

AMH 4930: History Research Seminar
The American Coast
Spring 2026
Thursday 11:45 am-2:45 pm. FLI 0229

Professor Jack E. Davis
(he, him, his)
Fall davisjac@ufl.edu (best means for communicating with the prof)
Ofc. Flint 235
Ofc. Hrs.: Tuesday 10:30-12:30, Thursday, 10:30-11:30
352-273-3398



In this reading-, writing-, and research-based course, students will explore the cultural and natural history of the US seacoast (Atlantic, Pacific, and Gulf). The seminar will use history to help us understand consequential decisions, actions, and events that predetermined the course of the country's relationship with the coast, a course that has led to unprecedented environmental challenges the nation faces in the 21st century. With the ultimate objective of producing a work of original research, students will analyze human-nature relationships, migration trends,

development patterns, and so-called “natural” disasters, while searching for examples from history that might serve as usable guides for today and the future.

Students should finish this course with an expanded knowledge of the integral place of the seacoast in American history. A principal ambition of the course is to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the American experience. If we incorporate the human relationship with the environment into our study of the past, we gain clearer insight into the identity, beliefs, and values of human groups and how each defined its relationship with others and the larger world.

Course Objectives:

- * The principal objective of the course is to complete an approximately 20-page paper of high literary merit and original concept and research. (The paper will be preceded by a prospectus and penultimate draft.)
- * Developing literary skills central to the profession and life after college.
- * Introducing the student to model research and writing.
- * Promoting critical thinking about the human relationship with nature and its impact in the social relationships among different human groups.
- * Expanding one's knowledge of American coastal history and its place in the larger American experience.

Attendance:

Attendance is imperative in a course that meets once a week. Excused absences include documented medical issues, documented family emergencies, religious holidays, and documented university business, such as traveling with the marching band for intercollegiate competition. An email from students alerting the professor of a forthcoming absence is an appreciated courtesy but does not count as an excused absence without proper documentation. Each student is allowed one unexcused absence without penalty. Each additional will result in a .5-percent deduction from the 10% class participation grade. See policy below under Course Requirements Descriptions.

UF Holidays:

Spring break March 16-20

Course Requirements:

* Final Paper	50%
* 3-page prospectus	10%
* Penultimate draft	10%
* 3-5-page research essay	20%
* class participation (to include haiku poems and treasure hunts)	10%
(.5 percentage point deducted from 10% participation grade for each absence after 1 freebie)	
* Grammar and Style Guide exercise (factored into all writing assignments)	

Due Dates: Due dates are enforced. All work must be posted on Canvas in Word format by the

due date and time noted in the syllabus and on Canvas. Due dates are a part of larger life and can mean the difference between success and failure, hooking the big one and letting it get away. In the classroom, the deadlines to prepare you for life and to ensure a level playing field for all. Canvas will not accept work after the due date; nor will the professor. We all have heavy workloads during the semester; a pleading email before the due date will not gain you privilege over your classmates. Plan for the due dates, manage your time around them, and stick to them. **AGAIN, ALL WORK MUST BE SUBMITTED TO CANVAS IN WORD (NOT PDF) FORMAT.**

Course Grading Scale (see the UF grading scale at the end of syllabus):

A+ =97-100

A =94-96

A- =90-93

B+ =87-89

B =84-86

B- =80-83

C+ =77-79

C =74-76

C- =70-73

D =65-69

Assignments not completed earn a 0

Plagiarized assignment (see plagiarism section below) earn a 0

Assignments not turned in before or by stated due date will not be accepted.

Assigned Texts:

Jack E. Davis, *The Gulf: The Making of an American Sea* (I'll provide a PDF copy)

David Helvarg, *The Golden Shore: California's Love Affair with the Sea*

Pavla Šimkova, *Urban Archipelago: An Environmental History of the Boston Harbor Islands*

Jamin Wells, *Shipwrecked: Coastal Disasters and the Making of the American Beach*

Week I (Jan 15): Introduction: Our Coastal Focus

Why and how we should study the coast, and why we write history, with a bonus warmup haiku.

Grammar and Style Guide Exercise Due on Canvas by 11:59 pm January 21

Week II (Jan 22): Defining the Research Problem, an Origin Story, and Let's Talk Style

Readings:

Davis, 1-19; Šimkova, 1-17; Wells, 1-9.

Week III (Jan 29): The Coast as Estuary and Native Shores

Readings:
Davis, 23-40; Helvarg, 15-34.

Week IV (Feb 5): Old World Meets so-called New World

Readings:
Davis, 41-113; Helvarg, 35-61.

3-5-page research essay due February 11, 11:59pm on Canvas (ENSURE YOU FOLLOW THE STYLE GUIDE)

Week V (Feb 12): Let's Talk Research

Essay presentations to class

Week VI (Feb 19): Work on Prospectus

No class, Prospectus due February 22, 11:59pm

Week VII (Feb 26): Pounding Down the Stakes

Readings:
Šimkova, 18-50; Davis, 114-149; Wells, 10-37.

Week VIII (Mar 5): Boston Hawbaw

Readings:
Šimkova, 51-145.

Week IX (Mar 12): Research Week

Work on papers

Week X (Mar 16-20): Spring Break

Week XI (Mar 26): Rethinking the Harbor and Bay

Readings:
Šimkova, 146-204.

Week XII (April 2): California, Land of Milk and Honey—and Earthquakes and Tsunamis

Readings: Helvarg, 62-320.

Penultimate drafts of research papers due (penultimate does not mean a rough draft) April 3, 11:59 pm

Week XIII (April 9): What Lies Beyond the Beach

Readings:

Wells, 38-67, 105-36; Davis, 261-303.

Week XIV (April 16): Epilogues and Commencements

Reading:

Šimkova, 205-14; Helvarg, 321-30; Wells, 163-69; Davis, 509-30;

Student presentations

Week XV (April 23) The Last Hurrah

Final papers due 11:59pm April 23

Course Requirements Descriptions:

All written work for the course must be written in 12-point double-spaced print and submitted on Canvas by the due date and time ***with additionally a copy in Word format emailed to the professor.*** Your work must also be presented in third-person language.

Course Attendance and class participation is required. Students are expected to come to class for lectures and prepared to participate in discussions. All missed classes after 2 free absences will result in a deduction from your class participation grade. *****If you miss 8 or more classes, or simply stop attending, because you believe you can pass the course successfully by only completing the written assignments, you won't. You will receive a failing grade.***

An absence is considered *excused* if there is an *acceptable reason* according to UF policy (<http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/regulationattendance.html>). Examples of acceptable reasons are medical illness, religious holidays, and military obligation. It is the student's responsibility to notify the instructor of an excused absence and to provide documentation of an acceptable reason. Otherwise, the absence will be considered *unexcused* and will result in a quiz grade of zero if a quiz is administered when the student is absent. Whenever possible, the instructor should be notified prior to the absence. When this is not possible (e.g., due to unexpected emergency or illness), the instructor should be notified as soon as possible.

Grammar and Style Guide exercise can be found on my Canvas site. Download and answer the questions by circling that which you believe to be the correct response. You will be required to follow the rules of the guide in all writing assignments for the course. If you fail to show proof of having completed the guide before any one of the writing assignments is due, you will lose 5 points from the assignment grade. If you fail to follow the standards laid out in the guide, up to 5 points will be deducted from your assignment grade.

Research Essay: This paper should discuss general methods of research you have developed, how you use secondary sources and primary sources in a research paper, what these sources do

differently and similarly, and why a quality research paper should include both. Additionally, the paper should discuss useful repositories—brick-and-mortar and online—of research material. Finally, share a clever method you have discovered for accessing research information.

Prospectus: The prospectus should run around 3 pages of narrative with two or more pages of a preliminary bibliography. The prospectus should open by introducing the scope and character of your research project. It should then identify questions that will frame the research and writing and lead you to a central argument. Finally, the prospectus should discuss the organization of the paper.

Research Paper: In addition to what is stated at the top of the syllabus, we will discuss the research paper throughout the course. You should look to either or both *The Gulf* or *Urban Archipelago* as models of scholarship and style of presentation. Griffith and Halvarg are excellent books too, but their approach using first-person narrative is different from a conventional academic work. One can argue that Davis in some ways tests the boundaries of convention.

Other Business:

Plagiarism and Honesty Code:

Keep in mind that your written assignments must represent original work. You cannot copy the words, phrases, arguments, ideas, and conclusions of someone else or of another source (including Internet sources) without giving proper credit to the person or source by using both **quotation marks** and a **footnote**. Do not cobble together paragraphs or passages of separate texts and then try to claim that you have done original and legitimate work. You must write with your own ideas and in your own words. If you copy the words of someone else without putting those words in quotation marks, REGARDLESS OF CITING THE SOURCE, you are plagiarizing. Plagiarism is theft, and it is academic dishonesty. You can be reported to the Dean of Students office for plagiarism, and the incident may then become a permanent part of your academic record. Plagiarism **will** earn you a failing grade in the course, a grade that is final and that cannot be made up. If you have any questions about how you are citing or using sources, come to me for the answers.

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/>

Again, please consult with me if you have any questions or concerns.

In-Class Recording:

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor. A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session. Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student

Classroom Assistance:

Please do not hesitate to contact the instructor during the semester if you have any individual concerns or issues that need to be discussed. Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center. Click here (<https://disability.ufl.edu/get-started/>) to get started with the Disability Resource Center. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Online Course Evaluation:

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

Academic Resources Information:

E-learning technical support: Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.

Career Connections Center: Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601.

Career assistance and counseling services.

Library Support: Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

Teaching Center: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352- 392-6420.

General study skills and tutoring. Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138.

Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

Student Complaints On-Campus: Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage for more information.

On-Line Students Complaints: View the Distance Learning Student Complaint Process.

History Majors:

If you are a history major or minor and wish to receive important announcements on courses, scholarships, awards, and the Phi Alpha Theta Honor Society, please sign on to the history department listserv. Compose a message to: majordomo@clas.ufl.edu. In the text of the message, type the following: subscribe hist-ba@history.ufl.edu

Alpata: A Journal of History

Keep in mind that the undergraduate- and graduate-student members of Phi Alpha Theta History Honor Society at the University of Florida publish an academic journal each spring. In the fall, the journal editors will be sending out a call for submissions (articles and book reviews) to the journal. The journal is also looking for talented students who would like to serve on the editorial board. Please contact me if you're interested.

UF Grading Scale

A = 4.0

A- = 3.67

B+ = 3.33

B = 3.0

B- = 2.67

C+ = 2.33

C = 2.0

C- = 1.67

D+ = 1.33

D = 1.0

D- = 0.67

E = 0.0

E1 = 0.0 Stopped attending or participating prior to end of class
I (incomplete) = 0.0