DESCRIPTION: This course examines the impact of the Black Death (1348-1350) on Italy, with particular attention to the demographic, social, economic, intellectual, legal, and gender consequences of this terrible pandemic. Beginning with an introduction to the medical knowledge and practice of the period, the course examines European and Italian (Sienese in particular) society in the years immediately before and after the plague to discover how it changed the lives of the survivors. The class analyzes economic shifts, legal changes in society and how jurists interpreted them, the role of women and their newly-gained wealth, changes in literature and art, improvements (or lack thereof) in agriculture and wages, and political rebellions. This course has two main, interrelated objectives: to give students familiarity with the main political, cultural, religious, and socio-economic features of life in medieval Italy, and to help students acquire a more critical and analytical approach to history in general, through the investigation of primary sources and the different ways in which historians have employed sources to construct historical interpretation. The course can also provide an excellent key to interpret what might be the consequences in contemporary society in the event of a pandemic.

CREDITS: 3 credits

CONTACT HOURS: 45 hours

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION: English

PREREQUISITES: None

METHOD OF PRESENTATION:

- In-class lectures
- Discussions
- Guided visits to museums, monuments and archives.
- Lectures include PowerPoint projections and other visual materials

REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:

- Active class participation and class discussions (15%)
- Written research paper (35%)
- Midterm exam (25%)
- Final exam (25%)

The paper will consist of 10-12 double-spaced pages on a topic chosen by the student or suggested by the instructor. A delay in turning in the paper/writing assignments will result in a lowering of your grade on the paper/writing assignments by a half grade the day after the due date and 2% for each following day.

The midterm exam is a comprehensive in-class written test of two hours, with 15 short essay-style answers.

The final exam too is a comprehensive in-class written test of two hours, with 10 short essay-style answers; it also includes a short essay on a topic to be picked from a given list.
LEARNING OUTCOMES:
By the end of the course students will be able to:
- Acquire a more critical and analytical approach to history in general;
- Analyze the historical, political and social context of Italy and Europe in the Middle Ages;
- Investigate the primary sources for the study of history;
- Recognize the lack of scientific approach to medicine’s studies in the Middle Ages.

GLOBAL LEARNING OUTCOMES:
Perspective Taking: Identify multiple perspectives while maintaining a value preference for own positioning (such as cultural, disciplinary, and ethical).
Cultural Diversity: Describe the experiences of others historically or in contemporary contexts primarily through one cultural perspective, demonstrating some openness to varied cultures and worldviews.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:
Successful progress of the program depends on the full cooperation of both students and faculty members: regular attendance and active participation in class are essential parts of the learning process. Attendance at and participation in all class meetings and field-studies are required. More than TWO unjustified absences (that are not medically excused with a written certificate of the doctor or caused by serious sudden family and/or personal occurrences, as for example death of a family member) will result in a lowering of your grade by two percentage points for every unexcused absence.

CONTENT: (please be aware that the sequence and therefore the objects of the content, particularly regarding field-studies, may vary and be modified depending on the season and availability of the different locations to be visited)

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<th>Lesson</th>
<th>Content</th>
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<td>Introduction and presentation of the course.</td>
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<td>Lesson 2</td>
<td>The medieval Mediterranean; the communities facing the sea; commercial contacts and their development. The arrival of the bacillus <em>Yersinia pestis</em>.</td>
<td>• O. Benedictow, <em>The Black Death</em></td>
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<td>Lesson 3</td>
<td>The macabre mystique of the Black Death (projection of a video).</td>
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<td>Lesson</td>
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<td>Lesson 4</td>
<td>Medical knowledge concerning the plague in the Middle Ages: the Greek treatises and the Latin tradition.</td>
<td>• R. French, <em>Medicine before Science</em></td>
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<td>Lesson 5</td>
<td>The <em>Schola Salernitana</em> [Medical School of Salerno]. Practical cures for the disease; the hospitals.</td>
<td>• L. García-Ballester, <em>Practical Medicine</em></td>
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</table>
| Lesson 7 | The crisis of the 1300s. The overpopulation of Europe; famines and health problems; economic and political crises before the plague. | • A. Luttrell, *The Crusade*  
• J. Larner, *Italy in the Age*, pp. 128-179 |
| Lesson 8 | The spread of the plague in the countryside and in the city: flight from the cities. | • W. Bowsky, *The Impact* |
| Lesson 9 | The ‘description’ of the plague: Boccaccio’s *Decameron* and the chroniclers | • G. Boccaccio, *Decameron* |
| Lesson 10 | Field study: guided visit to the State Archives of Siena. | |
| Lesson 11 | Written Mid-term exam | |
| Lesson 12 | Initial measures to contain the disease by health officials; medical remedies. Supposed causes of the plague. | • R. Gottfried, *The Black Death* |
| Lesson 13 | The Black Death in Siena and in the rest of Italy. | • J. Steinhoff, *Sienese painting after the Black Death*, pp. 64-71; 78-111 |
| Lesson 14 | Field study: guided visit to the ancient Hospital of Santa Maria della Scala and its dungeons. | |
| Lesson 15 | The ‘description’ of the plague in Art. | |
| Lesson 16 | Consequences of the plague: social and economic changes; the roles of women. | • M. Becker, *Florence in Transition*  
• C. Lansing, *Concubines* |
| Lesson 17 | Subsequent plagues and famines. The geo-political reorganization and the formation of regional states in northern and central Italy. | • S. Cohn, *The Black Death Transformed*, pp. 83-95 and 188-219  
• Carmichael, *Plague and Poor* |
| Lesson 18 | Field study: guided tour of the course’s Sienese sites. | |
| Lesson 19 | Economic and social changes; political reorganization in the city, and the opening of government to the lower classes. | • M. Becker, *Florentine Essays*, pp. 160-194  
• A. Brown, *The Renaissance*  
• G. Brucker, *The Florentine popolo minuto* |

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<th>Lesson 20</th>
<th>Social crises in the end of the 14th century: rural and urban revolts.</th>
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|           | • J. Brackett, *The Florentine Criminal*  
|           | • M. Becker, *Florentine Essays*, pp. 195-228                    |
| Lesson 21 | What happened after the Black Death? Conclusions.                |
|           | • G. Chittolini, *Cities, City-States and...*                     |
| Lesson 22 | Written Final exam                                               |

**REQUIRED READINGS:**

All the required excerpts (in English) are available in the course packet and on the course’s Moodle site, when applicable. The instructor is happy to suggest additional readings (both in English and Italian). Further sources, including archival ones, as well as documents and translations — when needed — are given to students for reading before or after class.


**RECOMMENDED READINGS:**


Jackson, Ph. and Nevola, F. *Beyond the Palio: Urbanism and Ritual in Renaissance Siena* in *Renaissance Studies*.


For students who can read Italian: