

CS 2480A - 650 (Fall 2025)
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 the formation and perception of identity in the Roman world. Dr. Meyer is 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

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Communication

Students must use their Western (@uwo.ca) email addresses when contacting their instructors.

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)

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

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

Additional Texts

Further readings will be supplied electronically by the instructor through OWL. 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.

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 **one test and a final exam**. The test will take place at **a time and place 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 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

First Test: TBA
Final Exam: TBA (December 11-22, 2025)

Important Policies

General information about missed coursework

Students must familiarize themselves with the *University Policy on Academic Consideration – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs* posted on the Academic Calendar:

<https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academicpolicies/appeals/academicconsiderationSep24.pdf>

This policy does not apply to requests for academic consideration submitted for **attempted or completed work**, whether online or in person. The policy also does not apply to students experiencing longer-term impacts on their academic responsibilities. These students should consult: [Accessible Education](#).

For procedures on how to submit Academic Consideration requests, please see the information posted on the Office of the Registrar's webpage:

<https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/academicconsiderations/>

All requests for Academic Consideration must be made within 48 hours after the assessment date or submission deadline.

All academic consideration requests must include supporting documentation; however, recognizing that formal documentation may not be available in some extenuating circumstances, the policy allows students to make one Academic Consideration request **without supporting documentation** in this course. However, the following

assessments are excluded from this, and therefore always require formal supporting documentation:

Mid-Term Test: TBA

Evaluation Scheme for Missed Assessments

Students who receive Academic Consideration for the **mid-term test** will be given an opportunity to take a make-up exam within the subsequent two **weeks at a time and place to be determined**.

When a student misses the **final exam** and their Academic Consideration has been granted, they will be allowed to write the Special Examination (the name given by the University to a make-up Final Exam). See the Academic Calendar ([Special Examinations](#)), especially for those who miss multiple final exams within one examination period.

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously, and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, here:

<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academicpolicies/appeals/scholasticdisciplineundergrad.pdf>.

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

Policy on Accommodation for Religious Holidays

Students should review the [policy for Accommodation for Religious Holidays](#) . Where a student will be unable to write examinations and term tests due to a conflicting religious holiday, they should inform their instructors as soon as possible but **not later than two weeks** prior to writing the examination/term test. In the case of conflict with a midterm test, students should inform their instructor as soon as possible but not later than one week prior to the midterm.

Academic Accommodation and Accessible Education

Academic Accommodation is “a means of adjusting the academic activities associated with a course or program of student in order to permit students with disabilities to participate in those activities at the University and to fulfill the essential requirements of a course or program.” <https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academicpolicies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodationdisabilities.pdf>. Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with **Accessible Education** at the earliest opportunity. “Accessible Education plays a central role in Western's efforts to ensure that its academic programs are accessible for all students” <http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessibleeducation/index.html>

Special Examinations

A Special Examination is any examination other than the regular examination, and it may be offered only with the permission of the Dean of the Faculty in which the student is registered, in consultation with the instructor and Department Chair. Permission to write a Special Examination may be given on the basis of compassionate or medical grounds with appropriate supporting documents. To provide an opportunity for students to recover from the circumstances resulting in a Special Examination, the University has implemented Special Examinations dates. These dates as well as other important information about examinations and academic standing can be found [here](#).

Support Services

Brightspace

All course material will be posted to OWL Brightspace: <https://westernu.brightspace.com/>. If students need assistance with OWL Brightspace, they can seek support on the [OWL Brightspace Help](#) page. Alternatively, they can contact the [Western Technology Services Helpdesk](#) online or by phone at 519-661-3800 or ext. 83800 for technical support. Current versions of all popular browsers (e.g., Safari, Chrome, Edge, Firefox) are supported with OWL Brightspace; what is most important is that you update your browser frequently to ensure it is current. All JavaScript and cookies should be enabled."

Academic Advising

Your Home Faculty's Academic Advising Office will support or refer whenever you have an issue that is affecting your studies, including information on adding/dropping courses, academic considerations for absences, appeals, exam conflicts, and many other academic related matters. Do not hesitate to reach out to them if you are struggling and unsure where to go for help. Contact info for all Faculties is here: <https://registrar.uwo.ca/facultyacademiccounselling.html>

Mental Health Support

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (<https://uwo.ca/health/>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Gender-based and sexual violence

Western University [is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence](#) (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website:

<https://www.uwo.ca/health/studentssupport/survivorsupport/get-help.html>. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Learning Development and Success

Counsellors at the Learning Development and Success Centre <https://learning.uwo.ca> are ready to help you improve your learning skills. They offer presentations on strategies for improving time management, multiple-choice exam preparation/writing, textbook reading, and more. Individual support is offered throughout the Fall/Winter terms in the drop-in Learning Help Centre, and year-round through individual counselling.

USC

Additional student-run support services are offered by the USC, <https://westernusc.ca/services/>.