

University of Wisconsin-Madison

History 201: The Historian's Craft

BELIEF AND UNBELIEF IN MODERN EUROPE

Fall 2021

Wednesdays, 8:50-10:45 a.m.
5255 Mosse Humanities

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Office hours: Wednesdays, 12:00-2:00 p.m. and by appointment

Course Description

Between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries western Europe saw a proliferation of new forms of religious belief and identity as well as the spread of alternatives to existing religious traditions, such as agnosticism and atheism. In this course we will explore these developments and their impact on a range of individuals. Central questions we will ask include:

- How have historians explained major shifts in religious belief and identity among western Europeans between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries?
- How have the meanings of “belief” and “unbelief” changed over time?
- What historical conditions and experiences have led Europeans to transition from one set of religious or philosophical beliefs, allegiances, and identities to another?
- Are there common routes by which individuals have taken on a new religious identity and belief system (conversion), abandoned a set of beliefs and commitments (deconversion), or otherwise changed their relationship to a religious tradition?
- What are some of the main ways in which people have narrated their spiritual and intellectual journeys?

This course will equip you to think historically about these questions as you learn and practice the skills that historians employ to do their work.

Course Objectives

The primary objective of this course is to introduce you to the delight of doing history by investigating a major theme in modern European intellectual history. Since this is a Historian's Craft course we will focus on developing foundational skills that historians use. You will learn to:

- find, interpret, and evaluate primary and secondary sources
- ask interesting and significant historical questions that generate new research
- construct strong historical arguments based on evidence and careful reasoning
- communicate findings and arguments clearly and effectively in both written and oral form

To practice these skills, you will write analyses of primary sources and of historians' arguments, discuss your findings and insights in class, write an original research paper on a topic of your choosing, and make an oral presentation in class. In doing so, you will meet the requirements for the Communications-B course.

Course Credit

This three-credit course, which fulfills the Comm-B requirement, meets as a group seminar for 115 minutes each week. You are also expected to spend an average of seven hours per week outside of class time reading, writing, and preparing for class discussions and presentations, for a total of 135 hours over the semester (or 45 hours per credit, according to UW-Madison's credit hour policy). Some weeks the work load may be slightly heavier; other weeks it may be lighter. Please plan to allot your time accordingly.

Requirements and Grading

1. Participate actively in all class meetings (25%). Since this is a discussion-based seminar, your learning experience and the success of the course depend on your coming to class prepared to engage the week's assignment. This means reading each text closely and thoughtfully—taking notes, identifying crucial passages, making connections, noting problems, raising questions—and coming to our meetings ready to discuss your insights, ask questions, and engage with the contributions of your classmates. Class participation also includes in-class exercises and active engagement in break-out group discussions.

You are expected to attend all class sessions. I understand that on occasion an illness or emergency makes this impossible, particularly as we are living in the midst of an ongoing pandemic. If you do become ill, please contact me as soon as possible. We will then schedule a one-on-one meeting online to catch you up and you will have a chance to do a written assignment to make up for your absence.

If you need to be absent for a religious holiday or UW athletics team travel, please notify me well in advance. Any unexcused absence will lower your class participation grade. You will receive a participation grade on a ten-point scale three times during the semester: on September 29, November 3, and December 15.

2. Write eight 250-300-word responses to assigned readings (25%). For each regular class session between September 15 and December 1 (i.e., 11 weeks) I will post one or more questions on Canvas about the assigned readings. Some of these will ask you to probe primary sources in specific ways, while others will ask you to identify and analyze historical arguments by other scholars or to construct your own questions about a source. You may choose which eight of these exercises you complete. If you choose to write more than eight responses, the top eight grades will count towards your final grade. Because the nature of these assignments varies, I will use somewhat different criteria to assess them but the following questions always apply:

- (a) Does your response reflect a close reading of the relevant text(s)?
- (b) Does your paper demonstrate thoughtful, independent analysis?
- (c) Is it written in clear and concise prose, polished for grammar and style?

To get credit for a response exercise, you must submit it on Canvas before the start of class when the reading is due; the submission folder closes at 8:50 a.m. sharp. No late papers accepted.

3. Write an original research paper of about 10 pages (40% total, broken into several parts). Your paper will be based on primary sources and will also incorporate scholarly writings related to the historical problem you explore. You will receive more detailed instructions for the project on October 13, and over the semester we will discuss the components that go into writing a strong research paper. Your paper will be composed in several stages, with each assignment making up part of the over all paper grade. A research proposal including your topic and sources will be due on November 3. I will meet

with you individually later that week to give feedback on your proposal. You will submit the first full draft of your paper on November 24, and we will meet during the following week to discuss it. The revised version of your paper will be due at 6:00 p.m. on December 15.

4. Make an oral presentation in class (10%). During the final two weeks of the course you will make an oral presentation to the class about your research paper and its key findings. Detailed instructions and a sign-up sheet will come in November.

Grading Scale

All assignments and your final course grade will be calculated using the following scale:

93-100%=A	83-87%=B	70-77%=C	0-59%=F
88-92%=AB	78-82%=BC	60-69%=D	

Honors Credit

Students taking the course for honors credit should consult with me by the fourth week of the semester to discuss options for an honors project. These include expanding the research paper into a longer article or doing another project involving art, media, or another form of public presentation, according to your interests.

Communication and Office Hours

I welcome meeting with students outside of class time. You are encouraged to come to office hours at any time during the semester, whether to discuss a question or problem you've encountered in the course, to get help on a paper, to explore an idea, or simply to chat. I hold regular office hours on Wednesdays, 12:00-2:00 pm, but if you have a schedule conflict then, let me know and we can arrange another time to meet. The best way to reach me is by email (eric.carlsson@wisc.edu). I check email regularly and will try to respond within 24 hours. Often I can reply sooner than that, but on weekends response time may be up to 48 hours.

Electronic Devices

Since face-to-face interaction is key to this seminar, you are encouraged to take notes with a pen and paper rather than on a laptop. (There is also a solid body of research that suggests that students process information more thoughtfully and focus their attention more sharply when they take notes by hand rather than on a computer.) If you wish, you may use a computer to access electronic copies of readings posted on Canvas during class. If you do so, please turn off email and any notifications that might distract you from our discussions. Most weeks we will take a short break midway through class, so you can check messages then if necessary.

The History Lab

The History Lab is an excellent resource for undergraduates writing history papers. Trained Ph.D. students in history will help you regardless of your stage in the writing process—formulating a thesis, developing your argument, citing sources, revising your drafts, and more. The History Lab is located in 4255 Mosse Humanities Building. Sign up for a one-on-one appointment, either in-person or online, at <https://history.wisc.edu/undergraduate-program/the-history-lab/>.

Academic Integrity

By enrolling in this course, you agree to uphold the high academic standards of UW-Madison. In your papers you must cite sources carefully, whether you repeat someone else's exact words or paraphrase or draw on their ideas. We will discuss in class how to document sources properly. In the meanwhile, if you have specific questions about plagiarism and how to avoid it, please speak with me or consult chapters 6 and 7 of Mary Lynn Rampolla's *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History* (see below) or go to <https://writing.wisc.edu/handbook/assignments/quoting/sources/>. Penalties for academic misconduct range from failing an assignment or a course to being suspended from the university. For university policies on academic misconduct, see <https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/>.

Learning Accessibility

If you have an instructional need that requires accommodations, please inform me of this at the start of the semester or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. I will then either work directly with you or coordinate with the McBurney Center to provide reasonable accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.

UW-Madison Statement on Diversity

Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals. UW-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background—people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.

Course Texts

We will read the four books below, which are available at local and online bookstores. Hard copies are on reserve at College Library.

Dominic Erdozain, *The Soul of Doubt: The Religious Roots of Unbelief from Luther to Marx* (Oxford University Press, 2016)

Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*, 10th ed. (Bedford/St. Martin's, 2021). Note: This book comes in multiple editions. Older (8th & 9th) editions are fine; reading assignments refer to chapters and sections rather than page numbers.

Alec Ryrie, *Unbelievers: An Emotional History of Doubt* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019; paperback reprint, William Collins, 2021). Note: This book is available as a free e-book via UW Libraries.

Ethan H. Shagan, *The Birth of Modern Belief: Faith and Judgment from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment* (Princeton University Press, 2018). Note: This book is also available as a free e-book via UW Libraries.

All other readings are posted as PDFs or web links on Canvas.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Reading assignments for each class session are listed below. Response exercises are posted on Canvas.

Sep 8 Course Introduction
 Alec Ryrie, *Unbelievers*, 1-12

- Sep 15 Approaching Belief and Unbelief
 Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*, ch. 1 (entire) & ch. 3, sec. 3a
 Alec Ryrie, *Unbelievers*, 13-43
 Ethan H. Shagan, *The Birth of Modern Belief*, 1-13, 19-64 (13-19 recommended)
- Sep 22 The Reformation of Belief
 Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*, ch. 2, secs. 2a-2b2
 Dominic Erdozain, *The Soul of Doubt*, 1-33
 Alec Ryrie, *Unbelievers*, 44-74
 Ethan H. Shagan, *The Birth of Modern Belief*, 65-97
 Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian* (selections)
- Sep 29 Skepticism Revived
 Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*, ch. 3, secs. 3b-3d
 Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*, 3-16, 44-57
 Dominic Erdozain, *The Soul of Doubt*, 34-68
 Sebastian Castellio, *About Heretics: Should They Be Persecuted?* (selections)
 Michel de Montaigne, *An Apology for Raymond Sebond* (selections)
- Oct 6 Atheists: Real and Imagined
 Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*, ch. 4, secs. 4a-4d
 Alec Ryrie, *Unbelievers*, 75-96, 106-115, 127-137
 Ethan Shagan, *The Birth of Modern Belief*, 98-165
The Life of St. Teresa of Ávila by Herself (selections)
- Oct 13 Finding Faith: Heart Religion
 Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*, ch. 4, secs. 4e-4g
 Ted A. Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart*, 1-17
 Graeme Hunter, "Blaise Pascal"
 Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (selections)
 Peter C. Erb, "Introduction," to *Pietists: Selected Writings*
 August Hermann Francke, *Autobiography*
 Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, "Thoughts for the Learned and Yet Good-Willed Students of Truth"
- Oct 20 Visit to Memorial Library
 Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*, ch. 5, secs. 5a-5c
 Alec Ryrie, *Unbelievers*, 138-172
 Ethan H. Shagan, *The Birth of Modern Belief*, 166-206
- Oct 27 Radical Enlightenment?
 Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 1-22, 159-174, 218-229
 Dominic Erdozain, *The Soul of Doubt*, 69-117
 Baruch Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise* (selections)
- Nov 3 A Religious Enlightenment? **Research proposal due
 Dominic Erdozain, *The Soul of Doubt*, 118-172
 Ethan H. Shagan, *The Birth of Modern Belief*, 207-249
 Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary* (selections)

