COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In this course, we will read, and discuss, a series of less popular texts from the ancient Greek and Roman worlds -- texts which reveal some of the odd, one might say, aspects of that world. By doing this, we will move away from the more familiar terrain of authors like Homer, or Sophocles, or Plato, or Vergil, or Cicero, or Caesar. The texts, with which we will be concerned, can begin to introduce us to the often-gritty culture of antiquity’s common folk.

Here are a few examples of the kinds of thing we will read. Apuleius’ *The Golden Ass*. This is a novel about a man named Lucius, who, in an attempt to imitate the magic done by a witch he has spied on, turns himself by mistake into a donkey. Lucius (now the donkey) then wanders the Roman province of Greece, experiencing the ‘underbelly’ of that society, until he finally regains his human form by worshipping the Egyptian goddess Isis. Juvenal, *Satires III*. Juvenal wrote vicious, biting satires, about Rome, about women, etc. We will read, for example, the satire in which he lambastes the city of Rome because it is full of foreigners. Petronius, *Satyricon*. Here, we have various adventures of Encolpius, and his several associates and acquaintances, as they navigate the social and sexual excesses of their world. Again, a fairly scurrilous document, about a bunch of Roman low-lives. Plautus, *Miles Gloriosus*. A comedy by the playwright Plautus, again portraying the antics of some Roman low-lives – in particular, slaves, and their relationships with their masters. This play provided the stuff for the Broadway musical (and then film) *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. Pliny the Younger, *Letters*. We will read selections from his letters, e.g.: his description of the death of his uncle during the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, or his correspondence with the emperor Trajan about how to deal with those accused of being Christians. Lucian’s *Alexander the False Prophet*. Here is the story of a religious charlatan, as it would seem, who fools the people of his home town into believing that he is a sort of prophet – and takes them for all they are worth in the process. That said, the cult, which he founded, was hugely popular all over the Black Sea and Balkan areas for several hundred years after his death!

These are a few samples of the texts we will tackle. The plan will be to have one text per week, which we read, discuss, and try to understand against the background of the complex worlds of ancient Greece and Rome. In particular, we will be observing aspects of the life of these worlds, which are generally not touched upon by courses in Classics. This is not the
glittering cosmos of high intellectual endeavor normally associated with the field of Classics, but rather, a swamp of pimps, whores, slaves, thieves, witches, sorcerers, boorish social climbers, and the like, which was perhaps more like the daily experience shared by a vast majority of the population in the ancient Graeco-Roman world.

**COURSE RATIONALE:**

The Greek and Roman worlds are typically understood to be the forebears of modern western society and culture. Homer, Sappho, Sophocles, Plato, Cicero, Vergil are the intellectual grandparents, as it were, of our own civilization. There is much truth to this. That said, we would be foolish not to realize that there was an entirely other world operative in their days. It is that world, which we will try to learn about.

The rationale here will be to examine texts, and ideas, which may very well seem very foreign to us. We will try to locate what we encounter in its own cosmos. Thus, for example, we will not simply cringe at the cruelty and grossness (of every conceivable kind), which confront us repeatedly in these texts. Rather, we will attempt to understand how and why these things might have been as they were in that long-vanished world we are reading about.

In short, this course will revolve around coming to understand, as best we can, a civilization we might think to know, but which can turn out to be almost utterly alien, if one only bores a bit into its life, culture, and habits.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

The objectives of this course are two-fold. In the first instance, it is hoped that you will come to grips with what are perhaps two of the most crucial difficulties facing any and every student of ancient Greece and Rome, namely: (1) a source tradition that is sparse, interested mainly in aristocratic males, and highly idiosyncratic in various other ways; (2) a society which is in very many ways very foreign to the modern observer. Then, once these issues have been mastered, our goal will be to produce written analyses of particular aspects of the texts we are reading. The papers you write should be coherent, cogent, concise, and thoroughly grounded in the available evidence. In short, the object is to learn to be a historian.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

**Five Reaction Papers (40% of final grade – each paper is 8% of your final grade)**

Each of these papers is to be a brief, two-page (maximum), reaction to the reading assigned for the week. The purpose of these papers is two-fold. First, these are to serve merely to practice writing a concise interpretation of, or reaction to, a piece of reading. But secondly, these should function to help you to engage with the readings over the course of the first several weeks of class. These papers will cause you to start thinking closely about what it means to tackle these ancient documents.
Two Research Papers (50% of final grade – each paper is 25% of your final grade).

You will be required to write two papers. Each paper will be about 5-7 pages in length. For each of these, you should pick one of the pieces we are reading. Then, you should consult at least the item of modern scholarship about that ancient text listed on the syllabus, as well as one or two other pieces of bibliography. The reading will enable you to locate some specific aspect of the text in question, which interests you, and about which you can write. I will help you by supplying prompts.

Participation (10% of final grade).

It is expected that you be in class every week, and that you participate actively in the class discussions. You should have done the assigned reading for each class, and you should come to class with some questions and/or comments about the reading. This will make the experience for everyone much richer.
WEEKLY PLAN:

Please Note:

Because of the nature of the texts we have from antiquity, the length of the readings will vary significantly from week to week. In some instances, there will be very few pages to read, whereas in other weeks there will be far too many. The shorter readings will raise plenty of issues for discussion, and should be read with care. Where the more extensive readings are concerned, please read as much as you can. If you do not finish any given one of these texts, that will not be a tragedy. We will discuss this on the first day of class.

Also, for each week, I provide you with the assigned reading, as well (usually) as something extra. The extra is there for those who would like to write a research paper about the given week’s assigned reading – or for anyone, who would like to read a bit of scholarship in the ancient text in question.

Finally, many of the readings are to be done using the Loeb Classical Library series, which is available online via Bobst Library. Locating these texts is slightly tricky, but I will explain this to you on the first day of class; and, there will be a handout to help you to locate these.

September 6: Introduction
We will discuss the class, and we will also introduce ourselves to Greek and Roman antiquity.

September 13: Apuleius, The Golden Ass
Reaction Paper 1 Due.

September 20: Petronius, Satyricon
Reaction Paper 2 Due.

September 27: Plautus, Miles Gloriosus (The Braggart Warrior)
Reaction Paper 3 Due.

October 4: Juvenal, Satires
Reaction Paper 4 Due.

October 11: Martial, Epigrams
Reaction Paper 5 Due.

**October 18: Plutarch, *The Education of Children***
Extra: C. Laes, *Children in the Roman Empire: Outsiders Within* (Cambridge 2011)

**October 25: Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses***
Assigned: Dio Chrysostom *Discourses* 10 (On Servants); 21 (On Beauty); 72 (On Personal Appearance; Encomium on Hair) [all in the Loeb Classical Library] ca. 40 pgs.

**November 1: Seneca, *On Anger***

**November 8: Pliny the Younger***

**November 15: Apicius, Cooking and Dining***
Extra: John F. Donahue, *The Roman Community at Table during the Principate* (Ann Arbor 2004)

**November 22: Thanksgiving, no class**

**November 29: Celsus on Medicine***

**December 6: Lucian’s Alexander***

**December 13: *Historia Augusta, Heliogabalus***