

**HIST. 4411W
THE RENAISSANCE**

FALL 2006

DR. R. LOVE

Lectures:	Tues.-Thurs., 11:00 am-12:15 pm, Pafford 208
Office Hours:	TELC3-217, Tues.-Thurs., 10:00-11:00 am, 3:30-5:00 pm, and by appointment
Telephone:	(678) 839-6039

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Jensen, *Renaissance Europe*
Pitti and Datti, *Two Memoirs of Renaissance Florence*
Machiavelli, *The Prince*
Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*

COURSE DESCRIPTION: “Renaissance.” The term conjures up a variety of images familiar to most of us: men and women in rich robes, extravagant banquets, fine works of art, the plays of William Shakespeare, the discovery of man and his world. But these images are accompanied by a myriad of stereotypes that often blur the clarity of the words: a “rebirth” or “revival,” which is what Renaissance means, as opposed to continuity with the past; an “Age of Reason or Discovery,” contrasted with the Medieval “Age of Faith;” and the like. What does all this mean? These terms make us less sure than we might be about what we really understand of the Renaissance and whether it constitutes a distinctive period of history by itself, or merely one aspect of a greater whole. It is useful to remember that the emergence of the Renaissance was fundamentally the work of an intellectual elite. They challenged the morals and politics of the Middle Ages by reviving the classical concept of man-centered freedom and by producing artworks of rare genius. But did these developments represent sharp breaks with the past, or simply manifestations of an evolutionary process begun long before? In the final analysis, the efforts of this intellectual elite became superhuman; their ideals turned into utopian illusions. The period ended in political despotism and a popular religious upheaval called the Reformation.

This course is designed to provide students with an understanding of what was essentially a transitional period at the threshold of the age of modern man, and of a society that had absorbed both classical and medieval influences, while managing to integrate both with new departures. The class attempts a balanced examination of the economic, political and cultural forces that resulted in new social, religious and intellectual patterns. Ultimately, we are interested in two different kinds of things. One is the reality—or accuracy—of the image and the stereotypes already noted. The other is the way in which the people and events between roughly A.D. 1300 and 1500 created—or not—a distinctive era within European civilization, whatever the importance of its contributions to the foundations of western cultural singularity. Indeed, the Renaissance did not stand on the first day of creation; it was the heir of a “Classical” and a “Biblical” tradition, as well as the legacy of the Middle Ages. This course examines the society that emerged out of that synthesis.

At the same time, the thesis implicit in the teaching of this course is that the people and events we shall treat are important NOT simply in-and-of themselves (though they are at least that), but ALSO because they tell us something important about the western tradition AND (though you may not believe this right now) about OURSELVES. This, then, is not an abstract, theoretical course, though you may find some abstractions and some theory in it. It is a course about YOU.

That is the good news: this course is, in the most important ways, relevant; it is interesting; it is educational.

Now the bad news: this is not an easy course. If you want one of those, listen to the street-chatter about which courses in which departments at SUWG are “Mickey-Mouse” courses. This course is relatively difficult, NOT because there is a lot of reading (though there is substantial), and NOT because there is a major writing component (though there is that too). It is not an easy course for the following reason: it makes demands upon your mental processes, or what Hercule Poirot used to call (before Dame Agatha killed him off) “your little grey-cells.” These cells may have atrophied in your most recent years of schooling—either in High School or at SUWG—but they will recover with exercise.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: I believe that in most instances students in the first two years of college are being intellectually and mentally challenged for the first time in their lives. You are cutting your permanent mental teeth. It is neither wise nor necessary to give you educational pap especially prepared for easy digestion. The advantage to you in this kind of course is threefold:

First, you are challenged to be as good as you can be at something that is not easy, but which is rewarding and satisfying;

Second, you will develop critical skills of analysis, reasoning and expression (both verbal and written) which—apart from their helping you to master the substantive aspects of this course—have **useful** skills at the end of this course that can be applied in practical ways. This will give you a legitimate come-back when people (parents or peers) ask you contemptuously what you’re going to “do” with “history”;

Third, you are going to get your—or someone’s—money’s worth out of this course.

These objectives will be met by various means: engendering critical thinking through analysis of contemporary sources; presenting history as an account of the human past by scrutinizing the significant role of individuals who imposed their personality on the larger context; and exploding the myth of inevitability by demonstrating the importance of contingencies within history as men and women in positions of power made choices according to personal perspectives. In addition, Hist. 4411 has been designated as one of the department’s **Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)** classes. This means that students will be doing a considerable amount of writing for the course. The written work will consist of a variety of informal and formal assignments that are intended to stimulate “writing to learn” (**WTL**), as well as “writing to communicate” (**WTC**).

Generally, the course will proceed in a chronological pattern though some thematic considerations necessarily will cross such simple lines. Class time will be devoted primarily to lectures, filling background and acquainting students with the major facets of the period that they have undertaken to study. But some time also will be spent exploring the assigned texts as a class. Student participation is encouraged at all times, therefore, particularly in group discussions based upon the readings, questions arising from lectures and even essays the students are developing. Naturally, this aspect of the course will depend largely upon student effort and willingness to contribute.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

One mid-term exam of 75 minutes’ duration, to be written in class on **Thursday, 5 October** (unless otherwise announced). This exam is worth **20%** of the final grade and will cover the first half of the course material.

A final exam to be written on **Tuesday, 5 December**, from 11:00 am-1:00 pm. This exam is worth **30%** of the final grade and will cover the second half of the course material. It is **NOT** a cumulative or comprehensive exam, though a mandatory question will ask students to consider a broad theme covered by the course material.

Two analytical essays of 6 to 8 pages in length; each is worth **25%** of the final grade. These papers will be due in class on **Tuesday, 26 September**, and on **Tuesday, 31 October**, respectively (unless otherwise announced). Each is to be based on a theme taken from one of the primary texts used for the course, either Pitti and Datti, Thomas à Kempis, or Machiavelli, although one of the papers may compare and contrast a theme common to two of the works. Each paper must deal with a different source, however.

An Extra Participation Grade of as much as **10%** also will be awarded at the instructor's discretion, pertaining to class discussions. To earn it requires making a contribution, beyond merely sitting and listening.

About the Analytical Essays: Choosing a theme from one of the primary texts, the students are required to develop that theme according to what the author wrote about it, how he defined it, and what its significance was to the age. Ultimately, the question to be answered is how the chosen themes help us to understand the mentality of Renaissance people. The purpose of these essays, in other words, is to have students view the world of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries **through the eyes of the contemporary authors**, as opposed to early 21st century eyes, in order understand that world through the examination of one of its aspects as they saw it. The purpose is **NOT** to judge or criticize their ideas simply because they were people of their age, molded, educated and informed by its standards, rather than ours. These essays are not book reviews, therefore; nor are they simple summaries. Also, they are **NOT** research papers. Although students may consult the historical introduction to each work as a preliminary guide, the essays are to be based **exclusively** on the primary text itself. All examples, all quotations must be taken from that source alone. No outside information is permitted.

Both papers are to be **type-written** in standard, grammatical English on 8 ½" x 11" paper, and to use acceptable forms of academic apparatus (i.e., citation of sources, etc.). So be careful to **REVISE** and **PROOFREAD** your work before final submission to correct needless typographical or spelling errors and other silly mistakes. **Failure to do so will materially affect the grade awarded.** To avoid that result, and because this is a WAC class that seeks to enhance writing skills, all students will be required to work with an instructor in the Writing Center, either individually or in small groups for more general instruction. **At least ONE draft of each major writing assignment for the class must be signed by the Writing Center instructor and submitted in class, attached to the final draft of the essay. Students who fail to meet this requirement will lose 10% of their paper grade.** Students are also welcome to consult with the professor in developing their essays. Writing is lonely work, but it need not be isolated work, and this class is designed to ensure that students receive the additional instruction that they need. **PLAGIARISM**—defined as presenting another author's published thoughts, writings and discoveries as one's own, without appropriate credit or citation—will result in immediate failure for the paper and possibly the course.

A Word About Deadlines: Most of the value of the preparation of an essay is lost if there is not time for careful criticism and consideration of the criticism before the next written assignment is due. Hence, students are expected to consult with the instructor in the Writing Center well in advance of the due date for the paper's submission in class, in order to receive a timely critique of their work to carry out necessary revisions to ensure a quality essay and a better grade. Students

also should strive to submit their essays on due date. Such papers will receive a thorough **written** critique with marginal comments from the professor. **Late papers**, on the other hand, will have an automatic extension of one week without penalty to the grade, but they will be returned with a mark only, minus marginal comments and a critique. Finally, any papers submitted after the extended deadline will lose a **full grade**. **NO PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED AFTER THE LAST DAY OF CLASS AT THE END OF THE TERM. ALSO, NO PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED BY EMAIL ATTACHMENT.**

COURSE GRADES:

Mid-term exam	20%
Final exam	30%
Analytical Essay 1	25%
Analytical Essay 2	25%
<u>Participation</u>	<u>10%</u>
Total	110%

The foregoing is a rough profile of the composition of student grades for the course—it is not to be regarded as a rigid framework. If a student starts off poorly and improves, that will be taken into account. If a student goes straight downhill after a brilliant beginning, well,...that also will have to be considered.

BETWEEN ME AND THEE: My office door is open to students. If you want to chat about the course, please do. If you want to drop in just to chat, do that also. Above all, should you have any difficulties in understanding the course material, whether from the readings or the lectures, see me! If you are having problems, it is best to get a drop on them early instead of when it becomes too late.

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Third, you are going to get your—or someone’s—money’s worth out of this course.

Fourth, you will gain experience in leading group discussions based upon the primary readings required by the course, which will hone your ability to ask thought-provoking questions and explain difficult ideas in simple terms.

These objectives will be met by various means: engendering critical thinking through analysis of contemporary sources; presenting history as an account of the human past by scrutinizing the significant role of individuals who imposed their personality on the larger context; and exploding the myth of inevitability by demonstrating the importance of contingencies within history as men and women in positions of power made choices according to personal perspectives.

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One analytical essay of 8 to 10 pages in length, worth **20%** of the final grade. This paper will be due in class on **Tuesday, 26 September**. It is to be based on a common theme found in at least two of the primary texts used for the course, either Pitti and Datti, Thomas à Kempis, or Machiavelli.

A research paper of 15 to 20 pages in length, worth **30%** of the final grade and due in class on **Tuesday, 14 November**. This essay is to address a subject related to Renaissance history (political, social, military, economic, intellectual, etc.) and, where possible, is to include research in primary source material. The paper topic is left to the student's discretion, but in consultation with the instructor to ensure that it is feasible.

Participation, worth **10%** of the final grade, which in this case means leading a class discussion on one of the primary texts assigned for the course. The graduate student will be expected to have read the source and be prepared not only to direct the discussion in class, but answer student questions related to the source (e.g., explanations of concepts, etc.). This will require that the student read the source carefully and understand it.

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COURSE GRADES:

Mid-term exam	20%
Final exam	20%
Analytical Essay	20%
Research Essay	30%
<u>Participation</u>	<u>10%</u>
Total	100%

The foregoing is a rough profile of the composition of student grades for the course—it is not to be regarded as a rigid framework. If a student starts off poorly and improves, that will be taken into account. If a student goes straight downhill after a brilliant beginning, well,...that also will have to be considered.

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