Course Description:
The history of early modern Europe is a bit like the universe. It is infinitely vast and impossible to survey in its entirety. A lot of it is hidden, inaccessible. But even if we can’t map it, we can locate constellations and try to explain how things formed and changed over time. At the center of this course are the four constellations that have intrigued historians for the longest time: the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment. We will survey these constellations of history by traveling widely, conceptually as well as geographically, telescopically and microscopically, weaving across a variety of sites, from farmlands to palaces, laboratories to courts. We will approach the period from a variety of interpretive angles, reading across historical traditions and exploring causal connections between processes that occurred on seemingly different planes. Hence topics such as gender or social history will not be relegated to separate weeks and, instead, understood in relation to seminal events like the French Wars of Religion or the Reformation.

It is often assumed that modernity itself was “created” by Europeans in the early modern period. To those who speak of “Western Civilization”, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, and the Enlightenment are foundational, mythic, and iconic markers of how we became what we are today. We start this course by questioning this narrative and expanding your historical imagination about what modernity is and where it comes from. Critical though they are, the relationship between these events is deeper than you’ve ever imagined. The French Revolution, as we will learn, was born on a wave of pornography and the history of skepticism was strangely mixed with the history of absolutism. The roots of modern finance lie in the chambers of alchemists and the charts of astrologers. It was the plantation economy which fueled the transformation of magic into modernity. A whole slew of questions emerge when we link the to the unfamiliar. If capitalism emerged from the Protestant Reformation, did merchants become merchants because they were Calvinists? Or did they become Calvinist because they were merchants?

This course is listed as “Early Modern Europe” but it could easily be called “Questioning Early Modern Europe.” The scaffolding for our inquiry will be a set of underlying questions about crisis and stability, continuity and change, order and disorder. I aim to convince you that the most significant legacies of this period are questions, not answers. The history of this period will be revealed, in this course, as questionable in several senses: contestable, debatable, open for revision. My aim is to convince you that these histories are both questionable and worth questioning. These questions are interesting because they apply not only to the period under consideration but also to us today. These are questions – about faith and doubt, the secret worlds of atoms and the farthest reaches of empire - that burn with contemporary relevance.

This course is designed, also, to help you think about how to ask and answer these questions, not just in the space of a history class but also in other academic and non-academic spaces. It is at once a survey of this period and a practicum in historical thinking and writing. It doesn’t assume that every student
is a first-year contemplating a history major. Some of you might be seniors fulfilling a requirement, others might just be interested in the topic. By instilling an appreciation for questions, my goal is for you all to leave the class with an ability to think historically as well as a sense of why this kind of thinking is important, relevant, revealing, and in every way worth learning how to do well.

**Goals:**

1) You should leave the class with a solid understanding of what the Renaissance, Reformation, the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment mean to historians. You should be able to identify the master narratives as well as many of the lesser-known histories of these events.

2) You should also be able to explain the critical debates surrounding why these events happened and how they were related to each other. Have scholars disagreed and, if so, what has been the basis of scholarly disagreement?

3) You should have a deep sense of the complexity and messiness of the history we are studying. You should be able to explain why and how the “Scientific Revolution” is a questionable historical category. By the end of this course, not only should you know what the Renaissance was, you should also understand why some would believe that the Renaissance never ended.

4) You should leave the class not with knowledge of the period but also an understanding of its importance. Why are these histories still being written? Why and why are the questions raised by the Renaissance, Reformation, Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment still important and, perhaps, now more important than ever before?

5) You should have improved as a writer and a reader. The writing of history is an art as well as a science: you will be encouraged, in your papers, to develop your own scholarly voice, and explore styles of historical interpretation – micro-histories, close readings, interpretations of visual images – with which you have been previously unfamiliar.

6) In order to become better writers, we have to become better readers. By the end of the semester, you should be better equipped to locate the essence and structure of scholarly argument. Towards this end, you’ll be exposed to a variety of methodological styles – from broad, sweeping social histories to intricate and minutely detailed micro-histories. Every week, we will examine how historians have framed questions, scrutinized archives, and traced trajectories of change over time. Amongst the legacies of Early Modern Europe are some of the best works of history. No matter how good a writer you are, you can always get a lot better by paying close attention to the underlying structure of scholarly arguments. We will certainly be critical about what we read but not until you’ve shown that you understand it.

7) This course should awaken your curiosity about all things historical, not just Europe. By exposing you to historical experiences and processes that you hadn’t imagined, I want to make you curious enough to want to know more, to convince you in the power of historical method and pleasure of historical reading. If it makes you take another history course, in a completely different area, I will consider myself successful.
Structure, assignments, and expectations:

Each week will have a similar structure. We will start with a synthetic account of the period, move onto a defining event or problem, and progressively deepen our understanding of it by engaging primary and secondary sources. On Monday, my lectures will identify and expand on the most important points from the readings. I will provide historical context, explain difficult ideas, and otherwise provide you with background necessary to understand the readings for Wednesday. The rest of the week will be spent unraveling and following the several strains of discussion that emerge from the readings. Monday will be mostly lecture, Wednesday will be a mix, and Friday will be mostly discussions and short presentations.

To do well in this course, you will have to do the readings before lectures and take notes during the lectures. You can come to class without doing the readings, but that would be a bit like watching a foreign film without the subtitles or, even worse, reading the subtitles without watching the film. You can do it, but you just won’t get that much out of it.

Requirements:

1) Learning archive of reading summaries (mostly just paragraph-long summaries of articles and chapters) and occasional Moodle assignments. (20%)

2) One paper (6-7 pages) analyzing a primary source (20%). Paper topics will be discussed every week. You can turn the paper in on any week. Requirements for the paper are listed below.

3) In-class final, essay style, with your learning archive and lecture notes (30%). There is nothing surprising here. You will be presented with excerpts of primary sources you haven’t seen before and asked a question which will require you to write an essay interpreting that source while drawing on your learning archive and lecture notes.

4) A ten-minute presentation of a book from the “further readings” of any given week (10%). By Week 2, each of you will have chosen the week on which you will present. There will be three parts to the presentation. 1) What is the question that the historian is asking and how is s/he answering the question? In other words, what is the main argument? (approximately 2 minutes) 2) What are the arguments of each individual chapter? (approximately 5 minutes), 3) How does this book help you think about the core readings for the week? What new questions does it raise? In what ways does it magnify the debate that historians are having? (approximately 3 minutes).

5) Participation (20%). This class will combine lecture and discussion, which means that I will often start lectures by calling on one of you to answer some basic points about the readings. As the week progresses, there will be less lecture and more discussion.

Papers:

The substantive topics will be announced each week, as they will emerge from lecture and discussion. Below is some advise about the general format. You can play around with it, but structure can also be liberating.
1) Opening paragraphs (2-3 paragraphs). How does the question that your paper is exploring emerge from the core readings of the week? How do these readings help you identify what is contestable, debatable or open to interpretation? This is your base question. You then deepen this question by thinking about how the further readings make it even more contestable, debatable, or open to interpretation. How do the further readings deepen the importance of the question? Do they conflict in their explanation of what changed over time and why? Do they suggest the working of a deeper underlying process?

2) An interpretive agenda. (1-2 paragraphs) How are you going to try and answer this question? Remember that the word “essay” comes from the French verb “essayer” which means “to try.” You should stay away from grandiose statements and defiantly self-assured theses and explore a mode of interpretation that is designed to establish the significance of the question which you have identified. It is important to establish how the question could be answered in more than one way. It is also important to choose a question that is appropriate to the scale of the paper. So “Why did the witch-hunt end?” is a less effective question than “What does an Inquisition trial tell us about the role of skepticism in ending the witch craze?”

3) An analysis of a primary source. (6-10 paragraphs). This is the body of your paper. What does your analysis of the primary source (or sources) reveal about how historical conditions change over time? Use the primary source to answer the question you have identified to the best of your abilities. Think about how each of the readings offers a different frame for evaluating the source. At the same time, think about how the source under question either reconciles the differing perspectives or helps you identify the focal point of argument.

4) A conclusion (1-2 paragraphs). Are there even better questions that emerge from this exercise?

Policies:
- Regular attendance and punctuality are required, not just appreciated. It is OK to miss one or two classes. After that, it will start to affect your grade.
- Late papers will get reduced by a half-letter grade for each day they’re late. Requests for extension must be made beforehand.

Required Texts:
In addition to articles, primary sources, and excerpts from textbooks, we will read the following books in their entirety, more or less. You should buy them from the bookstore or arrange to have them interlibrary loaned in advance of the weeks we are due to read them.

Week One: (1/19-1/23): Early Modern Europe: Decentered and Destabilized

Monday
- “The Tower of Babel” by Pieter Brueghel

Wednesday:
- Course Syllabus.

Friday:

Week Two: (1/26-1/30): Master Narratives of the Renaissance

Monday:

Wednesday:

Friday:
- François Rabelais, “How a great English Scholar attempted to argue against Pantaguel and was worsted by Panurge” and “How Panurge confounded the Englishman who argued by Signs,” “Thaumaste speaks of the Virtues and Knowledge of Panurge,” *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (trans. by J.M. Cohen, 1955), 230-239 (MOODLE)

Further Readings:

Week Three (2/2-2/6): Master Narratives of the Reformation

Monday:
Wednesday:
- Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, “The Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Reformation”, Encyclopedia of Social History, Volume One, 153-165 (MOODLE)

Friday:
- Michel de Montaigne, “That it is madness to judge the true and the false from our own capacities,” in Essays (A Selection: Penguin Classics) (1994), 74-79 (MOODLE)

Further Readings:

Week Four (2/9-2/13): Popular Cultures of the Renaissance and Reformation

Monday:
- Roger Chartier, “Reading Matter and ‘Popular’ Reading: From the Renaissance to the Seventeenth Century,” in Chartier and Cavallo, eds, The History of Reading in the West (1999), 269-284 (MOODLE)

Wednesday:

Friday:
- Robert Darnton, “Peasants Tell Tales: The Meaning of Mother Goose,” The Great Massacre, And Other Episodes in French Cultural History (1984), Darnton
http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.01687.0001.001

Further Readings:
- Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic (1971)

Week Five (2/16-2/20): Inquisitorial States

Monday:
Wednesday:
- Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, 51-127

Friday:

Further Reading:
- Karl Appuhn, “Microhistory,” in *Encyclopedia of Social History, Volume One*, 105-112

**Week Six (2/23-2/27): Family Politics**

Monday:
- Film: *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1982)

Wednesday:

Friday:
Further Readings:

**Week Seven: (3/2-3/6): The Spectacle of the State**

**Monday:**

**Wednesday:**
- Scott Sowerby, “Pantomime History”, *Parliamentary History* 30:2 (2011), 236-258 (MOODLE)

**Friday:**

Further Readings:

**SPRING BREAK**

**Week Eight (3/16-3/20): Spiriting Capitalism**

**Monday:**
- At your own pace, read the whole book over break. In what ways does it solidify what you've already understood about the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Scientific Revolution? Please pick one word: doubt, anxiety, skepticism, curiosity, and belief.

**Wednesday:**
http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/weber/protestant-ethic/

Friday:
- Simon Schama, “Whales on the Beach, Writing on the Wall” in *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (1997), 29-50 (MOODLE)

Further Readings:


Monday:

Wednesday:

Friday:

Further Readings:

Week Ten: (3/30-4/3): Plotting the Scientific Revolution

Monday:
- Moodle Post: How is Shapin’s revision of the Scientific Revolution different or similar from Findlen’s?

**Wednesday:**
- Chapters, 1-3 in *The Scientific Revolution* (1996)

**Friday:**

**Further Readings:**
- Frances Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (1972)
- Lorraine Daston and Catherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (2001), [http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.05324.0001.001](http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.05324.0001.001)

**Week Eleven: (4/6-4/10): Magical Economies**

**Monday:**

**Wednesday:**

**Friday:**

**Further Readings:**
- Jan de Vries, *The Economy of Europe in an Age of Crisis, 1600-1750* (1976)

**Week Twelve: (4/13-4/17): The Enlightenment and the Science of Society**

**Monday:**

Wednesday:

Friday:

Further Readings:
- Molly Greene, Catholic Pirates and Greek Merchants: The Maritime History of the Early Modern Mediterranean (2010), 78-110

Week Thirteen: (4/20-4/24): Sexing the Enlightenment

Monday:
- Introduction and “Philosophical Pornography in Robert Darnton, The Forbidden Bestsellers of Pre-Revolutionary France (1990)

Wednesday:
- “Utopian Fantasy” and “Political Slander” in The Forbidden Bestsellers of Pre-Revolutionary France (1990)

Friday:
- “Do Books Cause Revolutions?” in The Forbidden Bestsellers of Pre-Revolutionary France (1990)

Further Readings:
- Thomas Laqueur, Making Sex: The Body and Sex from the Greeks to Freud (1992)


**Monday:**
- Presentations (5 minutes each) of Section 1, Chapters 1-3
- Nicholas Dew, “*Vers la Ligne*: Circulating Measurements around the French Atlantic,” 53-72
- Joyce E. Chaplin, “Knowing the Ocean: Benjamin Franklin and the Circulation of Atlantic Knowledge,” 73-96

**Wednesday:**
- Presentations continued (Sections 2-4, Chapters 4-11)
- Junia Ferreira Furtado, “Tropical Empiricism: Making Medical Knowledge in Colonial Brazil,” 127-152
- Jan Golinski, “American Climate and the Civilization of Nature,” 153-174
- Neil Safier, “Fruitless Botany: Joseph de Jussieu’s South American Odyssey,” 203-224
- Susan Scott Parish, “Diasporic African Sources of Enlightenment Knowledge,” 281-310

**Friday:**
- Margaret Jacob, “Science, Global Capitalism and the State,” in *Science and Empire in the Atlantic World* (2008), 333-344
- Moodle post on how you would respond to Jacob. What is missing? What questions could she have raised? Are there other ways of bringing it together? Please draw on these articles and at least two of the readings from earlier in the semester.

**REVIEW SESSION**
- Preparing for your final. Please post on Moodle one idea – from lecture or discussion – that you would like to discuss further.