

Department: SPAN, MC&L

Course No: 188

Credits: 3

Title: Christians, Muslims and Jews in Medieval Spain

Contact: Roger Travis; Benjamin Liu

Content Area: CA1-Arts and Humanities

Diversity: CA4 International

Catalog Copy: SPAN 188. Christians, Muslims and Jews in Medieval Spain Either semester. Three credits. Conducted in English. Contacts, conflicts and coexistence among the diverse cultures and traditions of medieval Spain: Christian Hispania, Muslim al-Andalus, and Jewish Sefarad.

Course Information: a. Course description: The proposed course seeks to involve students in the critical interpretation and evaluation of historical, literary and other cultural texts (e.g., art and architecture) from and about the diverse cultures and traditions of medieval Spain. The emphasis will be on connecting past and present in ways relevant to issues of contemporary concern, especially to issues of interfaith and intercultural relations. The diversity of medieval Spain's communities will be presented from a variety of perspectives--Christian, Muslim and Jewish--that resonate with contemporary points of conflict or convergence. The main pedagogical innovation to be introduced in this course will be a dynamic, participatory weblog archive that will allow running discussion of course-related matters as well as relevant current events and issues.

b. Course requirements: No prior preparation required. The course will be taught in English. Evaluation will be based on classwork, written midterm and final exams, a short midterm paper, and a final project. The final project, the topic of which will be decided in consultation with the instructor, may either be a term paper or take an alternative, creative form. Participation in class and on the online course weblog will be factored into the classwork component of the final grade.

c. Major themes: The interfaith and multicultural situation of medieval Spain. Religion and cultural identification. Toleration and intolerance in religion and in law. Legislative and social regulation of interfaith contact. Religious justifications of war. Interfaith commercial relations. Intellectual and cultural transfer. Disputation, coercion and conversion. Modern contexts of Medieval Iberian studies. 20th-century cinematic interpretations of medieval Spain.

Meets Goals of Gen Ed: 2. Acquire intellectual breadth and versatility: The course will require students to evaluate and interpret a broad array of different types of texts, including literary works, historical documents, artistic and architectural forms, and films.

3. Acquire critical judgement: Students will learn to distinguish, compare, contrast and relate the

competing cultural narratives, practices and traditions that inhabit the shared and contested space of multicultural medieval Spain.

4. Acquire moral sensitivity: Students will become aware of the manifold perspectives from which religious and cultural differences may be viewed, and of their practical consequences, both tolerant and intolerant, including such extreme cases of persecution as forced conversion, Inquisition or expulsion.

5. Acquire awareness of their era and society: One of the goals of the course is to connect past and present times, and near and distant cultures, in ways that mutually illuminate both. 20th-century films about medieval Spain are one way this will be achieved : El Cid (1961) maps the suspicions and conflicts of the Cold War onto Christian-Muslim warfare in 12th-century Spain; while Destiny (1997) critiques contemporary Muslim fundamentalisms by depicting Averroes's persecutions under the Almohads in al-Andalus.

6. Acquire consciousness of the diversity of human culture and experience: In addition to studying a time and place far removed from the normal realm of undergraduate experience, the course engages with the religious and cultural diversity already existing within that distant time and place, attempting to come to grips with how, from the fact of that coexistence, their arose both intercultural commonalities and irreconcilable conflicts.

CA1 Criteria: This course satisfies the following criterion "1.) Investigations and historical/critical analyses of human experience" by examining the historical period and place called "medieval Spain", in terms of diverse human experiences of cultural difference as they are expressed in documentary, literary and artistic forms. To a lesser degree, this course also addresses criterion "2.) Inquiries into philosophical and/or political theory," in that it deals with the legal regimes and cultural habits that define and stabilize religious and social identities in the Spanish Middle Ages.

CA4 Criteria: This course meets, I think, both the letter and the spirit of the Group 4 requirement, construed to mean not simply cognizance of difference but also an appreciation of the dynamic interrelations among diverse groups. The course, in its exploration of Christian, Muslim and Jewish perspectives, emphasizes "that there are varieties of human experiences, perceptions," etc. (criterion 1), here in the multicultural context of the medieval Spain of "the three religions". The emphasis is placed less on the different beliefs and practices of each tradition as considered separately as much as on their interfaith interactions with one another over a common and contested territory. This emphasis on intercultural, as opposed to merely cultural diversity, will, I think, also serve to foster consideration of the "similarities that may exist among diverse groups" (criterion 3).

Role of Grad Students: Depending on availability and enrollments, one graduate student assistant may assist the faculty instructor in teaching the course. The student would assist primarily in shared and supervised grading, holding office hours, and perhaps showing films.

Supplemental Information: This course proposal was selected for a Provost's General Education Course Development Grant. As per GEOC's recent decision with such courses, it will be submitted for

simultaneous consideration by the College C&C committee and, pending that committee's decision, to GEOC.