

HIST 233: Renaissance, Reformations, (Revolutions), and Explorations

Grinnell College, Spring 2023

TTh 1:00-2:20 p.m., HSSC N1118

Syllabus subject to change

Assistant Professor Catherine Chou (choucath@grinnell.edu)

Office Hours: TTh 2:30-4:30 p.m. and by appointment. [Sign up here](#)

Course Description

Why is it worth studying the history of early modern Europe in our globalized and multicultural present? It used to be that a course covering this geographic and chronological era would take for granted that several well-defined events had ushered in a rational, secular modernity, first for ‘the West’ and then for ‘the rest’ – the Renaissance, Reformation, Scientific Revolution, and the beginnings of overseas empire.

As historians began experimenting with new methodologies, however, and calling into question entrenched narratives, the stakes for examining the history of early modern Europe shifted as well. Recasting events of world significance as contingent and contested processes both diminished their distinctiveness and recuperated the agency of a greater variety of participants. These historiographical shifts also had the effect of revealing that Europe’s status as the origin point of modernity is less incontrovertible fact than a story developed by both early modern men and women, and contemporary scholars, looking to make sense of a rapidly expanding and more interconnected world. To study early modern Europe in the twenty-first century is to understand why history built around the idea of inevitable progress, led by the West, was so appealing and durable, and why it has proven difficult and perhaps undesirable to construct a single cohesive narrative in its place.

This course will be split into four major units (Renaissance, Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, and the ‘Age of Discovery’), each pairing a narrative of progress and definitive breaking from the past with narratives of gradual, contested, and multifaceted change.

Required Books and Readings

Textbook: Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *Early Modern Europe, 1450-1789* (Cambridge University Press, Second Edition); available at [Burling \(on Course Reserves\)](#) and for [rental or purchase](#) in both e-book and hardcopy format

Course Packet – ***Required for class each day***

Assignments and Grading Breakdown

Participation: 15%

3 x 1200-word response papers **(including drafting): 45%**

Outline one due 02/12; **paper one due 02/20**

Outline two due 03/04; **paper two due 03/12**

Outline three due 04/12; **paper three due 04/21**

Hosting a salon (group project): 5%, to be held Week 10

Special Collections-based Research Paper: 35% **due 05/18**

Scaffolding Assignment #1: 04/28

Scaffolding Assignment #2: 05/05

Scale for individual assignments:

A: 97% B: 85% C: 75%

A-: 91% B-: 81% D: 62%

B+: 88% C+: 78% F: 50%

Scale for final grades:

A: 95%+ B: 84-86% C: 70%-76%

A-: 90-94% B-: 80-83% D: 60-69%

B+: 87-90% C+: 77-80% F: Below 60%

Attendance and Participation: 15%

The primary predictor of your success in class is your attendance. We are in this journey together. “Class” is the students coming together to analyze the readings: developing incisive questions, identifying significant passages, tracing common themes, providing evidentiary support for your arguments, and responding productively to critiques. There is no replacement for class, no substitute for showing up together in community.

Please prepare for every class by:

1. [Checking the class Google Doc](#) for announcements, reminders, and daily analysis questions (to be completed before each session). You should be prepared to write a short paragraph or two for each daily analysis question, although your style can be informal.
2. Using my notes on [Perusall](#) to guide your reading. Our course code for Perusall is CHOU-PEFPG. The daily analysis questions are repeated in Perusall, **marked with an orange question mark**. Annotations for your own benefit are “untagged” (the question marks are greyed out).
3. Bringing your course packet with you, so that we can all be on the same page during discussion.

3 x 1200-word Response Papers – 45% (see above for draft & final due dates)

For three of our four units (on the Renaissance, Reformation, and Scientific Revolution), you will write a 1200-word analytical paper building on your short reactions for each session, as well as our class discussions. You will design your own analytical question and argument and submit an outline a week in advance of the deadline, **drawing on at least one outside academic and/or additional primary source.**

Then, based on feedback from me (and potentially a writing tutor), please revise and complete the paper **(15% each)**.

Outlines should consist of:

- A complete introductory paragraph, including your analytical question and thesis
- A complete first body paragraph, including a topic sentence and the evidence and analysis you will use to support it (footnotes required)
- The remainder of your paragraphs (about three to four more) sketched out in bullet points. Begin with your topic sentences for each and include the quotations/evidence you will use to make your case. I should be able to clearly follow the logic of your argument.

All the writing you produce for this class should be footnoted in Chicago-style format. For more information on footnoting, see: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/717/03/>

Final Project – Rare Book or Manuscript-based Paper (35%), due 05/18, plus scaffolding dates

Grinnell recently acquired a treasure trove of rare books and manuscripts from the Salisbury House in Des Moines. We will be one of the first classes to make use of these archival materials (exciting!) For your final project, you will select an early modern artifact from Special Collections and build a short research paper around it (~2000 words). The two scaffolding assignments will focus on developing a research question and creating an annotated bibliography to support you in the writing process.

Hosting a Salon (5%), ideally Week 10, date and time determined by student schedules

During the Enlightenment, well-born and educated women hosted scientists, philosophers, and statesmen in their drawing rooms for lively discussions known as salons. Together as a class, we will select a text or two to discuss at an evening party with friends and colleagues.

Late Assignment Policy

Every student is entitled to two 24-hour grace periods to use on the 1000-word response papers, exams, or final project. You must notify me if you plan to take an extension. Once you have used your grace periods, late assignments will be docked by 1/3 of a grade each day.

Honor Code

Please familiarize yourself with the Grinnell Student Handbook honesty policies and abide by them.

Accommodations

If you have any documented needs that require accommodation, please do not hesitate to let me know.

[More details are available here.](#)

Readings and Topics

Week One

Tuesday, January 24th – Introduction

Thursday, January 26th – Renaissance Men

1. Jacob Burckhardt, 'The Development of the Individual' and 'The Revival of Antiquity' ('The Humanists'), in *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (London: Phaidon Press)

Week Two

Tuesday, January 31st – Renaissance Men

1. Petrarch, 'The Ascent of Mont Ventoux', April 26, 1366, in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, eds. Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 36-46

Thursday, February 2nd – Humanism and the New Learning

1. Dante Alighieri, *Inferno* (selections from the *Divine Comedy*), c. 1320, eds. Jean and Robert Hollander (Anchor Books, 2002)

Week Three

Tuesday, February 7th – Humanism and the New Learning

1. Giovanni Boccaccio, selections, *The Decameron*, 1353, trans. Wayne A Rebhorn (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2013)

Thursday, February 9th – Renaissance Women?

1. Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 1405, Part 1, Chapters 1-11 (New York: Penguin, 1999)

Sunday, February 12th – Outline for Paper #1 due

Week Four

Tuesday, February 14th – Renaissance Women?

1. Merry Wiesner-Hanks, 'Do Women Need the Renaissance?' in *Gender and History*, vol. 20, no. 3 (November 2008), p. 539-557

Thursday, February 16th – The Cataclysmic Reformation – Lutheranism

1. Andrew Pettegree, "The Changing Face of Reformation History" and Carl Truman, "Luther and the Reformation in Germany", in *Reformation World* (Routledge, 2000)

Week Five

Monday, February 20th – Final draft of Paper #1 due

Tuesday, February 21st – The Cataclysmic Reformation – Lutheranism

1. Johan Tetzl, 'Rebuttal against Luther's Sermon on Indulgences and Grace', 1518, p. 1-19 and 31-32
2. Pro- and anti-Luther woodcut selections, 1520s and 30s

Thursday, February 23rd – The Cataclysmic Reformation – England

1. Helen Parish, "England", in *Reformation World* (Routledge, 2000)
2. John Bale, 'The Woman Clothed with the Sun and the Whore of Babylon', in *The Images of Both Churches*, 1545
3. John Foxe, frontispiece, 'Acts and Monuments', 1563

Week Six

Tuesday, February 28th – The Cataclysmic Reformation – England

1. John Field and Thomas Wilcox, 'An Admonition to the Parliament', 1572

Thursday, March 2nd – Rethinking the Reformation

1. Lee Palmer Wandel, *The Reformation: Towards a New History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011)

Saturday, March 4th – Outline for Paper #2 due

Week Seven

Tuesday, March 7th – Rethinking the Reformation

1. Nicholas Terpstra, Introduction and Chapter 2, 'Purifying the Body', in *Religious Refugees in the Early Modern World: An Alternative History of the Reformation* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015)

Thursday, March 9th – Aristotelianism and the Early Modern Scientific Worldview

1. Peter Dear, 'Introduction: The Measure of All Things' and Chapter 1, 'Induction in Early-Modern Europe', in *Discipline and Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995)

Sunday, March 12th – Final Draft of Paper #2 due

Week Eight

Tuesday, March 14th – Towards an Experimental Paradigm?

1. Andreas Vesalius, selections, *On The Fabric of the Human Body* (1543), trans. D.H. Garrison and M.H. Hast (Basel, Switzerland: Karger, 2016)

Thursday, March 16th – Towards an Experimental Paradigm?

1. Robert Boyle, selections, *New Experiments Physico-Mechanical* (1660)

Spring Break

Week Nine

Tuesday, April 4th – Towards an Experimental Paradigm?

1. Margaret Cavendish, selections, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, ed. Eileen O'Neill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

Thursday, April 6th – Towards an Experimental Paradigm?

1. Simon Schaffer and Steven Shapin, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985)

Week Ten

Tuesday, April 11th – A Social History of Early Modern Science

1. Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), Chapter 1 'The Great Civility: Trust, Truth, and Moral Order', p. 3-41

Wednesday, April 12th – Outline for Paper #2 due

Salon Evening TBD, in lieu of regular class

Week Eleven

Tuesday, April 18th – The 'Age of Discovery'

1. Michael Ryan, 'Assimilating New Worlds in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 23, no. 4 (Oct. 1981), p. 519-38

Thursday, April 20th The 'Age of Discovery'

1. Michel de Montaigne, 'On Cannibals', 1580

Friday, April 21st – Final Draft of Paper #3 due

Week Twelve

Tuesday, April 25th – Thursday, April 20th – The ‘Age of Discovery’

1. Jose de Acosta, *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, ed. Jane E. Magan (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 1590

Thursday, April 27th – The Impact of the ‘New World’ in Europe

1. Anthony Grafton, Introduction and Chapter 5, ‘A New World of Learning’, in *New Worlds, Ancient Texts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992)

Friday, April 28th – Scaffolding Assignment #1 for Final Project due

Week Thirteen

Tuesday, May 2nd – Special Collections research time

Thursday, May 4th – Special Collections research time

Friday, May 5th – Scaffolding Assignment #2 for Final Project due

Week Fourteen

Tuesday, May 9th – Special Collections research time

Thursday, May 11th – Research Paper Presentations

Exam Week

Thursday, May 18th – Special Collections-based Research Paper due by 11:59 p.m.