

Medieval Thought and Culture
Professor McNelis
Spring 2016

This course is an introduction to foundational trends and developments in the thought and culture of Europe from late antiquity to the Renaissance (roughly 400-1500). We will read a series of texts (e.g. Augustine, Chaucer, Dante) and focus in particular on their treatment of major themes such as the relationships and responsibilities of the individual to authority, both civic and divine; the pursuit, acquisition and preservation of knowledge both by individuals and within institutional structures; the relationship of an individual to the broader community; and arguments about divinity that reflect intense disagreements in thought about the nature of the divine. While the texts will serve as the basis for class discussion, there will also be discussion of various aspects of the medieval world during each class session.

This is also a hybrid class that will heavily use blackboard. Each week there will be lectures on various topics of intellectual history from the period during which the work we are reading was written. Students will be expected to listen to these lectures before class and to answer questions on a blog before attending class. The goal is to direct both your reading and the class discussion.

Office Hours

I am available to meet before class, but if that does not fit with your work schedule, I am happy to talk over the phone or other ways to address your concerns. My office phone number is 202-687-8714; email is cam72@georgetown.edu.

Requirements:

- a) **Written Work (30%)** Students will write 6 short papers (500 words or less) over the course of the semester. These papers are designed to develop critical thinking and to develop analytical skills by focusing on issues discussed in class. These will be graded on a standard scale from A to F; only truly excellent work will receive the highest grades. Over the course of semester, I anticipate that there will be significant improvement in your writing from the beginning to the end of the class. You are not to use outside sources for these papers; doing so will be considered a violation of the University's Honor Code and (if proven) will result in an F for the assignment. Moreover, papers should respect the page limitation spelled out above; longer papers will not be read. Written work is due at the start of each class in hard copy. If you cannot be in class, you may submit your paper online before the start of class. Your absence will be recorded as such, but your paper will count as long as it arrives before the start time.
- b) **Class Participation (30%)** Students are expected to attend every class. I recognize that emergencies may arise. Students must, however, be extremely cautious about missing class, since, through BALS policy, the second absence will result in failure of the course. The only exception to this rule is medical; for that, I will need documentation from a doctor, and I will consult with SCS administrators about what should be done. Your presence in the classroom, by itself, amounts to C work (75%, i.e. a "fair" performance). A higher grade is easily obtainable by contributing meaningfully to our discussions. This can mean asking questions as well as answering those posed by faculty and other students. The foundation of your class participation should be a careful, thoughtful reading of the texts. Much of this material will be unfamiliar, even uncomfortably challenging. Each class session is designed to help you understand the assignment and to think about it in new ways. In other words, there will be learning during the class session, and your active participation will be an index of how much you are learning.

Blogs (20%): Over the course of the semester, students will be responsible for writing 8 entries of 250 words or so in relation to a question that is prompted by a lecture pre-recorded on Blackboard. Grading rubrics are the following:

1. Content. Does the post
 - a. specifically address the question based upon the reading?
 - b. or use the reading to develop, corroborate, or disagree (politely!) with another post?
2. Expression. Is the post clearly written?
3. Intellectual engagement. Does the post display (through citation and analysis) an intellectual engagement with the readings assigned for that week?
4. Synthesis. Does the post draw upon the broader context of the course?

c) Final (20%): A take home exam. More details later.

Learning Goals and Assessments

Students will be assessed according to the following benchmarks and goals:

- 1) Students will develop strategies of reading, understanding and enjoying literary works.
- 2) Students will learn to analyze and discuss complex ideas that emerge from literature and other expressions of intellectual activity.
- 3) Students will learn a basic outline of medieval history and be able to understand the basic intellectual context in which texts were written.
- 4) Students will learn the basic form and style of academic writing. Students will be able to produce papers that engage closely with specific passages and that are free from lexical and grammatical errors.

Schedule of Readings:

Week 1: Course Introduction
 Week 2: Augustine, *Confessions* 1-7
 Week 3: Augustine, *Confessions* 8-13
 Week 4: Einhard, *Life of Charlemagne*
 Week 5: Beowulf
 Week 6: John of Salisbury, *Policraticus* (selections)
 Week 7: Letters of Abelard and Heloise (selections)
 Week 8: Aquinas, selections
 Week 9: Dante, *Inferno*
 Week 10: Dante, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*
 Week 11: Chaucer, selections from *Canterbury Tales*
 Week 12: Chaucer, selections from *Canterbury Tales*
 Week 13: Petrarch, selections
 Week 14: Wrap-up

Required Texts

It is essential that you acquire the correct translations. Please order by ISBN number.

St. Augustine, *Confessions*, R.S. Pine-Coffin (tr.), Penguin ISBN-13: 978-0140441147

Two Lives of Charlemagne, Penguin ISBN-13: 978-0140455052

S. Heaney, *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation* ISBN-13: 978-0393320978

Peter Abelard. *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise* Penguin, B. Radice (tr.) ISBN-13: 978-0140448993

Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, J. Ciardi (tr.) ISBN-13: 978-0451208637

G. Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, N. Coghill (tr.) ISBN-13: 978-0140424386

- Grading Scheme

A = 93-100%

A- = 90-92%

B+= 88-89.9%

B = 83-87.9%

B- = 80-82%

C+= 78-79.9%

C = 73-77.9%

C- = 70-72%

D+= 68-69.9%

D = 60-67.9%

F = Below 60%

Absences

A student will count as “absent” in any week in which he/she fails to submit any of the assignments due that week, including discussion postings, and/or writing assignments. After the student accumulates two such “absent” weeks, the student will receive a failing grade in this course, regardless of grades earned in any other assignment

Accommodation (*Students with Disabilities Policies*):

The School of Continuing Studies proudly supports the role of Georgetown's Office of Institutional Diversity, Equity, and Affirmative Action and does not discriminate or deny access to otherwise qualified students on the basis of disability. Depending on their documentation, students with disabilities may be eligible for reasonable accommodations and/or special services in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Students with disabilities are strongly encouraged to contact the Academic Resource Center (Leavey Center, Suite 335; 202-687-8354; arc@georgetown.edu) before the start of classes to allow that office time to review their documentation and to make recommendations for appropriate accommodations, including note takers, books on tape, extended time on tests, interpreting services and enlarged texts, among others. There is a procedure for requesting an accommodation as well as a list of possible accommodations available.

If the Academic Resource Center recommends accommodations, its office will provide the student with an official letter to share with professors. Students are personally responsible for completing this process officially and in a timely manner. Neither accommodations nor exceptions to policies can be permitted to students who have not completed this process in advance. In some instances, recommended accommodations might not be allowable by a professor if doing so would modify course or degree requirements considered an essential requirement of the program of instruction. Should questions or related issues arise, the student and professor should work directly with the Academic Resource Center to find an appropriate resolution.

Academic Integrity

As signatories to the Georgetown University Honor Pledge, students are required to uphold academic honesty in all aspects of the course, especially on exams and papers. The professor is

aware of and regularly consults all of the major internet sources for plagiarized papers. Thus, students are hereby cautioned to follow the letter and the spirit of the Standards of Conduct outlined in the Georgetown Honor System brochure pp. 3-4, 11-13. If you have any questions about conforming to rules regarding plagiarism or about the proper format for citations, consult your professor or teaching assistant. The first instance of plagiarism will result in a grade of "F" on that assignment. Any further instance of plagiarism will result in an "F" for the course.