

Renaissance Florence: Politics, Art, and Intellectual Life
ACM London/Florence Program
Spring 2010

Course Overview and Goals

This course will focus on the relationship between politics, art, and intellectual life in Renaissance Florence (1250-1550). Over the course of the semester we will examine the evolution of Florence from a medieval commune, to a Renaissance republic, to an oligarchy controlled by the Medici family, and finally, to a duchy under Spanish power. As we look at each stage of the historical and political development of Florence, we will also examine key intellectual movements of the time (Scholasticism, Humanism, Civic Humanism, Neo-Platonism, etc.) We will examine some of the Florentine writers who best represent each intellectual movement (Dante, Salutati, Bruni, Pico, Machiavelli, etc) and place those thinkers in their historical context and relate their ideas to the key political issues of their times. Central to this course is the idea that intellectual endeavors are a product of their times and reflect the issues and concerns of their political milieu. We will see throughout this course that artistic endeavors can also reflect the current political and intellectual ideology of the day, and can be used to promote certain ways of thinking. Throughout the course, as we explore the interconnectedness of politics, art, and intellectual life during the Italian Renaissance, students will critically analyze texts, whether they are philosophical treatises or statues from the fifteenth century, and place them in their larger historical context. By the end of the course, students will have a broad understanding of Renaissance Florence, its political history, its major thinkers, and many of its famous works of art.

Required books

Bondanella & Musa, *The Italian Renaissance Reader*
Kohl & Witt, *Earthly Republic: Italian Humanists on Government & Society*
Kohl & Smith, *Major Problems in the History of the Italian Renaissance*

Course Requirements

My overall expectation regarding this class is that you will attend every class meeting unless you are ill and you will come to class prepared and willing to contribute significantly to class discussions. In addition to these general expectations, there are also specific requirements:

1) Analytical Papers: Part of your final course grade will be determined by how well you do on three analytical papers. You need to prove to me that you carefully read the material, made a significant analysis of it, and expressed your ideas well. Because these papers are meant to stimulate class discussion, papers are due at the beginning of the class on the day assigned. I want your ideas on these papers, based on your individual ability to analyze a text before it is discussed, not a summary of the classes' ideas.

2) Class Discussion: Your thorough preparation for daily class discussions will also be an important factor in determining how well you do, overall, in this course. I advise you to take discussions seriously. To do well in class participation, you must read all the assignments on time, participate often in every class discussion, and make insightful, significant comments that go beyond a mere recitation of facts from the reading.

To further facilitate a true discussion between students, roommate pairs will be asked to lead an hour-long discussion once during the semester. Let me make a few suggestions here. As discussion leaders, you need to come to class that day ready to ask questions about the bigger issues embedded in these texts, about the larger historical significance of the works, about how these works relate to themes and issues covered in class, and about how these texts compare to ones we have already discussed. I would also encourage you to elicit opinions from your fellow students regarding their responses to the texts. You can

also ask students to analyze key passages of the text (this would be a good exercise in preparation for the exams). The student-led discussions are marked with asterisks on the syllabus.

3) Exams: In addition to your performance in class participation and on the papers, your final course grade will also be determined by how well you do on a midterm and a final exam. Both the midterm as well as the final exam will test, in essay format, your ability to analyze key passages from texts we read and your ability to synthesize lecture material with primary source material.

Syllabus

The following is a tentative schedule. The syllabus will be finalized at the start of the semester. On days when we meet on site, please leave yourself enough time to get to there by the start of class! Be sure to bring the assigned reading material with you and a sturdy notebook to use while standing. The weather is changeable, so please bring appropriate clothes and rain gear with you for the days when we will be on site.

Unit 1: Factionalism in Florence: A Political History of the City

Week 1, 1st class: Meet in classroom at Linguaviva for a lecture.

Unit 2: The Duecento: Dante and Scholasticism

Week 1, 2nd class: Meet in classroom for a lecture and discussion. After the lecture, we will go to the Spanish Chapel at Santa Maria Novella.

Read:

- Handouts on Scholasticism and Aquinas
- Handout, Book 1 of Dante's *On Monarchy*
- *Major Problems*, pp.119-130, 139-142, 165-166.

Week 2, 1st class: Meet in the courtyard of the "Firenze com'era" museum. From there we will go to the "Casa di Dante" museum and have a brief tour of Dante's neighborhood, walking by the Bargello and ending up at Piazza della Signoria.

Read:

- Handout, Book 2 of Dante's *On Monarchy*
- Handout, selections from Dante's *Divine Comedy*

****Week 2, 2nd class:** Meet in the classroom for a discussion of all three books of Dante's *On Monarchy*.
(First analytical paper due)

Unit 3: The Black Death (1348) and Boccaccio

****Week 3, 1st class:** Meet in the classroom discussion.

Read:

- *Italian Renaissance Reader* pp. 60-92, 96-99, 118-139, 152-161.

Unit 4: The Trecento: Petrarch and the Birth of Humanism

Week 3, 2nd class: Meet in the classroom for lecture and discussion.

Read:

- *The Earthly Republic*, pp. 23-7.
- *Major Problems*, pp. 26-27, 215-251, 284-296.

****Week 4, 1st class:** Meet in the classroom for a discussion of the reading.

Read:

- Selected handouts by Petrarch

- *Italian Renaissance Reader* pp. 4 – 21. (Second analytical paper due.)

Week 4, 2nd class: Meet in the classroom for a **midterm exam**.

Unit 5: The Early Quattrocento: Salutati, Bruni and the Rise of Civic Humanism

Week 5, 1st class: Meet inside the entrance to the Bargello.

Read:

- handout by Hartt, “Art and Freedom in Quattrocento Florence”

****Week 5, 2nd class:** Meet in the classroom for discussion.

Read:

- Salutati in *Earthly Republic* pp. 81 -114.
- Bruni in *Earthly Republic* pp. 121-175.
- *Major Problems*, pp. 253-267, 275-276, 279-282.
- Handouts, “Despot’s Advice vs. Republican lament” “Wilcox on Baron Thesis”

Unit 6: The Middle Quattrocento: The Medici and Neo-Platonism

Week 6, 1st class: Meet first in the classroom for lecture and discussion. Afterwards we will go to the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi to look at the Medici Chapel.

Read:

- Handouts: “Documents Relating to the Medici in the Fifteenth Century,” “Marsilio Ficino,” “Platonism in Fifteenth-Century Florence”
- Pico della Mirandola in *Italian Renaissance Reader* pp. 178-185
- Michelangelo in *Italian Renaissance Reader*, pp. 375-381.

Unit 7: The Late Quattrocento: The Medici and Savonarola

Week 6, 2nd class: Meet outside the entrance to the Museo di San Marco (to the right of the Church).

Read:

- Handouts on Savonarola: “Savonarola, Florence and the Millenarian Tradition,” “Savonarola, Machiavelli, and Moses,” and the primary sources by Savonarola.

Unit 8: Late Quattrocento/Early Cinquecento: The Medici, Machiavelli, and the Republican Revival

****Week 7, 1st class:** Meet in the classroom for discussion.

Read:

- Pazzi conspiracy in *Earthly Republic* pp. 293-322.
- Machiavelli in *Italian Renaissance Reader*, pp. 258-297.
- *Major Problems*, pp. 177-197 (Third analytical paper due.)

Unit 9: The Early Cinquecento: The Triumph of the Medici

Week 7, 2nd class: Meet to the left side of the entrance of the Uffizi to tour the Piazza della Signoria.

Read: Cellini in *Italian Renaissance Reader*, pp. 306-312, and middle of 322-374.

Week 8, 1st class: Meet outside the ticket office room inside the Palazzo Vecchio.

Read: Guicciardini in *Italian Renaissance Reader*, pp. 298-305.

Week 8, 2nd class: Meet in classroom for the final exam.