

# History 376: Seminar on Medieval Peasants

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**Moravian College**  
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**Office Hours: Mon & Wed 8:30-10am, Fri 9-10am**  
**plus other times by appointment**

This course is first and foremost a writing course, in which you will produce a high-quality article-length paper on a topic of your choice. Your paper will be based on original research from primary sources, but it will also engage the historiographical context of your topic. This course should give you the opportunity, in other words, to put into practice everything you've learned during the last few years about how to be an historian.

In addition, you will learn about the lives of peasants in late medieval England. The chronological and geographical context for our work is important, but it is less important than the opportunities the course provides for engagement with primary and secondary sources. Do not worry if you do not already know much about medieval English peasants: we will begin the semester reading a textbook that gives good background information.

Our regular class reading load is not particularly heavy, but the amount of reading and writing associated with research is considerable! Be prepared to write, rewrite, and assist others with their writing. Because we meet only once a week, you will find that the amount of work required for each class session is more than you are accustomed to: you'll need to figure out ways of spreading the workload across the week.



## Goals of the Course

By the end of this course, you should have improved your abilities to:

1. approach writing as a *process*, one which involves considerable ongoing reflection and revision.
2. use primary sources critically and carefully.
3. respond to secondary sources and engage in historiographical debates.
4. appreciate the ways in which the expectations for writing change according to format and audience.
5. use the writing conventions appropriate to the discipline of history.
6. give and receive constructive criticism.
7. deliver effective oral presentations.

## The Role of Writing in this Course

In this course, you will engage in four different types of writing, each with a particular set of conventions and a different audience:

1. **Research paper based on primary sources.** The final product must be about 18 to 20 pages long, written for an audience of other historians. It must be of publishable quality – indeed, I hope that some of you will consider submitting the final versions of your papers to journals for publication. This paper must be written in formal academic prose, with complete footnotes and a bibliography. Please note that you will be writing this paper in stages throughout the semester, with lots of opportunities for feedback and rewriting between each stage.
2. **Journal entries.** For most of this course, you will be writing weekly journal entries to reflect on our readings and on the process of researching and writing. The main audience for these entries will be yourself – they will serve as a place for you to untangle ideas, think through research strategies and data, and even vent about the frustrations you encounter. The secondary audience for the entries will be me – I will read over each entry to check that you are keeping up your journals and taking them seriously. In terms of format and style, journal entries may be less formal. They will be graded for content, regularity, and willingness to engage with ideas, rather than for stylistic concerns such as spelling and grammar. Even though errors in spelling and grammar will not detract from your grade, I hope that you will proofread journal entries nonetheless: proofreading will help you clarify your ideas, and this will ultimately improve your paper.
3. **Feedback to others on their writing.** As part of the ongoing process of rewriting and rethinking, you will help others with their papers and they will do the same for you. Each time a major part of the paper is due, you will write up comments to help other members of your writing group (I will assign you to writing groups once the semester is underway). Your main audience will be that of your peers, although I will also collect a copy of your comments in order to assess and help you with the important (if often overlooked) skill of offering useful feedback and constructive criticism.
4. **Free-writing during class.** Sometimes we will use part of our class time to think through issues and ideas by writing about them. I will not collect these writings, but I will sometimes ask you to read them aloud or to summarize them. Your main audience will thus be yourself, and your focus should be on exploring and thinking through ideas and arguments. As with the readings journals,



free-writing will be a means to an end – an important part of the writing *process* – rather than an end in itself.

## Required Texts

The assigned textbook for this class is:

- ❖ Judith M. Bennett, *A Medieval Life: Cecilia Penifader of Brigstock, c. 1297-1344* (1998).

All other required readings for this course (including instructions on course assignments) can be found in the Coursepack handbook which I will distribute to you in class.

## Attendance Policy

Attendance is not required in this course, but it is very highly recommended. Much of what we cover will build on previous classes, and those who are absent will find it hard to keep up with what is going on. Absentees will also find that their class participation grade suffers. Attendance is particularly important since we meet only once a week and since so much of our course involves discussion and exploration of ideas that cannot easily be replicated from class notes.

## Academic Honesty Policy

I expect that you will complete all assignments in this course individually and independently, and I will refer any cases of suspected cheating or plagiarism to the Academic Affairs Office. I strongly encourage you to ensure that you are familiar with Moravian's Academic Honesty Policy, found in the Student Handbook. As this policy explains, it is possible to commit plagiarism without intending to be dishonest, but serious consequences result regardless of intent.

Let me clarify two particular occasions when it is legitimate (and even desirable) to use the help of others. First, while I expect that you will write all assignments on your own, I *do* encourage you to discuss with each other the ideas and arguments contained in our course, both within class and outside of it. For example, you might run into a friend in the library and start talking about how your paper is going. Perhaps, for instance, you are puzzled about how to interpret a particular primary source. Your friend, after listening to you, might make an observation or suggestion. As you write your paper, it is legitimate to explain and respond to that comment, *as long as you do not claim the idea as your own*. You might, for example, write something like, "In talking about this reading with [your friend's name], he/she suggested that this primary source might reflect [your friend's suggestion]. This makes good sense to me because..." In other words, signal clearly which things are someone else's opinion and which things are your own. You should also insert a footnote that acknowledges your debt to someone else's ideas or thoughts – by the end of the semester, you will almost certainly find that your work has been strengthened by suggestions from your classmates, and you should thank them accordingly. People often do this by adding a special footnote or endnote before their regular notes. Here's an example.<sup>1</sup> Second, I encourage you to seek help with writing. It is perfectly legitimate to ask others to read over your paper and look for errors of spelling, grammar, and expression. You might also ask others to look over your written work and help you with paper organization and structure. I am happy to read drafts of papers, especially if you give

me advance warning. I also encourage you to use the Writing Center. Again, it is good practice to insert a footnote in your paper in which you thank anyone who has read and commented on a draft.

One other thing to note about plagiarism: often people do not realize that it is possible to plagiarize from oneself. In other words, if someone were to turn in a paper that was identical or very similar in parts to a paper he/she had turned in for another class, this would constitute plagiarism. If you hope to work on a topic that you've already examined in another class, please talk carefully with me about it first. You may be able to expand part of a paper you've previously written, or take it in a different direction, but *this absolutely needs to be cleared with me before you begin*.

## Inclusive Language Policy

Moravian College policy strongly encourages the use of inclusive, non-discriminatory language in all academic writing and communication. For instance, rather than writing about "mankind," write about "people" or "humankind." Rather than use the term "he" when referring to a person in the abstract (as opposed to a specific individual), replace it with "they" or "he/she." This mindfulness about language reflects Moravian's commitment to a tolerant and inclusive campus community. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have about inclusive language or to work with you to find ways to make your language more inclusive.

## Evaluation

Your grade for this course will be calculated as follows:

Journal Entries (eleven throughout the semester, lowest grade dropped)	10%
Quiz (February 19)	5%
Historiographical Abstracts (due February 26)	5%
Paper Chunk 1 (Wed March 16)	10%
Paper Chunk 2 (Wed March 30)	10%
Paper Chunk 3 (Wed April 6)	10%
Paper Chunk 4 (Wed April 13)	10%
Complete Draft (Wed April 20)	10%
Final Paper (Sunday May 1, 5pm)	10%
Oral Presentation (Wed May 4, 11:30am)	10%
Participation (including feedback to others)	10%

***Please note: All late work is subject to a penalty of 10% per day. If you miss a deadline – even by 5 minutes – you will be penalized 10%; if the assignment comes in the next day, it will be penalized 20%, and so on!***

Throughout the semester, you will write eleven JOURNAL ENTRIES (10%), responding to the prompts listed on the schedule below. The lowest grade will be dropped, and the top ten will each count for 1% of your final grade. Please email these to me by 10:15am on the day that they are due, except as noted in the syllabus.

The QUIZ (5%) on February 19 will be a multiple-choice test on all ten chapters of *A Medieval Life*, our reading for the first few weeks.

Your HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ABSTRACTS (5%) are due on February 26. You will submit at least five abstracts of secondary sources (in most cases, these will be books, book chapters from edited collections, and/or articles in journals). Each abstract should be at least ½ page single-spaced or a full page double-spaced. Each must identify (a) the author's thesis; (b) the sources he/she has used; and (c) the ways in which you think it will be useful for your paper.

Because we are approaching writing as a process, your writing throughout the semester is at least as important as the final product. Your grade for writing throughout the semester will be assessed according to the quality of the four five-page "chunks" of writing that you turn in on March 16, March 30, April 6, and April 13. Each PAPER CHUNK is worth 10% of your final grade. \*\*Please note that deadlines are on the Wednesdays prior to our Friday classes.\*\*

Your first COMPLETE DRAFT (10%) is due by noon on April 20. Although some polishing may occur thereafter, it should contain all major sections of your paper (including a clear thesis) and be well organized and written.

The FINAL PAPER (10%) should be 18-20 pages long and formatted in accordance with the *Chicago Manual of Style* guidelines. It is due to me via email by no later than Sunday May 1 at 5pm.

Your ORAL PRESENTATION (10%) will take place during the period scheduled for exams of classes meeting MWF period 3; in other words, on Wed May 4, 11:30am-2pm. It will consist of a 10-minute talk that outlines your thesis and the main conclusions that you reached in your work throughout the semester. Faculty from the history department, and any others who have been involved in the paper-writing process will be invited, and you are also welcome to invite family and friends.

PARTICIPATION (10%) is an extremely important component of this course. In order to help others write strong papers, you will need to give them the most helpful feedback possible. This means reading their papers carefully, thinking about their overall arguments and suggesting ways to improve or clarify these arguments, providing encouragement, and offering constructive critiques. Half of your participation grade will be determined by the quality of your written feedback to writing group members. The other half will be determined by (a) how well you accept constructive criticism, (b) your class attendance and participation, and (c) your in-class writing assignments.

Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact the Academic Support Center, located on the first floor of Monocacy Hall (extension 1401). Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic Support Center. I am happy to do what I can to treat you fairly and help you succeed.



# Class Schedule

Please note: we only meet on Fridays, but there are often assignments due (by email) by 12 noon on a Wednesday. I suggest that you make a note of these in your calendars/planners!

Fri January 22	<b>Introduction</b>
Fri January 29	<b>The Peasant World I</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bennett, <i>A Medieval Life</i>, chapters 1-3.</li> <li>Patrick Rael, "Research Papers: Keeping a Research Journal," Coursepack [hereafter abbreviated to CP] 4-6.</li> <li>Primary Sources and Potential Research Questions, CP 7-9.</li> <li>Primary Source: Court Rolls, CP 10-15.</li> </ul> <p><b>Journal 1:</b> First, please summarize the readings for today from Bennett in 1-1.5 pages (double-spaced). Write this under the heading, "Reading Summary." Reducing these chapters to just 1-1.5 pages will certainly involve leaving lots of information out! I want you to identify the information that seems most relevant to you as you begin to plan your own project. Second, in something between ½ a page and a full page double-spaced, please set out your initial thoughts about what you might research for your paper. Head this section, "My Project." Look at Rael's suggestions on research journals. Questions you might consider: what topics and sources interest you most so far? Has the reading from Bennett suggested any potential topics to you? Email your journal to me by 10:15am on Fri 29<sup>th</sup>.</p>
Mon February 1 - Fri February 5	<b>Individual meetings with me about paper topics</b> We'll schedule these at the previous class meeting.
Fri February 12	<b>The Peasant World II</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bennett, <i>A Medieval Life</i>, chapters 4-6.</li> <li>Patrick Rael, "Research Papers: Paper Writing Steps," CP 16.</li> <li>Primary Source: Manorial Accounts, CP 17-19.</li> </ul> <p><b>Journal 2:</b> First, please summarize the readings from Bennett in 1-1.5 pages (double-spaced). Write this under the heading, "Reading Summary." Second, continue your musings on your own project and where you think you might be headed under the section, "My Project" (½ - 1 page).</p>
Fri February 19	<b>The Peasant World III</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bennett, <i>A Medieval Life</i>, chapters 7-10.</li> <li>Quiz on <i>A Medieval Life</i> (5% of grade)</li> <li>Patrick Rael, "Research Papers: Taking Notes," CP 20.</li> <li>Primary Sources: Chronicles, Sermons, and Literature, CP 21-32.</li> </ul> <p><b>Journal 3:</b> First, please summarize the readings from Bennett in 1-1.5 pages (double-spaced). Write this under the heading, "Reading Summary." Second, you should – by now – have a reasonable idea of what your own project will involve. Record your progress in refining questions and ordering sources under the section, "My Project" (½ - 1 page).</p>

Fri February 26	<p><b>Historiography: The Use of Coroners' Rolls; Integrating Historiographical Analysis in your Papers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selections from Barbara Hanawalt, <i>The Ties That Bound: Peasant Family Life in Medieval England</i>, CP 33-46.</li> <li>• Barbara Harris, Review of <i>The Ties That Bound</i> in <i>Journal of Social History</i>, CP 47-49.</li> <li>• Primary Source: Coroners' Rolls, CP 50-57.</li> <li>• "Useful Feedback and Constructive Criticism," CP 58-59.</li> </ul> <p><b>Historiographical abstracts</b> are due to me in class. Please submit at least five abstracts of secondary sources (in most cases, these will be books, book chapters from edited collections, and/or articles in journals). Each abstract should be at least ½ page single-spaced or a full page double-spaced. Each must identify (a) the author's thesis; (b) the sources he/she has used; and (c) the ways in which you think it will be useful for your paper (for instance, might it be a good comparison? Might you argue against the author's conclusions?).</p> <p><b>Journal 4:</b> Please summarize the readings from Hanawalt &amp; Harris in 1-1.5 pages double-spaced (your total for both together should be 1.5-2 pages, not 1.5-2 pages each). From this point on, you need no longer include the section entitled "My Project."</p>
Mon Feb 29-Thurs March 3	<p><b>Individual meetings with me (no class Fri 4<sup>th</sup>)</b></p> <p>At least 24 hours before our meeting time, please send me an email in which you outline your latest plans for your project, list at least three questions you have for me, and explain where you plan to go with the paper chunk due after Spring Break. This assignment will count as <b>Journal 5</b> and must be <i>at least</i> 200 words long.</p>
March 7-11	<p><b>Spring Break</b></p>
Wed March 16	<p><b>Paper Chunk 1</b> is due to me and to writing group members via email by 12 noon</p>
Fri March 18	<p><b>Writing Workshop: Chunk 1; Historiography: The Use of Artistic Sources</b></p> <p>We will spend part of today's class workshopping your first paper chunks. The rest of the class will focus on an historiographical article about how we should use art as a primary source.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Michael Camille, "Labouring for the Lord: The Ploughman and the Social Order in the Luttrell Psalter," <i>Art History</i> 10 (1987), 423-454, CP 60-99.</li> </ul> <p><b>Journal 6</b> is due: Please summarize the reading by Camille in 1.5-2 pages double-spaced. Be sure to identify his thesis and the scholars with whom he disagrees.</p>
Mon March 21-Thurs March 24	<p><b>Individual Meetings with Me (no class Fri 25<sup>th</sup>)</b></p> <p>At least 24 hours before our meeting time, please send me an email in which you outline your latest plans for your project, list at least three questions you have for me, and explain where you plan to go with the paper chunk due next Wednesday. This assignment will count as <b>Journal 7</b> and must be <i>at least</i> 200 words long.</p>
Wed March 30	<p><b>Paper Chunk 2 and Initial Outline</b> are due to me and to writing group members by 12 noon.</p>

Fri April 1	<p><b>Writing Workshop: Paper Chunk 2; Historiography: Cohesion and Community in the Peasant Village</b></p> <p>We will spend part of today's class workshopping your second paper chunks. The rest of the class will focus on an historiographical debate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• J. A. Raftis, "Changes in an English Village After the Black Death," <i>Mediaeval Studies</i> 29 (1967), 158-77, CP 100-109.</li> <li>• Christopher Dyer, "The English Medieval Village Community and its Decline," <i>Journal of British Studies</i> 33 (1994), 407-29, CP 110-132.</li> <li>• "Initial Paper Outline," CP 133-134.</li> </ul> <p><b>Journal 8</b> is due: Please summarize the readings for today in 1.5-2 pages (double-spaced) total. Be sure to identify each author's thesis and sources, as well as the places where they agree and disagree with one another.</p>
Wed April 6	<p><b>Paper Chunk 3</b> and <b>Updated Outline</b> are due to me and to writing group members by 12 noon.</p>
Fri April 8	<p><b>Writing Workshop: Paper Chunk 3; Historiography: Conviviality and Charity</b></p> <p>We will spend part of today's class workshopping your third paper chunks. The rest of the class will focus on an historiographical debate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Judith M. Bennett, "Conviviality and Charity in Medieval and Early Modern England," <i>Past and Present</i> 134 (1992), 19-41, CP 135-57.</li> <li>• Maria Moisà, "Conviviality and Charity in Medieval and Early Modern England," <i>Past and Present</i> 154 (1997), 223-234, CP 158-69.</li> <li>• Judith M. Bennett, "Conviviality and Charity in Medieval and Early Modern England – Reply," <i>Past and Present</i> 154 (1997), 235-242, CP 170-177.</li> <li>• "Introduction and Conclusion," CP 178.</li> </ul> <p><b>Journal 9</b> is due: Please summarize the readings for today in 1.5-2 pages (double-spaced). Be sure to identify each author's thesis and sources, as well as the places where they agree and disagree with one another.</p>
Wed April 13	<p><b>Paper Chunk 4</b> (Intro &amp; Conclusion) and <b>Updated Outline</b> are due to me and to writing group members by 12 noon.</p>
Fri April 15	<p><b>Writing Workshop: Paper Chunk 4; Historiography: Did Women's Wages Increase More than Men's after the Black Death?</b></p> <p>We will spend part of today's class workshopping your introductions and conclusions. The rest of the class will focus on an historiographical debate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sandy Bardsley, "Women's Work Reconsidered: Gender and Wage Differentiation in Late Medieval England," <i>Past and Present</i> 165 (1999), 3-29, CP 179-205.</li> <li>• John Hatcher, "Women's Work Reconsidered: Gender and Wage Differentiation in Late Medieval England," <i>Past and Present</i> 173 (2001), 191-98, CP 206-213.</li> <li>• Sandy Bardsley, "Women's Work Reconsidered: Gender and Wage Differentiation in Late Medieval England – Reply," <i>Past and Present</i> 173 (2001), 199-202, CP 214-217.</li> </ul> <p><b>Journal 10</b> is due: Please summarize the readings for today in 1.5-2 pages (double-spaced). Be sure to identify each author's thesis and sources, as well as the places where they agree and disagree with one another.</p>



Wed April 20	<b>Complete (absolutely-the-best-you-can-make-it) Draft</b> is due to me and to writing group members by 12 noon. Look at Rael's checklist: Patrick Rael, "Research Papers: Revising the Draft" and "Research Papers: Writing Checklist," CP 218-220.
Fri April 22	<b>Writing Workshop 5</b> We will spend the whole of today's class focused on giving each other substantial feedback on the complete drafts. Please review again: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Patrick Rael, "Research Papers: Revising the Draft" and "Research Papers: Writing Checklist," CP 218-220.</li> </ul>
Mon April 25 – Wed April 27	<b>Individual Meetings with Me (no class Fri 29<sup>th</sup>)</b> At least 24 hours before our meeting time, please send me an email in which you outline your latest plans for your project, list at least three questions you have for me, and explain what you need to do for the complete draft due on Sunday. This assignment will count as <b>Journal 11</b> and must be <i>at least</i> 200 words long.
Sun May 1	<b>Final paper</b> is due electronically by 5pm. Please do not assume I have received your paper until I send you an acknowledgement!
Wed May 4, 11:30am	<b>Miniconference</b> (details to follow) – 10 minute paper presentations.

The image below, along with those on pp.1 and 5, comes from the 14<sup>th</sup>-century Luttrell Psalter. As you'll see when reading Michael Camille's article (for March 18<sup>th</sup>), Camille is critical of some of the ways in which historians use images from this manuscript. You might want to think about the ways I am using them here and whether I'm committing some of the interpretive crimes he suggests by including them in the syllabus!

