Literacy and Legends: Scribes and Writing in the Ancient World

Playwrights, cooks, politicians, spin doctors...students are often surprised to find out that nearly all professions in modern society have counterparts in the ancient world. Such reflections on class and occupation in the ancient world come to us in texts, whose writers existed in their own social and power struggles. These writers—or their bosses—have agendas and prerogatives that shape the ways their readers (and we moderns) understand the world. In this course, we will explore a variety of texts from Middle Eastern and Mediterranean sources, written before the Common Era, with the hope of understanding the development of writing, its purposes, and its social setting. One of our working questions will be: What types of people were writing and reading in the ancient and classical worlds, and how can we discover the voices of ancient writers when we “read between the lines” of their texts? This class will include a close reading essay on an ancient text that demonstrates how unpredictable scribal jobs were in the ancient world. A second essay will explore one of the witty and humorous texts from ancient Mesopotamia through the lens of folklore in order to understand embedded ideas about a writer’s social class and profession. The class will culminate with a research paper in which you will study an ancient scribal text or artifact for what it can tell us about power in society or issues of social justice.

Working Research Questions This Course Will Ask:

I. What types of people were writing and reading in the ancient and classical worlds? Men? Women? Minorities? Other types?
II. How can we discover the voices of ancient writers when we “read between the lines” of their texts?
III. How does a writer's social position affect the texts that they compose.
IV. How does a text’s genre affect its composition?
V. Who was able to read and write in antiquity?
VI. How/where/when were writer’s trained?

Course Objectives and Learning Goals:

I. To gain practice in collegiate level writing and thought.
II. To develop interdisciplinary scholarly skills of research and analysis.
III. To understand ancient texts from a variety of scholar perspectives.
IV. To learn and to implement various critical methodologies.
V. To develop tolerance for various academic and cultural perspectives.
Required Books:


I will supply you with the ancient texts that we will read, with the exception of a few texts from the Bible. The NRSV and NJPS, these are two good scholarly translations of the Bible and will be used in class. The NRSV can be found free online at www.biblegateway.com. The NJPS can be found in the Library’s reference room.

Recommended books:

**Also see course bibliography on LATTE**

Grading:

- **Close Reading Essay:** 20%
- **Lens Essay:** 20%
- **Research Paper:** 35%
- **Portfolio:** 10%
- **Participation:** 15% (5% participation and honesty assignments; 5% misc. assignments; 5% FTA assignment)

All work should be turned in on time. Late work will not normally be accepted without a penalty.

**Essays and Research Paper.** You will receive detailed instructions for the expectations of these assignments. They will be posted on LATTE.

**Portfolio.** Be sure to keep all of your work in this course. You will need to turn it back in. This includes materials from the final versions of your work to that coffee stained napkin you scribbled on in a state of caffeinated ecstasy. You may also be asked to scan copies of your textbooks and other readings on which you made notes. A detailed handout of the portfolio requirements will be posted on LATTE.

**Participation.** Participation refers to your efforts in class discussions, workshops, and group participation. “Honesty Assignments” refers to assignments, which you will be asked whether you completed or not. Miscellaneous assignments are handouts and worksheets that are assigned throughout the class. Lastly, there will be a paper presentation. Based on your paper topic and the class schedule, you will be asked to present on your research topic. You may not be completely done with your paper before you are asked to present on your topic, depending on which topic you are writing on. A presentation may be in the form of a class discussion on the topic depending on the subject. See LATTE for a handout with further details.

This is a project-oriented course, which means that any of you who have spent your life relying on your brightness, and completing work last minute, will have to change your entire approach to writing.

Participation in this class also means that you are showing up with the correct materials for the day’s work. You should **always** have blank paper, a pen, a pencil, and your computer with you in addition to the necessary reading materials for the unit we are studying.

For the **Honesty Assignment** see handout on LATTE. It is due on Week 10 but was assigned on Week 1.
FTA (Finding a Topic Assignment) will occur at the end of the Lens Essay. See handout for details. You must submit a final draft of the close reading, lens essay, and research paper and a portfolio assignment to pass the class; failure to submit one of these assignments could result in a failing grade.

One-on-ones:
We will meet once per unit for a one-on-one, a fifteen to twenty minute conference to discuss your paper. These will be good times for us to get to know each other a little better, for you to better understand my expectations of your work on an individual basis, and for you to explore your paper topics in greater depth. Conferences will be scheduled via Doodle on a first come first serve basis, so if you are a very busy student, sign up early.

When you come for a one-on-one, bring all your materials for the essay you are working on: drafts, brainstorming sheets, questions, etc. You should have thought through your goals for the meeting before you walk into my office. I will, of course, be available outside of these one-on-one meetings, but count on these meetings as being our most productive times together. One-on-one conferences count as part of attendance; missing a scheduled conference meeting is equal to missing a class session.

Office hours:
You should also consider using the posted office hours to periodically discuss your progress throughout the course. I'm rooting for your success!

Attendance:
Class attendance is mandatory. Should you miss 3 classes, your final grade will be docked by a third of a grade. Your final grade will continue to be docked a third of a grade for every missed class thereafter. According to UWS guidelines 7 absences will result in a failing grade.

Athletes and other students in university activities: Sports events and school activities are grounds for excusable absences, which means that assignments can be turned in early. Late penalties will still apply for any late work. To be excused for a school activity, you must inform me at least 3 days in advance by email and CC your coach or activity director. I may “reply all” to the email to follow up on the absence.

The Writing Center:
The Brandeis Writing Center offers you a free service, which aids you in the writing process. The tutors at the writing center are on your team! I will ask you to take advantage of their services at different points in the semester. Depending on the assignment, I may even allow a one day extension on a paper deadline if you visit the writing center. Check them out here: http://www.brandeis.edu/writingprogram/.

Technology:
Technology is welcome in the classroom. Computers are allowed in class for the convenience of note taking. If, however, a computer becomes a disruption, I reserve the right to request that the computer be turned off. Surfing the internet, IMing, text messaging, FBing, tweeting, or doing any other such activity is disrespectful during class. Turn off cell phones in class. Please be respectful with technology.

In return for your efforts, I will be responsible with technology as well. I will use presentations to assist the lectures and discussions but not to be a substitute for them.

Plagiarism:
Plagiarism is forbidden! Do not merely copy from a source verbatim without citing appropriately. Cite any paraphrased material you use.

When in class, be respectful of other student’s ideas as well. If you are discussing content outside of class, do not bring those ideas to class and try to pass them off as your own. Bring them up in class, if they are relevant, but give your classmates the credit they deserve by explaining where the idea came from.
Disabilities:
Students with documented disabilities should discuss this with me within the first two weeks of class. Please view http://www.brandeis.edu/acserv/disabilities/index.html and the UWS manual for more information.

Religious Accommodation:
Brandeis tries to blend both our US federal calendar with a Jewish Holiday calendar. The blending of these calendars is not seamless, and not all students fall into these categories. Make sure you are in contact with me ahead of time if you are requesting accommodation for religious reasons.

How to Succeed in this Class:
I. Attend. If you do not attend classes, you will miss vital information for assignment preparation and personal growth.
II. Come to class prepared. Expect to spend 2 hours of prep time outside of class for each 50 minutes spent in class. If there is one week where you cannot foresee yourself finishing the assignment before class, email me or stop by during my office hours.
III. Expect to participate. This class will be taught in a “conversational” style and contains many workshop sessions.
IV. Be open to new ideas. Grappling with challenging new information rather than snubbing it off is the best road to success in this class.
V. Don’t procrastinate.
VI. Treat others and myself in the class respectfully. If something challenges your understanding, respond respectfully and professionally to that challenge.

Miscellany
*I reserve the right to change this syllabus as needed to accommodate learning throughout the semester. This may include changing assignments.*
**This is a 4 unit class that meets twice a week. Because conferences are mandatory, we will not meet for the full class every class session.**
Schedule

See schedule in LATTE
Class Bibliography
**More items may be added as the course progresses**

**Primary Sources:**


**Secondary Sources:**


**Various Websites Of Interest:**
Throughout the course you will read the biblical texts by comparing two English Bible translations: The NRSV and NJPS, these are two good scholarly translations and will be used in class. The NRSV can be found free online at www.biblegateway.com. The NJPS will be posted on LATTE.

**Scribal Culture Websites.** The following websites are not in the class bibliography. If you use one of these websites in your work, make sure that you cite it according to Chicago Style’s standards. Depending on your topic, these may not qualify as “academic” sources, so check with me before relying too heavily on one of these sources, especially if it is not from a museum.

### 1. Ancient Scribes in General

1.1. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LoqavHDJKZ0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LoqavHDJKZ0) Meso and Egyptian writing.


#### 1.3. Mesopotamian Scribes

1.3.1. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmaZ_3YWLqU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmaZ_3YWLqU)

1.3.2. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HbZ2asfyHcA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HbZ2asfyHcA)

#### 1.4. Egyptian Scribes

1.4.1. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HuzoE0qod9g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HuzoE0qod9g) Egyptian writing

1.4.2. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=csx1d3N60UI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=csx1d3N60UI) sculpture of the a scribe


### 2. Invention of Writing.

#### 2.1. Popular articles


### 3. Scribal Materials

#### 3.1. Production of Parchment

3.1.1. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nuNfdHNTv9o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nuNfdHNTv9o)

#### 3.2. Quills

3.2.1. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=36h1vt-9ss](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=36h1vt-9ss)

#### 3.3. “Metal books”


### 4. Miscellaneous

#### 4.1. Modern idioms about writing.


### 5. Modern Science and Ancient Scrolls and Texts

#### 5.1. Greek


### 6. Ancient Science and Math

#### 6.1. Mesopotamian

6.1.1. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vRexBVbxBQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vRexBVbxBQ)

#### 6.2. Egyptian

6.2.1. Egypt In General

   6.2.1.1. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njFNjRTjVd8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njFNjRTjVd8)

#### 6.2.2. “Egyptian Hieratic

6.2.2.1. [http://www2.potsdam.edu/millercc/Learning%20Fair/LFHieratic.html](http://www2.potsdam.edu/millercc/Learning%20Fair/LFHieratic.html)

#### 6.3. Greco-Roman Period

6.3.1. Antikythera
6.3.1.1. http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/decoding-antikythera-mechanism-first-computer-180953979/?utm_source=smithsonianhistandarch&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=2015022268&spMailingID=22115568&spUserID=NzQwNDU4Mjg5ODMS1&spJobID=501122268&spReportId=NTAxMjY4S0


7. Geography
7.1. Maps

7.2. Archaeological Site

7.3. General
   7.3.1. Egypt
      7.3.1.1. http://matrix-msu.github.io/daea/
   7.3.2. Palestine
      7.3.2.1. http://moses.creighton.edu/vr/

8. Digital Humanities
   8.1. Literacy

9. History
   9.1. Mesopotamia
      9.1.1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MKs5Wvv1-14