

CS 2480B - 650 (Winter 2027)
**The Roman Emperors:
The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly**
Dr. Alexander Meyer
Online and Asynchronous Lectures
In-person Exams



Course Information

This course will examine the characters, policies, and actions of many of the most famous and infamous of Rome's emperors, including Augustus, Nero, Domitian, Marcus Aurelius, Constantine and Julian the Apostate. We will discuss the virtues of the best emperors, the depravities of the worst emperors, and the means by which these men are judged. In the process we will examine the public and private lives of Roman emperors and their associates, from the spectacles sponsored by victorious generals to the scandals of the imperial household. We will use literary, documentary and archaeological evidence to determine what made a good or bad emperor, how their reputations were formed, and whether their reputations are justified.

Instructor Information

Alexander Meyer is an ancient historian with particular interest in writing, literacy and the written word in the ancient Rome. Dr. Meyer is also fascinated by issues of travel, migration and communication in the ancient world in general. Before coming to Western in 2012 he studied at the University of Pennsylvania, Tufts University and Duke University. He has also taught at Duke and at the Intercollegiate Center for Classical Studies in Rome. In the summer

he is co-director of an archaeological field school at the Roman fort of Vindolanda on Hadrian's Wall in northern England. He also leads study trips to Rome and the Bay of Naples. Please feel free to introduce yourself at any time.

Contact Information

Dr. Alexander Meyer (he/him)

Department of Classical Studies

Lawson Hall, Room 3224

Email: alexander.meyer@uwo.ca

Office Hours: by appointment

Zoom: <https://westernuniversity.zoom.us/j/97999760832>

Teaching Assistant: TBD

Department of Classical Studies

Email:

Office Hours: by appointment

Zoom:

Communication

Students must use their Western (@uwo.ca) email addresses when contacting their instructors. If you have questions about the administration of the course, please contact your TA directly, before contacting Prof. Meyer.

Course Structure and Topics Covered

This course will examine the lives and characters of the most interesting Roman emperors. We will cover a different emperor each week. In doing so, students will read excerpts of some of the major historical sources from which we learn about these men. We will then compare these sources and additional archaeological and documentary evidence in order to evaluate the merits and faults of each emperor. We will also discuss how each emperor's legacy has been shaped by the historical record and whether their reputations are justified.

This course will be entirely lecture-based. Lectures will be released on Brightspace every Friday, unless otherwise announced.

We will examine the lives and careers of Augustus, Claudius, Nero, Vespasian, Domitian, Hadrian, Marcus Aurelius, Septimius Severus, Caracalla, and Julian, among others.

Course Objectives and Skills attained

Objectives:

- An understanding of how history is written and reconstructed.
- A familiarity with Roman literature, art and archaeology as it relates to Roman emperors.

- A basic knowledge of the history of Rome.
- A familiarity with some of the most important literary sources from ancient Rome.
- An understanding of the potential and limitations of ancient sources (literary, archaeological and documentary).
- The ability to analyze and discuss the significance of these sources in a coherent manner and in their historical context.

Skills:

- Critical thought
- Argumentation
- Analysis of written material
- Interpretation of archaeological evidence
- Scrutiny of artistic evidence

Course Materials

Required Texts (for purchase)

Suetonius. *Lives of the Caesars*. Translated by Catherine Edwards. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. (978-0199537563) (\$15) [**Suetonius**]

Tacitus. *Annals*. Translated by Cynthia Damon. London: Penguin Classics, 2012. (978-0140455649) (\$24) [**Tacitus**]

Recommended Text

Lives of the Later Caesars: The First Part of the Augustan History. Translated and edited by Anthony Birley, London: Penguin Classics, 1976. (978-0140443080) [**Historia Augusta**]

Additional Texts

Further readings will be supplied electronically by the instructor through OWL/Brightspace. These texts are every bit as important as the books listed above so be sure to allow yourself sufficient time to access them. Details will also be provided if you prefer to check these sources out of the library.

All course material will be posted to OWL: <https://westernu.brightspace.com/>

Students are responsible for checking the course OWL site (<https://westernu.brightspace.com/>) regularly for news and updates. This is the primary method by which information will be disseminated to all students in the class.

If students need assistance with the course's OWL site, they can seek support on the OWL Brightspace Help page. Alternatively, they can contact the Western Technology Services Helpdesk. They can be contacted by phone at 519-661-3800 or ext. 83800.

Technical Requirements

This course requires you to have a reliable high-speed internet connection and a computer that meets the technical requirements for watching streaming videos.

Electronic Devices: No aids are permitted for the exams in this course. No electronic devices of any kind (including calculators, cell phones and smart watches) are permitted.

Statement on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Students may use Generative AI tools to help them learn more about the course material and to study, but they **may not** be used during the tests or exams in this course.

Methods of Evaluation

Assessment for this course will be based on **one test and a final exam**. The test will take place in **February** in a location **to be determined**. It will consist of no more than 50 multiple choice questions. You will be given one minute per question to complete the tests. The final exam will take place at the time determined by the registrar's office during the final exam period. This exam will be a maximum of two hours long and comprise no more than 100 multiple choice questions.

The test and final exam for this class will be in-person on the UWO campus. Please note that the mid-term test is considered to be central to the learning objectives for this course. Accordingly, students seeking academic consideration for this assessment will be required to provide formal supporting documentation to their academic counselor. Students who are granted academic consideration for this assessment will be provided with an opportunity to take a make-up exam.

No outside materials of any kind will be permitted during the test of the final exam. You may not collaborate with anybody on the tests once they begin, nor may you receive information about the tests from anyone who has completed them or share information about the test with anyone who has not yet completed them. Your answers must be yours and yours alone.

First test: 35%

Final exam: 65%

Schedule

Mid-Term Test: **TBA**

Note that this assessment is central to the learning objectives for this course. Accordingly, students seeking academic consideration for this assessment will be required to provide formal supporting documentation. Students who are granted academic consideration for this assessment will be given the opportunity to take a make-up exam at a time and place to be determined by the instructor or TA.

Final Exam: Time and place TBD by the Office of the Registrar

Note that supporting documentation is always required for academic consideration requests for examinations scheduled by the office of the registrar (e.g. December and April exams) and for practical laboratory and performance tests typically scheduled during the last week of the term.

When a student receives academic considerations or academic accommodation which overlap with the built-in flexibility of the assessment, the longest period of accommodation will determine the deadline. The built-in flexibility of the assessment should not be taken to extend any considerations or accommodations.