commitment to South Vietnam from 1954 to 1964.

4. The coup d’état and assassination of President Diem in November of 1963; the assassination of Kennedy three weeks after Diem’s assassination and Lyndon Johnson becoming the American President.

5. There will be particular attention paid to President Johnson’s escalation of the war, including the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the “Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.

6. The escalation of the American military commitment to South Vietnam, the growth of the anti-war protests in the United States, and increasing opposition to the war in Congress.

7. 1968 – a highly critical year for the US; the Tet offensive; President Johnson’s decision not to seek a second term as President; the election of 1968.

8. The period from 1969 to 1973; Nixon-Kissinger policies, the bombing of Cambodia; Kent State shootings; peace talks, Linebacker I and II.

9. The Paris Peace Agreement of 1973; withdrawal of US forces; return of the POWs; the fall of SVN; America’s defeat and the unification of Vietnam under communist rule from Hanoi.