University of Wisconsin–Madison

History 600: Advanced Seminar in History

THE SUPERNATURAL IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE

Fall 2025
Wednesdays, 8:50-10:45 a.m.
5245 Mosse Humanities Building

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Office hours: Wednesdays, 11:00-1:00 and by appointment

Course Description

The historical record of early modern Europe (c. 1500-1800) is replete with accounts of the supernatural. Stories abound of healing miracles, apparitions, demonic possession, levitations, bilocations, and more. This was also an age of religious reformations, scientific revolution, and Enlightenment, marked by intense debates about the nature and reality of supernatural activity, whether diabolical or divine. In recent years, historians have renewed their focus on the place of the supernatural in early modern culture. They are re-examining long-held narratives about "disenchantment" and secularization in the period, while also rethinking how we make sense of past experiences that people claimed went beyond the ordinary.

In this seminar, we will delve into this fascinating world together, engaging contemporary scholarship that focuses on case studies from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. You will explore key historiographical debates, make oral presentations, and contribute actively to class discussions. The central project of the course is a substantial research paper of about twenty pages on a topic of your choice. The seminar's goal is to help you think historically about the place of the supernatural in early modern culture while building your skills as a researcher and writer.

Learning Outcomes

History 600 is an advanced research seminar and a capstone course for History majors and certificate students. If you invest time, thought, and hard work in the class, by semester's end you will be able to:

- Explain key historiographical debates and approaches to studying the place of the supernatural in early modern Europe.
- Develop an original, well-supported historical argument that synthesizes a range of evidence and interpretations based on critical analysis of primary and secondary sources.

- Design and complete a substantial, self-directed research paper employing the essential skills of the historian.
- Communicate your research findings clearly and effectively both in writing and in oral presentations.
- Lead and contribute productively to class discussion, collaborative exercises, and peer review.

Requisites and Course Designations

Students in this course must have completed History 201 or History of Science 211. This is a three-credit, advanced-level course that meets either Humanities or Social Science breadth requirements and counts as Liberal Arts & Sciences credit in the College of L&S.

Credit Hours and Workload

We meet in person as a group seminar for 115 minutes each week. In addition, you are expected to spend an average of seven hours per week on this course outside of class—reading, conducting research, writing, preparing for class discussions and presentations, and meeting with the instructor—for a total of 135 hours over the semester (or 45 hours per credit, according to UW–Madison's credit hour policy).

Requirements and Assessment

Your grade for this course will consist of the following components:

- Class participation 30%
- Written responses to common readings 10%
- Research paper (total) 50%
    - Research proposal—10%
    - Preliminary thesis and outline—5%
    - Complete polished draft—10%
    - Final revised paper—25%
- Oral presentation of research 10%

1. Class participation (30%). Since this is a discussion-based seminar, your learning experience and the success of the course depend on your coming to class prepared to actively engage the week's assignment. This means reading each assigned text closely and thoughtfully—taking notes, identifying crucial passages, making connections, 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 active engagement in break-out group discussions and a peer-review session. On October 29 you will give a brief (3-4-minute) report on your research topic to the class.

You are expected to attend all class sessions. I understand that on occasion an illness or personal emergency may make this impossible. If that happens, please contact me as soon as

possible so that we can arrange to get you caught up. If you will need to be absent for a religious holiday or UW athletics team travel, please notify me in advance. Any unexcused absence will lower your class participation grade. You will receive a participation grade three times during the semester: on September 24, November 5, and December 10.

2. Written responses to common readings (10%). During the first six weeks of the course, we will read works by contemporary historians together. You will complete **four** written responses to the readings from weeks 2-5:

- September 10 and 24: Write in-class responses to prompts provided during class.
- September 16 and 30: Submit a short essay (400-500 words) on Canvas in response to a prompt about that week's reading.

These responses will be assessed using the following questions:

- Does your response reflect a close reading of the relevant text(s)?
- Does your paper demonstrate thoughtful engagement with the text(s)? (Note: This does not necessarily mean that you've grasped every claim or nuance of the piece.)
- For the responses submitted on Canvas: Are they written in clear and concise prose, polished for grammar and style?

3. Research paper (50% total, scaffolded through shorter assignments). Write an original research paper on a topic of your choice related to our course subject. Drawing on both primary and secondary sources, the paper should be 5,000-6,000 words (about 20 double-spaced pages), including footnotes, but excluding the bibliography.

You will receive detailed instructions and a grading rubric for the project on October 8. For the remainder of the semester, we will discuss the components of a strong research paper. The project will be developed in stages (grade weights in parentheses):

- **Preliminary statement of interest** in two potential research topics—due Tuesday, October 7, at 10 pm. This will not be graded but will help you begin thinking about your project and receive early feedback on the viability of your topic.
- **Research proposal and annotated bibliography**—due Monday, October 13, at 10 pm. We'll meet individually later that week to discuss your proposal (10%).
- **Preliminary thesis statement and outline (1-2 pages)**—due Tuesday, October 28, at 10 pm (5%).
- **5-6 pages of draft writing**—due Tuesday, November 4, at 10 pm (ungraded checkpoint).
- **10-12 pages of draft writing**—due Tuesday, November 11, at 10 pm (ungraded checkpoint).
- **Complete polished draft**—due Friday, November 21, at 6 pm. We'll meet the following week to discuss your draft and set out plans for revision (10%).
- **Final revised paper**—due Thursday, December 11, at 6 pm (25%).

4. Oral presentation of research (10%). During the final two weeks of the course, you will give a formal 7–8-minute presentation, followed by about 5 minutes of Q&A, on your completed (or nearly completed) research paper. Detailed instructions and a sign-up sheet for presentation times 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	

Communication and Office Hours

I welcome meeting with students outside of class. You are encouraged to come to office hours at any point during the semester, whether to discuss a question or problem you've encountered in the course, to get help on an assignment, to explore an idea, or simply to chat. I hold regular office hours on Wednesdays from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm. 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, 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 strongly encouraged to take notes with a pen and paper rather than on a laptop. (A solid body of research shows that students generally process information more thoughtfully and focus their attention more sharply when they take notes by hand.) If you wish, you may use a laptop or tablet but not a phone to access electronic copies of readings posted on Canvas. On certain days, you will be asked to bring a computer to class for exercises related to your research paper. When you do use an electronic device, please silence notifications for email, messaging, and other apps to avoid distractions. Most weeks, we will take a short break midway through class, so you can check messages then if you need to.

Academic Integrity

By enrolling in this course, you agree to uphold the high academic standards of UW–Madison. All work you turn in must be your own. In your papers you must cite sources carefully, whether you repeat someone else's exact words or paraphrase or draw on their ideas. This includes material generated by AI (see below). We will discuss how to properly document sources in class. If you have questions about this in the meantime, please consult https://writing.wisc.edu/handbook/assignments/quotingsources/ or speak with me. Penalties for plagiarism and other 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-misconduct/.

Use of Generative AI

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools (ChatGPT, Copilot, Gemini, Claude, etc.) are rapidly changing aspects of our daily lives and reshaping many academic disciplines. These tools offer both opportunities and potential hazards for research and writing in the field of history. The goal of this course is to help you develop historical thinking, research, and writing skills that these tools cannot replace. In class, we will discuss in more detail the promises and pitfalls of AI use, but here is an overview of the policies we will follow:

Acceptable uses of AI in this course include:

- Brainstorming research questions or narrowing a topic
- Finding potential sources, provided you verify every reference and consult other databases and bibliographies; note that AI isn't yet very good at this task
- Proofreading your writing for grammar, syntax, or clarity
- Fixing the structure or organization of footnotes

Unacceptable uses of AI in this course include:

- Generating writing and submitting it as your own work; this includes creating drafts, even if you substantially revise them
- Relying on AI tools to perform analysis, interpretation, or critical argumentation for you
- Paraphrasing AI-generated content without proper attribution
- Using fabricated or inaccurate sources suggested by AI

Keep in mind that AI-generated text can include errors, biases, and invented "facts" or sources. If you use AI as a tool, it is your responsibility to verify all information and ensure the accuracy of your work. As with all coursework, your submission must reflect your own ideas, analysis, and engagement with historical sources. Over-reliance on AI shortcircuits your learning and can compromise the integrity of your work.

Transparency requirement: If you use an AI tool in any stage of your work, you must acknowledge it clearly. Append a brief note to the assignment explaining how you used it. Submitting work generated by AI as your own will be treated as plagiarism, a violation of academic integrity (see above).

The History Lab

The History Lab is the History Department's in-house writing center. Its graduate student staff offer expert, one-on-one advising on your history projects, both in-person and virtually. Whether you're choosing a topic, conducting research, crafting a thesis, outlining an argument, or revising a draft, the History Lab staff can help you sharpen your skills and become a more effective writer. For instructions on how to schedule an appointment with a Lab TA, or to find tips, guides, and other resources for all of your history assignment needs, visit https://history.wisc.edu/undergraduate-program/the-history-lab/.

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 the University of Wisconsin–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

You are asked to purchase these two books for this course:

- Jane Shaw, *Miracles in Enlightenment England* (Yale University Press, 2006)
- Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations,* 9th ed. (University of Chicago Press, 2018)

Turabian's is a classic text that has been updated many times. Please be sure to use the most recent (i.e., ninth) edition. We will also read much or all of the following two books. They are both available as e-books free of charge via UW Libraries, but you may wish to purchase hard copies if you prefer reading in print.

- Carlos Eire, *They Flew: A History of the Impossible* (Yale University Press, 2023)
- H. C. Erik Midelfort, *Exorcism and Enlightenment: Johann Joseph Gassner and the Demons of Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Yale University Press, 2005)

COURSE SCHEDULE

Except for the books by Shaw and Turabian, all common readings are posted on our Canvas webpage (https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/470042). There you will also find full bibliographical information for all required and recommended readings.

Wk 1 (Sep 3) **Introduction: Approaching the Supernatural in History**

Reading:

- Jeffrey J. Kripal, "The Supernatural as Natural, Healthy, and Banal"
- Brad S. Gregory, "The Other Confessional History: On Secular Bias in the Study of Religion"
- Tor Egil Førland, "Acts of God? Miracles and Scientific Explanation"

Wk 2 (Sep 10) **The Birth of the Supernatural**

Reading:

- Peter Harrison, *Some New World,* Introduction & chs. 1 & 5
- Craig Harline, *Miracles at the Jesus Oak,* Prologue & ch. 1

Assignment:

- In-class writing exercise responding to the assigned readings

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Wk 3 (Sep 17) **Flying Saints and Other Impossibilities**

Reading:

- Carlos Eire, *They Flew,* Preface, Introduction, chs. 3, 4, 6, 7, Epilogue

Assignment:

- Write a 400-500-word analysis of Eire's book responding to one of the prompts posted on Canvas. Due on Tuesday 9/16 by 10 pm.

Wk 4 (Sep 24) **Protestant Miracles**

Reading:

- Jane Shaw, *Miracles in Enlightenment England,* chs. 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8

Assignment:

- In-class writing exercise responding to Shaw's book

Wk 5 (Oct 1) **Thinking with Demons**

Reading:

- H. C. Erik Midelfort, *Exorcism and Enlightenment* (entire)

Assignment:

- Write a 400-500-word analysis of Midelfort's book responding to one of the prompts posted on Canvas. Due on Tuesday 9/30 by 10 pm.

Wk 6 (Oct 8) **Research Project Overview, Finding Sources**

Reading:

- Darren Oldridge, *The Supernatural in Tudor and Stuart England,* chs. 5 & 6
- *A Manual for Writers,* chs. 1 & 2

Assignment:

- Submit a statement of interest in two potential research topics. Due on Tuesday 10/7 by 10 pm.

Wk 7 (Oct 15) **Individual Meetings: Research Proposal**

Reading:

- *A Manual for Writers,* ch. 3. Read this before you start work on your research proposal.

Assignments:

- Submit your research proposal by Monday 10/13 by 10 pm.
- Meet individually with Prof. Carlsson to discuss your research proposal.

Wk 8 (Oct 22) **No Class Meeting**

Reading:

- *A Manual for Writers,* ch. 4

Assignment:

- Read your sources, take notes, begin formulating your argument.

Wk 9 (Oct 29) **Writing Workshop: Effective Drafting**

Reading:

- *A Manual for Writers,* chs. 5 & 6. Read this before developing your thesis statement and outline.

Assignments:

- Submit a thesis statement and a detailed outline of your paper on Tuesday 10/28 by 10 pm.
- Give a four-minute oral presentation of your project in class, including your topic, types of sources, working hypothesis, hurdles you may encounter.

Wk 10 (Nov 5) **Writing Workshop: Evidence and Integrity: Handling Sources**

Reading:

- *A Manual for Writers,* ch. 7

Assignments:

- Submit 5-6 pages of your paper on Tuesday 11/4 by 10 pm.
- Bring Turabian's *A Manual for Writers* to class.

Wk 11 (Nov 12) **Writing Workshop: Introductions, Conclusions, and More**

Assignment:

- Submit 10-12 pages of your paper on Tuesday 11/11 by 10 pm.

Wk 12 (Nov 19) **Peer Review**

Assignments:

- Bring a paper copy of your complete polished draft to class.
- Using a provided template, read and comment on a classmate's paper in class.
- Incorporating feedback from peer review, submit your complete polished draft on Canvas on Friday 11/21 by 6 pm.

Wk 13 (Nov 24-26) **Individual Meetings: Polished Drafts**

Assignment:

- Meet individually with Prof. Carlsson to discuss your paper draft.

Reading:

- *A Manual for Writers,* chs. 9-12
- Recommended: Joseph M. Williams, *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace,* ch. 2

Wk 14 (Dec 3) Research Presentations

Reading:

- *A Manual for Writers,* 127-31, 134-35

Assignment:

- Give a 7-8-minute presentation of your research project, followed by Q&A from your classmates (Group I).
- Revise your draft incorporating instructor feedback.

Wk 15 (Dec 10) Research Presentations

Assignment:

- Give a 7-8-minute presentation of your research project, followed by Q&A from your classmates (Group II).
- Submit your revised paper by Thursday 12/11 at 6 pm.