Introduction

The term “early modern” carries with it a host of assumptions and ambiguities that can easily create a fog that limits our understanding of the beauty and powerfully contested nature of the four centuries (or so) of time the “early modern” period contains. The term assumes Europe was traveling towards something called “modern” but, like anxious children, hadn’t gotten there yet. We can easily assume that what we see, as historians, when we looking backward at the people living then, are merely underdeveloped versions of ourselves. Part of what I hope we will discover, through this class, is that early modern Europe is a complex, shifting and difficult space, yet much of our civilization’s heritage blossomed out of that fertile ground. We shall see that ideas of society, of religion, of truth: all of them were contested (often violently) throughout this period. The period produces figures as diverse as Giordano Bruno and Isaac Newton, Martin Luther and Louis XIV: making sense of how the period contains such rich soil will be part of our journey. While the end of the seventeenth century saw the emergence of ideas of toleration, freedom, of rationally approaching the world, that emergence was just beginning and incomplete.

Understanding the roots of these ideas allows us to understand ourselves and our place in history more clearly and more critically. Thus, our examination of early modern Europe will necessarily entail the study of the people and events that generate those ideas. One of the related goals within this theme is to help you and I more fully understand these solutions to life’s basic questions as well as answer those same questions. Socrates one wrote that the unexamined life is not worth living. The history of early modern Europe will help us examine our lives more fully and see our past and our current society more clearly.

One part of our journey this semester will involve coming to terms with the process of doing history: the choices and skills necessary to create historical arguments. History requires a different kind of thinking than you might normally have been exposed to in other classes. A historian, like a geologist or biologist, cannot explain why a particular event happened in the precise way that it did. That would be like asking a biologist to explain how you have just the precise genetic makeup you do or why a particular mountain is precisely as high as it is and no shorter or taller. Science can explain the processes and general conditions that led to the mountain looking as it does (or you looking as you do). Similarly, a historian can explain generally how an event came to be the way that it was. However, within that uncertain space is the beauty of real history: the creative act of exploration.

Course structure

This course is a seminar. We will meet each week for about 2.5 hours, with a brief pause about halfway through. Except for the first week, the first part of each meeting will be led by two student presenters. After the break, we will finish our discussions and reflect on what we’ve gained during that class. The remaining minutes of class will focus on practical research
methods and skills as they relate to our research projects due at the end of the semester. The seminar format places much of the burden of learning on you and your fellow students. Not preparing for discussions will harm them as well as you. Though presenters will organize and lead the discussion, you should come prepared to every class; otherwise you’ll be letting them down.

Requirements:

Regular attendance and participation: 30%

Since a graduate course involves discussion, attendance and participation are crucial. I expect you to attend and actively participate in our class work. Missing more than one class may seriously affect your grade. Missing an assigned presentation (see below) will harm your partner and the rest of the class, so if you miss one you will likely see a severe drop in your class grade. There are three parts to your Discussion grade:

1. Presentations:
   During the first class session you will sign up to do paired presentations on course readings. Presenters are responsible for introducing the assigned readings and guiding discussion. A good presentation should give a brief account of the author’s career and scholarly interests, followed by a synopsis of the reading’s subject and main themes, an analysis of its methods and sources, and a set of questions for discussion. These questions, which will help frame the rest of the discussion, should address not only problems with the reading but also further questions that the reading raises but does not resolve.

2. Precis: (500 words-ish):
   Each class, we will read and discuss selected readings in Early Modern European history. To help us all out in that task, each of us will prepare BEFORE class a short, critical summary of the reading you have chosen. These “precis” will be posted on the course blog prior to our meetings. In these short essays, be sure to address the following questions: What is the author’s thesis? What kinds of historical evidence does the argument rely upon (e.g. letters, court records, diaries, governmental reports) and how does this kind of evidence shape the historian’s conclusions? How does this work relate to others you have read this semester for this course? What do you see as the major strengths and weaknesses of this work? Do you see any important omissions, errors of fact or logic? The précis should read like a book review, that is: aimed at someone who has not read the work and in a fluid, essay format (i.e., not disconnected answers to a series of implied or specified questions). I expect each of you to do 6 of these over the course of the semester. You may do more for extra credit.
   [NB: there are no extensions, excuses, . . . etc.: these are due when they are due. Period.]
3. Speaking in Class:
The final expectation is that each of us will add meaningful analysis and commentary both of the specific works we are working with and the larger themes, ideas and concepts we are dealing with when covering this period. This is not a quantity but a quality assessment.

Writing
1. Secondary source critique: Formal: 5% of your grade: due February 16
Over the course of the course, you will write one short (three-page) critique of selected secondary sources. Directions for this assignment are linked under the “Grading Material” tab on the course blog.
2. Primary source analysis: Formal: 5% of your grade: due March 22
Over the course of the class, you will write one short (two-page) analysis of a primary source. Directions for this assignment are linked under the “Grading Material” tab on the course blog.
3. Two peer critiques: Informal: 5% of your grade: due February 23 & March 29
Over the course of the summer, you will write two brief (one-page) peer critiques of your fellow students’ secondary source critiques and primary source analyses.
4. Final Reflection: Informal: 5% of your grade: due with Final Project
With your Final Project, you will turn in a two page reflection on your work over the course. There is a sheet, very informal in nature, which outlines the kinds of things you should reflect on but what I am looking for are a self-analysis of what you did well, what you did not-so-well and what areas you enjoyed or not. It’s intended to allow you time to think about your performance and how the class worked for you.

Preliminary Research Bibliography: 10%: Due March 1: Ungraded But Discussed
Submit a preliminary bibliography on the (approved) topic of your choice with at least 13 scholarly entries, 10 of which must not be listed on the class syllabus, including at least 5 articles and 6 books. There should be at least 2 primary sources in your bibliography (using more will result in a higher grade). Include, at the beginning, a brief paragraph describing the topic that you are researching, including what you hope or expect to find, along with any difficulties that you anticipate encountering. Include 2-3 sentences on each source, explaining its relevance. This will be the basis of your Final Project, below.

Annotated Outline: 10%: Due April 5th: Graded
Submit a detailed outline of your planned topics and arguments for your Final Project. This should be 6 or so pages or so in length and include brief summaries of sections, sources, struggles and ideas. The goal is to show your progress to date, along with the critical thinking you’ve done thus far on your topic.
Final Project: 30%: Due Last class or final exam period
The goal for this requirement is to have each of you work on a topic of your choice, one that interests you, and conduct intensive research on that area. Research allows you to learn about an area in a rigorous way as well as helps you learn ‘how to learn’ about new areas of study. As I noted in my first email to you all, there are two tracks each of you can choose from to complete this course requirement. One is a traditional academic track: the research paper. The details for this track are below. The second is geared for those course members who are interested in thinking about how they might teach parts of early modern history. This track is an “educational” one and will require the development of a Unit plan, made up of several lesson plans. The details for this track are below as well. A POSSIBLE third track could be made available to interested students. This track would involve creating an on-line exhibit- a digital history--showcasing your research and analysis on your chosen topics. Any student interested in pursuing this possibility should meet with me VERY soon after we begin class to start their work.
Regardless of the track you choose, your topic must be approved by me.
If you begin having any questions about this aspect of the course, contact me.

Final Project Topic Suggestions:
Select a topic from the following list or develop one of your own: You should plan to narrow your topic by region or country:
• Witchcraft
• Medicine, Healing
• Folklore, storytelling
• Popular rebellions, uprisings
• Games (especially as they relate to the social order)
• Festivals, popular celebrations
• Rituals (e.g. Both official & non-official religious or spiritual practices)
• Beliefs/practices around Food or Drink
• Culture of Work
• Institutions (Royal Academies, Royal Courts, Craftsmen, etc.)
• Crime and the law (how does the law suppress popular culture?)
• Impact of Literacy on Popular Culture (e.g. “penny print”)
• New technologies and popular culture (e.g. Printing, science)
• Forms of education (e.g. Universities, Hedge schools)
• Commercialization, Consumer Culture
• Gender (e.g. Women’s roles, cross-dressing)
• The “New” World
HIST 605
Themes in European History I (ca. 1400-1800)
Thomas Rushford
www.historianhouse.us/History_605

Research Paper (approximately 12-15 pp.)
In our seminar paper, you should:
· argue an original thesis concerning your topic in early modern European culture
· discuss the historiography that is relevant to your topic
· base your argument on evidence from sources
· conclude by discussing how further research on this topic might proceed.

Unit Plan (approximately 12-15 pp.)
Your topic should involve a considered unit that you would teach to either secondary or college students (there’s a difference and your plans should reflect that). The Unit should have the elements required for a standard Unit plan. The Unit should contain 5-7 lesson plans, each of those plans having their required elements.

Benchmarks and examples of both Unit plans and Lesson plans will be posted on our Course Blog.

Class Policies
As adults in college you are entitled to know what the class policies are, as you are expected to adhere to them. They are designed to help with your education, and to enable all class members to do their best.

1. “Participation:” Attendance will be recorded. An absence will be excused only if you have an outstandingly good reason for missing a class, such as being ill, needing to attend a funeral, or participating in an official GMU event (though given our class time . . . ). Arriving late and leaving early are both disruptive to other students. **You must arrive before I take attendance to be marked "present" for the class:** "I was finishing my homework" or “I was shellacking my dog, Barf” will not be accepted as excuses for late arrival or departure. **Please note the impact of being late on your attendance and the resulting likelihood of failing the class.**

2. Classroom courtesy: Out of respect for your fellow students, come to class on time and do not engage is distracting behavior during lectures or discussion. Put away crossword puzzles, turn off mobile phones and such. A further note about courtesy:

   **Nota Bene**
   
   Don’t use your computer for things other than class work during class. I appreciate the beauty of a laptop as much as anyone but chatting, surfing, watching YouTube (etc.) during class violates this expectation. If I even think you’re doing that, I’ll mark you as absent (it really bothers me and distracts your classmates).

Readings
Required readings for each week are listed in the calendar, below. Most (NOT ALL) of the articles and primary sources will be available online, but each week there is one major book
reading assignment (all or part of a book, depending on length) that you will have to buy or borrow. I did not order books because I expect that many of you will wish to buy only the books that particularly interest you and that you’ll borrow the others. Please make arrangements as early as possible to get the books you want, and allow extra time to read reserve copies of those you don’t want.

Two books that you will find valuable for doing research in this course are:

If you find that the readings or discussions introduce a lot of unfamiliar terms, you should take a look at the following books:

* Early Modern Europe: *An Oxford History*, Eaun Cameron, ed., Oxford University Press: Oxford (2001)(0-19-820760). This is a good survey of the period and topics we will (mostly) be covering. If you haven’t taken a history class in a while or simply need some grounding in the period, this is a good reading source.
Bennett, Tony, Lawrence Grossberg, and Meaghan Morris, eds. *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Malden, MA, and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005. A dictionary of important concepts, which contains brief histories of important concepts for social analysis, e.g. family, class, science.

**Brief Suggestions for Doing Well**

Graduate level history is not an “easy” adventure, though it can be both fun and enriching. If you keep a few simple points in mind, it will be a lot easier. What follows are really aspects of one overarching principle: TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR OWN EDUCATION.

* Read the syllabus carefully, and write down in [insert whatever you use] the dates on which assignments are due. This will help you budget your time for the weeks when there is more work than normal.
* Talk to me before anything gets BAD, wrong or otherwise abnormal. Problems always come up but problems are generally easily solved UNLESS you ignore them.
* Develop a comfortable friendship with perseverance and a tolerance for frustration. Some of the greatest challenges— and therefore, real learning— in history (especially at this level) lie in necessary trail-blazing. Many important topics in early modern history are only vaguely understood and remain largely unanswerable questions that require further work.
HIST 605
Themes in European History I (ca. 1400-1800)
Thomas Rushford
www.historianhouse.us/History_605

SCHEDULE
A zen master once wrote that “in the beginning is all.”
I offer that little piece of wisdom with the recommendation that will begin
our first steps together by doing each assignment
when it is assigned. That way you’ll be prepared for our class.

Week 1: August 28th
Introduction: some historiographical considerations
Geertz, Clifford. “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture.”

Week 2: September 4th
Popular Culture: Who and What Do We Mean?
Peter Burke, Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe
978-0754665076
OR
Natalie Zaemon Davis, Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays
(978-0804709729)

Week 3: September 11th
Secondary Source Due
*Randolph Starn, “Review article: the early modern muddle,” Journal of Early Modern History 6:3
Economic and Social History of the Orient (1998)—on the applicability of “early modern” beyond
Europe

Week 4: September 18th
Peer Critique 1
Power of the Word II: Reformation & Counter Reformation
(9780670032969)
OR
Robert Bireley, The Refashioning of Catholicism, 1450-1700: A Reassessment of the Counter
Reformation (978-0813209517)

Week 5: September 25th
Marshall, Reformation and Primary Sources (Luther, On the Jews)(skim, its long)
Preliminary Research Bibliography Due

Week 6: October 2nd
Paradigms of Life: The New Science
Week 7: October 9th = Columbus Day Enjoy Yourself but get started on your final project

Week 8: October 16th
Primary Source Due
Impact of the New World
OR
Sydney Mintz, Sweetness & Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History (Penguin) (978-0140092332)

Week 9: October 23rd
Peer Critique 2
Eltis, Rise & Fall of Slavery and Eltis, Importance of Slavery

Week 10: October 30th
Annotated Outline Due
Joad Raymond, The Invention of the Newspaper: English Newsbooks 1641-1649 (978-0199282340)
OR
Kevin Sharpe, Reading Revolutions: The Politics of Reading in Early Modern England (978-0300081527)

Week 11: November 6th
Joad Raymond, The Invention of the Newspaper: English Newsbooks 1641-1649 (978-0199282340)
OR
Kevin Sharpe, Reading Revolutions: The Politics of Reading in Early Modern England (978-0300081527)

Week 12: November 13th
Clark, Stuart Inversion, Misrule and the Meaning of Witchcraft (Past & Present. No. 87 (May, 1980) (available on JStor) & Article

Week 12: November 20th
Final Project Presentations (work-to-date)
"Wonder" Pamphlets (everyone)

Week 13: November 27th
The Making of Modernity II: The French Revolution:
Hunt, Lynn, Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution, (Berkley, CA, University of California Press, 2004)
OR
Reflection on Grading:
In my grading system, here’s the breakdown. These comments should be read as a whole in order to feel out the shifts. My experiences as a professor at the graduate level and as a graduate student have reinforced in me the idea that these are common criteria and you may already know them. You will note that the central focus of the steps in this is the degree, quality and amount of critical engagement with a reading. Undergraduates may summarize what they read, a graduate student engages with that material, using previous readings, relying on best historiographical tools and noting personal approaches. Thus:
A+= 98 - 100. This is a perfect student. Every single moment in their class work is breathtaking and startling in its beauty, command of the source material and uniquely powerful in its insights. These are rare and wonderful students.
A= 94 - 97: a small step down from the Olympic heights of the A+ student, still in every moment showing signs of brilliance but having small pieces of work be more “normal.” The focus is analysis rather than mere summary and there are flashes of brilliance to their work.
A– 90 - 93: The distinguishing mark between the A student and A- student is the reliance on summary rather than analysis: the student has awareness of the material but not ‘command.’
B+= 88-89: While the mixture of work now shades into total summary here, there is also less real engagement in the class work and material. Less active participation at all levels of the course work.
B= If you receive a “B” grade in grad school, I have been told, its like a ‘D’ as a undergraduate. All that "B" here means is that the quality of the work produced is at an undergrad level, rather than at a graduate level.