HUMANITIES 401 “AGE OF FAITH“ - Western Medieval Heritage

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This upper division course is not only designed for students who major or minor in the field of (European) Humanities, but can also be taken to fulfill General Education requirements. Our class is an EXPLORATIONS COURSE in the HUMANITIES and FINE ARTS. Completing your academic coursework in HUM401 will provide you with greater interdisciplinary knowledge, will prepare you to engage in more complex and in-depth studies, and will give you a wider awareness of past, present and future global challenges. It will furthermore help you achieve the following in a meaningful and constructive way:

1) Analyze written, visual, or performed texts or other modes of expression (such as music) in the Humanities and Fine Arts with sensitivity to their diverse cultural contexts and historical moments;
2) Describe various aesthetic and other value systems and the ways they are communicated across time and cultures;
3) Identify issues in the Humanities that have personal, local and global relevance;
4) Demonstrate the ability to approach complex problems and ask complex questions drawing upon knowledge in the Humanities.

BOOKS REQUIRED

BOETHIUS CONSOLATION OF PHILOSOPHY, Rev.
DANTE DIVINE COMEDY: INFERNO (Mandelbaum: Translator)
BEDIER ROMANCE OF TRISTAN AND YSEULT (Random House)
ROSS (Ed.) PORTABLE MEDIEVAL READER (Penguin)

(With reference to the above mentioned books, I have ordered the least expensive – and usually abridged – editions available with our campus bookstore, but any other editions are acceptable. They may, however, require substantially more reading.)

Our course is as fascinating as overwhelming in scope. We shall therefore proceed selectively by necessity through the many areas of history, the arts, philosophy, music and literature of the period between roughly 300 AD (C.E.) to beyond 1300 AD (C.E.), with a thorough look at the history of Early Christianity – the very framework for Medieval Society. While learning about Europe’s major achievements and calamities over more than some 1000 decisive years in the making of our modern Western world, we should consider our efforts as a journey not only through the Past, but rather toward ourselves in our contemporary and present day condition. Anyone who, confronted with our materials, could possibly feel or think “I don’t care”, would necessarily indicate that he or she does not care about themselves. Our course work deals with beauty, pleasure, suffering, meaning, foundation - and with each one of us!
Most importantly, we will write TWO MAJOR EXAMINATIONS, one MIDTERM in-class examination and one end-of-semester TAKE HOME RESEARCH PAPER of scholarly scope (ours being a 400 level class!). Both examinations will consist of WRITTEN ESSAYS: The Midterm is written in the classroom ( - 75 minutes, two essays from a choice of four topics – ) and this exam will take place on OCTOBER 17th. Unexcused absence or delay will earn you an automatic “F” grade by default. If you cannot attend this - or any - examination or must miss whatever deadline, you will have to make arrangements to take your exam or hand in your paper in advance, i.e. EARLIER - , never later than the official due date, in order to be acceptable. Your take home Research Paper will consist of an essay of your choice (from a list of topics handed out to you on NOVEMBER 14th to allow for three weeks of thorough preparation and meaningful writing). The Final Research Paper must be of a MINIMUM LENGTH OF SIX PAGES (exclusive of index, source list, etc.) and is due on DECEMBER 5th at our last class session. Finals week will thus be stress-free for you with regard to our class, we will simply meet in order to wrap up the semester and I shall, if at all possible, return your graded papers to you. Each, midterm exam and final paper, will earn you 35% toward your class grade. Your presence is mandatory, absence of more than three weeks will lower your class grade by a full point, an A turning into B, etc. If you should miss, without certified medical reason, more than five weekly meetings, you can no longer receive a passing grade for this class.

Let us RESUME: Your Semester’s work will thus consist of FOUR distinct and separate assignments:

1) Midterm - October 17th
2) Personal Reading Report - due November 14th
3) Museum Visit Report - due November 14th
4) Final Take Home Research Paper - due December 5th (Choice of Topics will be handed out on November 14th)

As a tentative timetable, we will dedicate some two weeks for each chapter in your textbook – which you must ALWAYS BRING WITH YOU to our weekly reunions, because we need to work with the picture materials contained in the book! Time will also be allotted for viewing various visual and sound media presentations.

Good luck!