History 230: European History
From the Greeks to the Renaissance

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This class meets on Tuesdays & Thursdays 9:30-10:50

Now that the European Union is a major player on the world stage, the idea of “Europe” is hotly debated. Does a European culture exist? A European identity? Should historians seek to explore Europe as a single unit or should we examine history using either a more regional approach or a more global one?

This course traces the rise of “Europe,” while keeping in mind contemporary debates about what that means. Starting with the rise of poleis following the Greek dark ages and extending through the Northern Renaissance, we will address the intellectual, cultural, political, social, and economic developments that shaped what is generally referred to as “European history.” Topics will include, among others, Greek society and culture, the Roman Republic and Empire, the rise of kingdoms in the West, the Carolingian Renaissance, and life in the High Middle Ages.

**Required Texts**

ISBN: 978-0140446081


Additional readings are available for download, either directly from websites listed in the course schedule or in the “Shared Files” section for this course in myUNE.

**RECOMMENDED TEXTS**

*The following text offers extensive advice about how to succeed in history courses—including information about how to write papers, how to take notes, how best to study, and how to properly cite sources. Although there will be no formal reading assignments drawn from this book, I will likely refer to it from time to time. I strongly advise you to purchase a copy and to keep it on hand throughout your tenure in history courses here at UNE.*


*Although there is no “textbook” for this course, students may find the following titles useful:*


**COURSE GOALS**

This course has three primary goals:

1. Improve critical thinking skills (including the ability to “think historically”);

2. Improve writing skills;

3. Gain an understanding of important developments in European history between the Greek Archaic Period and the Northern Renaissance.

With these goals in mind, you will be asked to take three exams, complete a term paper, participate in discussions, and carefully read a variety of articles, essays, and books. You
should always come prepared to listen, talk, and take notes. Feel free to ask questions as they occur to you.

**DISCUSSIONS**

Discussions are fun but they are also of major importance to your success in the course. These sessions are vital because they give you an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the subject material, to try out your ideas by discussing them with the group in a non-stressful setting, and to develop your critical thinking skills. In short, you will not get everything you can out of this class unless you are ready to take a few intellectual risks. DO NOT BE SHY! You are not being judged.

**TERM PAPER**

When do you think Europe emerged? How should we conceive of “Europe?” Why? Your project this semester is to examine whether the “idea of Europe” existed during the period of your choice between 700 B.C.E. and 1500 C.E.

To successfully complete this assignment, you should:

1) Choose a place and time (within the chronological and geographical constraints of this course) that particularly interests you. Are you fascinated by Classical Athens? Medieval France? The Roman Empire under Nero? The development of medieval Christianity?

2) Locate a mixture of primary and secondary sources (4+ sources) that deal with your subject matter. [A primary source is one written during the period you are writing about. A secondary source is any scholarly interpretation of your subject. You can use either articles from academic journals or scholarly books. Please talk with me to verify that your sources are acceptable before you spend a great deal of time reading them.]

3) What do the primary sources that you have located suggest? What do the scholars that you have read say? You should pay particular attention to how the people living during the period that you are researching thought of themselves. What mattered to them? What institutions did they associate with (if any)? What government did they have and how did this government relate with other neighboring governments? You may find that people’s concerns do not seem to involve large entities like “Europe” or even smaller ones such as their own state; the historical actors you read about may simply care about day-to-day concerns. If this is the case, what does it suggest?

4) After you have completed your research and decided what your argument will be, write a 6-10 page paper that ‘makes your case.’ Papers should be double-spaced and written in 12-point Times New Roman. Be sure to cite all sources using both footnotes and a bibliography. Copy-editing and clear prose matter.
5) All papers are **due** on November 25, 2008.

**Exams**

There will be **three** exams during the semester. Each mid-term will include five (5) multiple-choice questions and one (1) essay; the final examination will include ten (10) multiple-choice questions and two (2) essays. Eighty percent of each exam grade will be based on the essay portion of the test.

As the first exam approaches, we will talk in detail about how to succeed on an essay examination. In a nutshell, successful essay writing requires that you develop a clear and defensible thesis, defend your thesis using accurate evidence drawn from lectures/readings, and ultimately that you prove that your thesis is correct. Thus, your essays should contain three parts:

1. You should begin with a short introductory paragraph that succinctly summarizes the issue with which you will be dealing (the question), states your 1-2 sentence answer to that question (thesis), and outlines how you will more thoroughly argue your position;

2. Next, include several paragraphs (usually 3-5 for an essay such as this) that carefully present information (evidence) from the lectures and readings to “prove” that your thesis is defensible. Be sure to explain why the evidence that you provide is relevant;

3. Finish off with a concise conclusion that summarizes your argument, reiterates some of the evidence that you have discussed thoroughly in the body of the essay, and re-states your thesis. The conclusion is your last opportunity to drive home your main point and to convince the reader that your answer is viable.

As you write your exam essays, remember that your job is both to answer the question and to effectively utilize evidence to prove your point. If you do both of these successfully, you will do very well on the three tests.

**Participation/Attendance**

Your attendance and participation are vital for success in this course. You cannot learn, nor can you contribute to the group’s progress, if you are absent. I will keep track of both who attends regularly and of who participates in discussion. Participation is worth 15% of your overall grade.
OTHER POLICIES

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

• All papers must be handed in on the day that they are due. This must be done IN CLASS. No late papers will be accepted.
• Papers will not be accepted electronically unless otherwise specified.

Having said this, if an unforeseen and serious problem arises, please contact me and we will work something out. Please be prepared to provide a doctor’s note, obituary, or other paperwork as needed.

CELL PHONES AND OTHER ELECTRONICS

Cellular phones, MP3 players, and other electronic devices (excluding laptops) are distracting to others and are therefore not acceptable in the classroom.

If you would like to take notes on a laptop, please feel free to do so.

PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism represents serious academic misconduct. As per UNE guidelines, students who steal the words or ideas of another party will be referred to the Dean for disciplinary action.

The University of New England defines plagiarism as:

a. the use, by paraphrase or direct quotation, of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgement; or

b. the unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials.

— Student Handbook, pp. 33-34

You can learn much more by consulting the following:

http://www.une.edu/library/resguide/default.asp

If you have any questions about how to properly cite sources, please contact me.
OVERALL COURSE GRADE

Before the final exam you will be handed a sheet that lists five grading options. Each option allows you to raise or lower the value of the respective test grades. So, for example, if you do not perform as well as you would like on the first mid-term, you will have the ability to lower its value relative to the other two test grades. Regardless of the option you choose, the combined test grades equal 60% of the overall course grade.

The basic grade breakdown is as follows:

- Exams (combined): 60% (see above)
- Term Paper: 25%
- Participation: 15%

COURSE SCHEDULE

Please note that the following schedule is provisional. Changes may be made as demanded by the weather, class progress, etc. Please watch your email for alterations/revisions.

THURSDAY, SEP. 4, 2008

Today we will get to know one another, make sure that everybody understands course expectations and requirements, and take a few minutes to discuss the nature of historical study.

Lecture: Introductions

Reading:


TUESDAY, SEP. 9, 2008

The Archaic period (800-500 B.C.E.) is arguably the most important in Greek history because it was during this period that the polis emerged as the defining political and social structure of the Greek world. Today we will examine how demographic change, growing trade, and military innovation helped determine the shape of Classical Greece.

Lecture: Rise of the Polis
Reading:

Homer, *The Iliad*, Books I and XXIV. Available online at:  

**Thursday, Sept. 11, 2008**

Athens was a democracy but democratic rights were not distributed equally. Women were totally excluded. Almost every family owned slaves. Those born outside of Athens were excluded from owning property and were considered inferior to native-born Athenian males. Athenian democracy required the acquisition of a massive naval empire and the conquest of neighboring *poleis*. Today we will discuss the realities of life in Classical Athens.

**Lecture:** Life in Athens

**Reading:**

Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian Wars*, Book 2. Available online at:  

**Tuesday, Sept. 16, 2008**

Many scholars argue that Europe owes much of its cultural heritage, especially in terms of philosophy, drama, science, and art, to Classical Greece. Today we will consider some of the most influential Greek thinkers and artists.

**Lecture:** Classical Greek Culture

**Reading:**

Plato, *The Republic*, Book VII. Available online at:  

**Thursday, Sept. 18, 2008**

Alexander was ambitious, egotistical, and stands as one of the greatest military leaders in history. In only a few years, he defeated the greatest power in the world and created a massive empire of his own. Today we will follow Alexander’s short life and consider its larger significance.

**Lecture:** Alexander the Great
**Reading:**


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**TUESDAY, SEPT. 23, 2008**

The Roman Republic started life as just another city-state, a small kingdom in what is today Italy, but grew to become the largest empire of the ancient world. Today we will trace the rise of the Republic.

**Lecture:** Rise of the Roman Republic

**Reading:**


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**THURSDAY, SEPT. 25, 2008**

The Republican government that controlled Rome until the death of Julius Caesar went into decline as a result of political intrigue, corruption, and other factors. Today we will trace the demise of the Republic and the rise of the Empire.

**Lecture:** Collapse of the Roman Republic

**Reading:**


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**TUESDAY, SEPT. 30, 2008**

**Lecture:** Exam Review I

**Reading:**

No Reading Assignment
TUESDAY, OCT. 7, 2008

At its height, the Roman Empire extended from North Africa to northern England, France to the Near East. How was it possible to govern such a great expanse of territory? What significant accomplishments were made?

Lecture: The Pax Romana: The Rise of an Empire

Reading:


THURSDAY, OCT. 9, 2008

Christianity started life as a small Jewish sect and gradually expanded to become the largest religion in the world. From the time that it became the official religion of the Roman World (325 C.E.) to the end of our course, Christianity maintained a profoundly important role in cultural, social, and political life throughout most of Europe. Today we will examine the initial rise of the Church, setting the stage for future developments.

Lecture: The Early Christian Church

Reading:


TUESDAY, OCT. 14, 2008

Edward Gibbon published his monumental six-volume *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* between 1776 and 1788 and his account casts a long shadow over our interpretation of the late Roman period. For Gibbon, the spread of superstition fatefuly
undermined the empire and ended Roman dominance in the West. Historians are not so sure. Today, scholars are hesitant to suggest that the Empire collapsed at all and they instead say that it simply changed form, creating the framework for future European political life. Today we will examine both views.

**Lecture:** Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire?

**Reading:**


**THURSDAY, OCT. 16, 2008**

The ascension of Constantine to power inaugurated a new phase in Roman history during which the center of Roman power shifted from Rome to Constantinople. The Byzantine Empire, in turn, kept Greek/Roman culture alive, protected Western Europe from fearsome invaders from central Asia, and generated legal and religious frameworks that continue to be important. Today we will survey the rise of Byzantium, the development of the Orthodox Church, and the major accomplishments of the Eastern Roman Empire.

**Lecture:** The Rise of Byzantium

**Reading:**

Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, Chapt. XVI. Available online at: [http://www.ccel.org/g/gibbon/decline/volume1/chap17.htm](http://www.ccel.org/g/gibbon/decline/volume1/chap17.htm).

**TUESDAY, OCT. 21, 2008**

While the Eastern Roman Empire kept Roman culture alive in the East, Western Europe grew into a collection of smaller kingdoms—many of which later formed the basis of modern European states. Today we will discuss the evolution of some of these tribal groups.

**Lecture:** The Western Barbarian Tribes

**Reading:**

Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, Chapt XXXVIII. Available online at: [http://www.ccel.org/g/gibbon/decline/volume1/chap38.htm](http://www.ccel.org/g/gibbon/decline/volume1/chap38.htm).
THURSDAY, OCT. 23, 2008

After the Romans left Britain in 410 C.E., Christianity largely disappeared except for a small enclave of Celtic Christians in Ireland. Due to long-term isolation from Rome and the necessity of converting indigenous Celtic peoples, Celtic Christianity developed separately from the Roman Church. During the sixth and seventh centuries, the Roman and Irish churches engaged in a process of re-Christianizing Britain—a process with extremely important long-term implications for European history. Today we will examine the return of Christian Britain.

Lecture: Christianity in the British Isles

Reading:


TUESDAY, OCT. 28, 2008

Charlemagne and the Carolingian family exerted a profound influence on European history by creating a vast Christian empire in Europe. Today we will trace the rise of the Carolingians while also taking note of some of their most significant accomplishments.

Lecture: Charlemagne and the Carolingians

Reading:


THURSDAY, OCT. 30, 2008

Between roughly 800 and 1000 C.E. a group of Scandinavian farmers managed to create a trading empire, to colonize new lands such as Iceland and Greenland, and to discover North America more than 500 years before Columbus. Today we will explore their story.

Lecture: The Vikings

Reading:

Tuesday, Nov. 4, 2008

Lecture: Exam Review II

Reading:

No Reading Assignment

Thursday, Nov. 6, 2008

Lecture: Exam II

Reading:

No Reading Assignment

Tuesday, Nov. 11, 2008

Between 900 and 1300 C.E. the population of Europe grew, new states emerged, and Europeans engaged in a series of attacks upon the Muslim world. As a result, life in Europe underwent profound transformations. Today we will discuss these developments.

Lecture: The Expansion of Europe

Reading:


Thursday, Nov. 13, 2008

Early medieval European society was loosely divided into three groups—those who fought, those who prayed, and those who worked. Today we will take a look at each group to gain an insight into the nature of European society during the High Middle Ages.

Lecture: The Chivalrous Society

Reading:

Song of Roland, 102-144.
**TUESDAY, NOV. 18, 2008**

Although Europe was overwhelmingly Christian and while the Roman Church exerted a profound influence on virtually every kingdom and nascent state, the reality is that European political culture varied greatly. Today we will look at some of the political structures that developed across Europe.

**Lecture:** Medieval States

**Reading:**

*Song of Roland*, 145-203.

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**THURSDAY, NOV. 20, 2008**

Today’s film blends a fictional story, told through animation, with “spectacular location sequences” to explore the construction of the great European cathedrals of the Middle Ages. These structures, built of stone and glass, “soared to unprecedented heights as the medieval church reached to the heavens to express their devotion.”

**Lecture:** “Cathedral” (film)

**Reading:**

No Reading Assignment

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**TUESDAY, NOV. 25, 2008**

Although scholars place a great deal of emphasis on the “Renaissance,” as if all that came before was depressing and bleak, the truth is that medieval culture was rich and varied. Today we will examine scholastic, religious, and secular culture during the High Middle Ages.

**Lecture:** Culture During the High Middle Ages

**Reading:**

The fourteenth century was one of crisis: religious, military, economic, and social. The Hundred Years War, the Great Schism, and the Plague all presented profound moments of upheaval. Today we will explore some of these crises in order to establish the roots of the Renaissance.

**Lecture:** The Crisis of Renaissance Europe

**Reading:**


The Renaissance started when a handful of intellectuals took a growing interest in the Classical past, expanded when economic prosperity fueled an extraordinary outpouring of artistic, literary, and philosophical work, and ultimately spread to help establish a fruitful seedbed from which the Reformation would grow. Today we will discuss the first two stages in this process, taking careful note of the development of "civic humanism" and paying attention to the contributions of the Medici family.

**Lecture:** The Renaissance

**Reading:**


The Renaissance was not limited to Florence and the idea of “civic humanism” soon spread to Northern Europe where a new generation of scholars, authors, and artists emerged. Today we will examine the Northern Renaissance paying particular attention to the “Prince of Humanists,” Desiderius Erasmus.

**Lecture:** The Northern Renaissance

**Reading:**

Erasmus, *Praise*, 83-134.
Lecture: Final Exam Review

Reading:

No Reading Assignment