

**ANCIENT BIOGRAPHY  
SYLLABUS**

Professor Edward J. Watts ([ewatts@ucsd.edu](mailto:ewatts@ucsd.edu))  
Office: Humanities and Social Sciences 4005  
Office Hours: Wednesday 8:30-10

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

Men in the ancient world distinguished between writing a biography of a person and writing a history of the time in which they lived. In this class, we will focus upon the lives of ancient men as they were presented by ancient authors. The lives of all of these people are notable and distinct. The texts describing them, however, were written by authors who share similar ideas about the characteristics that separated an exceptional individual from ordinary people.

This course will use ancient biographies to reconstruct the lives of prominent Greeks and Romans. At the same time, we will use these texts to understand the views of the people who wrote ancient biographies. We will see the issues that concerned them, the actions that they thought important, and the conduct that they found to be despicable. The reading will include some modern scholarship describing the techniques of the ancient biographer. Most of the assigned reading, however, will be comprised of ancient biographical texts by authors like Xenophon, Plutarch, and Suetonius.

**OUTLINE:**

The course is divided into three sections. The first explores political biography in the Roman world and the ways in which biographies were used to both attack and support political personalities. In the second section of the course, we will consider pagan religious biographies and how the biographical form can be transformed to describe a holy man. The final section of the course will be devoted to Christian biography. Of particular concern will be the way in which Christians adapt the pagan biographic form to suit their own religious and political agenda.

**EXPECTATIONS:**

Weekly attendance and completion of the assigned reading is required. Any missed classes will adversely impact a student's participation grade. Students are expected to do extensive reading of ancient sources (in translation), submit weekly questions by email, participate in discussions about these sources, and give periodic group presentations. Students will turn in a short research assignment (5 pages) at the end of one of the first two sections of the class. One such paper is required (students may choose which one of the sections they want to address). Students will also be expected to complete a final research paper of 10-15 pages. Evaluation will be based on class participation (20%), short paper (20%), and a final paper (60%). The final paper grade will be assessed as follows: final paper detailed outline and bibliography (7.5%), final paper rough draft (12.5%), editing of rough draft (7.5%), and final copy (75%). The outline, rough draft, and edited rough draft will all be graded as pass/fail assignments. They may not be submitted late.

**MATERIALS:**

Arnaldo Momigliano's *The Development of Greek Biography* (Harvard, 1993) is recommended for background information.

There are also required readings drawn from both ancient sources and modern scholarship. They are available on TED.

**DUE DATES:**

Please note the following dates:

- January 29 (First short paper due)
- February 19 (Second short paper due)
- February 26 (Final Paper outline due)
- March 5 (Final Paper rough draft due)
- March 12 (Final Paper due)

(These dates have been italicized on the syllabus for easy reference.)

Papers must be turned in through *turnitin.com* and *in hardcopy* by the end of class on the day they are due (the turnitin.com password for this class is "decline"). No papers, drafts, or outlines submitted to the professor or graders by email will be accepted. Late papers will be penalized 5% for the first day, 10% for each subsequent day. After 5 days, the grade will be recorded as a zero. Extensions on papers and make-up examination requests will be granted only in the most extreme circumstances and then only with appropriate documentation that clearly explains their necessity.

**ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:**

"Plagiarism—A student must not adopt or reproduce ideas, words, or statements of another person without appropriate acknowledgment. A student must give credit to the originality of others and acknowledge an indebtedness whenever he or she does any of the following:

- a. Quotes another person's actual words, either oral or written;
- b. Paraphrases another person's words, either oral or written;
- c. Uses another person's idea, opinion, or theory; or
- d. Borrows facts, statistics, or other illustrative material, unless the information is common knowledge."

(quoted from Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct, Part III, Student Misconduct, Academic Misconduct)

This is the grossest of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism will earn the student an automatic failing grade in the course. The case will also be forwarded to the appropriate administrators for disciplinary action.

**READING SCHEDULE**

January 8

Class 1: **Introduction**

**SECTION I: POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY**

January 15

Class 2: **Plutarch**

Plutarch, *Lives of Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar* see links at:  
<http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/home.html>

January 22

Class 3: **Suetonius**

Readings:

Suetonius, *Life of Augustus, Life of Gaius (Caligula), Life of Domitian*, see links at:  
<http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Suetonius/12Caesars/home.html>

**SECTION III: PAGAN RELIGIOUS BIOGRAPHY***January 29***FIRST SHORT PAPER DUE**Class 4: **The early pagan holy man**

Reading:

Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* (TED)  
 Lucian, *Alexander the False Prophet* (TED)

February 5

NO CLASS MEETING

February 12

Class 6: **Proclus**

Readings:

Marinus, *Life of Proclus* (TED)  
 H. Blumenthal, "Marinus' *Life of Proclus*: Neoplatonist Biography" (TED)

**SECTION III: CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY***February 19***SECOND SHORT PAPER DUE**Class 7: *The Life of Antony and its imitators*

Readings:

Athanasius, *Life of Antony*, see link at: [http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF2-04/Npnf2-04-38.htm#P3636\\_1501897](http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF2-04/Npnf2-04-38.htm#P3636_1501897)

Jerome, *Life of Paul*, see link at: [http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF2-06/Npnf2-06-04.htm#P5650\\_1579122](http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF2-06/Npnf2-06-04.htm#P5650_1579122)

Jerome, *Life of Hilarion*, Chapter 1, see link at: [http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF2-06/Npnf2-06-05.htm#P5677\\_1599962](http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF2-06/Npnf2-06-05.htm#P5677_1599962)

***February 26***  
***FINAL PAPER OUTLINE DUE***

Class 8: *The Life of Constantine*

Readings:

Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*—entire text is online at:  
<http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF2-01/TOC.htm>

***March 5***  
***ROUGH DRAFT DUE TO TURNITIN.COM BY 9 PM***

Class 9: Writing Day

Assignment: The usual time spent in class and preparing for class on this day is to be devoted to preparing and writing a draft of your final paper. The draft must be posted to turnitin.com by 9 PM. An edited copy of this draft must be included with the final paper submission.

***March 12***  
***FINAL PAPER DUE TO ME BY 1PM***