Culture-- understood both as a society's artistic and literary productions, and as its broader assumptions about what the world is like-- has been central to historical thinking over the last generation. Hence this course begins by looking at some influential approaches that social scientists, literary critics, and other theorists have taken to the concept of culture itself. After this theoretical orientation, we'll turn to some basic narrative schemes that have defined the shape of cultural change in early modern Europe, between about 1450 and the French Revolution of 1789: the narratives of Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment. The remainder of the seminar will examine some basic problems that have recently preoccupied historians: the position of the intellectual, the relationship between intellectual life and political power, the status of science, and the relationship between history as a discipline and other methods for making sense of culture in the past. Throughout, the seminar's main purpose is to reflect on models of historical analysis that students will find helpful for studying other times and places.

**Requirements:** This is primarily a seminar about reading historical work and theories that can illuminate historical problems. Hence the main requirement is careful preparation of the reading assignments and participation in seminar discussions of them. There will also be three short writing assignments, focused on the assigned readings, and these will be tailored to the needs of individual students. Those for whom early modern Europe is a secondary or teaching field will be asked to prepare short summaries of themes in the readings; students planning more intensive work in the field may choose to prepare more in-depth essays.

**Topics and assignments**

January 17:  Introduction: problems, methods, themes

**Part 1: Some theoretical perspectives**

January 24:  What is culture and what does it do (1)?
   assigned:  Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, chapters 1, 4, 5, 8, 14, 15

January 31:  What is culture and what does it do (2)?
   assigned:  James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*

February 7:  What is culture and what does it do (3)?

**Part 2: Some foundational narratives**
February 14: The Burckhardtian Renaissance and the Reformation
assigned: Jacob Burckhardt, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, parts 1 and 2; Eamon Duffy. The Stripping of the Altars, pp. xiii-xxxvii, 1-205, 301-337

February 21: The Reformation (2)

February 28: The Enlightenment
assigned: James Melton, The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe

**Part 3: Knowledge and power**

March 7: Europeans and others

March 14: Spring break

March 21: States and cultures

March 28: Science and power

**Part 4: Visual cultures and the problem of the Renaissance**

April 4: In Italy
assigned: Michael Baxandall, Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style

April 11: In Northern Europe
assigned: Thomas Kaufmann, Court, Cloister, and City: The Art and Culture of Central Europe, 1450-1800, pp. 1-255

**Part 5: The historian's knowledge**

April 18: Challenges
assigned: Hayden White, The Content of the Form, pp. 1-82, 104-141, 185-213

April 25: For the defense
assigned: Roger Chartier, On the Edge of the Cliff