

The Medieval World

AS.100.102 | Fall 2023

Gilman 132 | Mondays & Wednesday, 11-11:50 am

Professor A. E. Lester

Office: Gilman 322

Office hours: Tuesdays, 1-3pm and by appointment

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Teaching Assistants:

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The world map of al-Idrisi in 1154. It's upside down from the modern point of view — the south at the top, north at the bottom — and Mecca at the center top. Facsimile by Konrad Miller, 1928.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The Medieval World, ca. 300-1500, was one of the most dynamic time periods and geographies in the past. Out of the fracturing and collapse of the Roman Empire came new societies, cultures, kingdoms, belief systems, structures, and ideas. This course explores selected topics in the political, economic, social, and intellectual history of Western Europe in the wider world in the period between the fall of the Roman Empire and the fourteenth century. This period witnessed profound transformations of governments, of the economy, of cultural ideas and interactions that found expression in new building forms, written records, decorative arts, material culture, rituals, and beliefs. Over the course of the semester, we will analyze the ways in which medieval society took shape as it reorganized itself after the almost total collapse of the ancient world. We will also address topics such as religious plurality, sovereignty and subjecthood, the flourishing of new learning, chivalric culture, crusading, and the plague and its effects. We will follow the interplay between material and cultural forces in the processes of social organization.

Lectures and readings will narrate, analyze, and question these developments. Together we will address several overarching **concepts** including: kingship, law and peace; changes and innovations in religion and religious differences; the expressive power of poetry, visual arts, and music, to list a few. We will follow a number of specific **themes**: the emergence of peace from political fragmentation; the dynamics of population growth and ecological change; the creation of legal norms for the regulation of power and capital; and the dynamics of gender, power, and ideology; the creation of knowledge and the transmission of knowledge through texts, institutions, and learning practices; contacts, interactions, and adaptations among Christians, Muslims and Jews; defining notions of Holy War and the perception of heresy; as well as the emergence of concepts such as romantic love, individuality, nature, and rationality.

The course will move quickly. We are covering a vast sweep of time and space. This course is meant to give an introduction to the medieval world that will set you up well to pursue more in-depth historical studies in the future.

COURSE DESIGN & REQUIREMENTS

The **lectures** in the course provide not only an outline of historical events and their significance, but an interpretation of these events with an eye to how historians, both in the past and in the present, assemble, analyze and narrate change and continuities over time. The lecture and discussion components of this course are designed to complement one another. Weekly **discussions** are a time for you to share your thoughts, questions, reactions, and interpretations of the readings and to engage the comments and ideas raised by others in a respectful and useful manner.

Writing and reading history is part of an on-going dialogue that involves you, the primary and secondary texts and sources listed below, their authors, copyists, and translators, as well as modern historians and your colleagues in this class. I strongly urge you to complete the readings at least a day in advance of the discussion so you can generate your own thoughts and questions beforehand, and so you can write about them in a reflective and clear manner. The syllabus indicates which texts we will focus on for each week. **ALWAYS** bring all components of the weekly readings with you to discussion sections. Your participation is crucial for the intellectual exchange that is the foundation of this course, as well as for your grade!

REQUIREMENTS

- Students are required to attend lectures and discussion sections unless formally excused in advance in writing.
- Always bring books and readings for the weekly discussions to class with you. You will often be asked to go into a book or text and to analyze the text closely in discussion.
- All written assignments (weekly Critical Assessments, Reading Responses, and the two Exams) are required and must be completed to receive a grade in the course.

Grades for the course are based on an assessment in four areas:

- (1) Attendance in lecture and discussion; and *engaged* and *active* participation in discussions and the completion of 12 weekly Critical Assessments of the readings due **Fridays** for discussion meetings – **30 %**
- (2) Building on your notes for the Critical Assessments, you will write **SIX** short (1-2-pages, or approx. 800 words) written Reading Responses analyzing primary source readings and at least one scholarly article; Responses are due on the following **Mondays** after discussion– **20 %**
- (3) Take-home **Midterm Exam** – **25%**
- (4) Take-home **Final Exam** – **25%**

Your final grade will reflect a consideration of all of the above dimensions. All written work is due as specified on the assignment sheet. Specific assignment rubrics, guidelines, exam questions, and explanations will be circulated in advance. Any written assignments handed in late without a medical excuse will be graded down a full letter grade (therefore an A- will be a B-) for everyday they are late. Contact me or your TA at least one day in advance if you think you will not be able to complete an assignment on time.

Grading Policy: (see last page for expectations): All work that is turned in will be returned and graded typically within two weeks (occasionally, due to travel or illness, it might take slightly longer). Grades will not be posted and updated on Canvas, although at the end of the course final grades will be posted there. If you would like to know how you are doing in the course, or would to discuss a grade and comments on a particular assignment or strategies to improve in the class, please do meet with your TA and or come to my office hours, or make an appointment to meet with me as soon as you have questions. Please don't wait for the end of the semester. Learning is a process. We get better at what we do by making mistakes, encountering misunderstandings, working on and editing our writing, and I will not penalize you for this. In grading for this course, we look for improvement over the semester.

Note on Technology: With permission, computers may be used in a limited way during lecture and discussion. However, I strongly urge you to listen during lecture and to take notes **by hand** either on the handout or in a notebook. Use of cellphones for texting, chatting, snapping, etc. during class is distracting to me, to your TAs, and to fellow students and **is prohibited**. If you need to use a device for some reason, please come see me in advance of class and we can find a workable solution. In some instances, computers may be used in discussion to refer to online source materials and readings.

Readings and Responses:

The weekly readings and discussions allow students to read sources from the period closely and to analyze aspects of cultural, intellectual, and religious diversity and change. Throughout the semester you will have 12 opportunities to write short **Critical Assessments** responding to the readings. We will provide prompts for these assignments at the start of each week. These offer a guide to reading medieval primary and secondary texts and to thinking critically about sources from the distant past. Critical Assessments are a form of guided note taking and assessment. Critical Assessments must be completed in advance of discussion meetings on Friday and shared with your TAs by uploading them to Canvas before discussions; please also bring them to class to take notes and to use in conversation.

Throughout the semester you are also required to write **SIX short Reading Responses**. These responses offer an opportunity to expand on themes in your Critical Assessment, but offer a deeper and more thoughtful engagement with a particular idea, text, image, which you will develop as an argumentative statement supported by evidence from the text. This course is a **writing intensive** class and these short-written responses are designed to help students develop and hone their writing skills and to develop the tools of historical thinking, investigation, and interpretation.

The **mid-term** and **final exams** ask students to delve more deeply into specific questions of change and innovation and to engage in focused textual analysis while mastering a sense of the flow of events and the key terminology used to understand the medieval world.

Note on sources:

During the semester you will be asked to read and analyze a wide variety of sources, many of which are written texts that take different forms, including autobiographies, chronicles, poems, letters, legal texts and inquisitions. Some will no doubt prove more accessible than others. In addition to written texts a significant emphasis will be given to visual material, including manuscript illuminations, cultural objects and artifacts, and architectural and archaeological remains. Occasionally you will be asked to “read” visual and material sources and give equal weight to what they can tell us and how they can supplement our interpretations of the period.

A willingness to imagine and indulge the circumstances of a different period in time, that is, to take seriously the descriptions, claims, and forms authors and artists used to communicate their contemporary concerns is the most useful skill you can bring to these sources. You should also remember that almost all the texts we will read were written on wax or parchment, copied variously by different scribes, written in languages ranging from Latin, Greek, Arabic, Syriac, to French, German, English, and so forth, and were then translated into modern English. Our sources are mediated sources, but they nevertheless offer us a window into the many social contexts of the medieval world. Your willingness to read and think for yourself is one of the most important skills you can work on in this class!

COURSE GOALS & LEARNING OBJECTIVES

I have many hopes and ambitions for you in this course, and I hope you do as well. That said, there are several key goals that guide the course structure, the assignments, and the discussions. I hope that you will gain from the class:

- a clear sense of the major events, impact of individuals and ideas, and the complexities that constitute the medieval world. You should be able to offer a narrative of the most significant developments of the period and to reflect on changes over time.
- an understanding of the contingency of events and the creation of knowledge; that what occurred in the past is mediated by our access to sources, translations, objects, and by the questions we ask in our present moment.
- a strong sense of the value of reading and writing about something outside the ordinary, about societies and people different from our own contemporary context. With this, I hope you will cultivate a sense of intellectual **risk-taking** and **empathy** in formulating and expanding your thoughts, ideas, arguments, and perspectives. Studying the deep past is a privilege and requires creativity, imagination, and careful analysis. It is also necessary for fully understanding our place in the world and the past.
- a sense of historical thinking through cultivating strategies of close reading, inquiry, and analysis of a variety of sources.
- sharper analytic and interpretative skills honed through crafting short response papers, responding to directed essay questions on the exams, and developing a thoughtful and reflective writing practice.

- a greater excitement and enthusiasm for the medieval world, its sources, and the deep past's changing meaning for us today.

TEXTS:

All of the books and readings for the course will be available through **eReserve** at the Sheridan Library. The books listed below are available for purchase in the JHU Bookstore and through other booksellers. Most of the books are also available digitally and links can be found through the course Canvas site and the library website. All of the books listed below are available in paperback and students are urged to buy books for their own use in class. The textbook is available in both hardcopy and digital form. While it will not be the main focus of discussion it will give you an invaluable point of reference in a class that covers a great deal of history.

Judith Bennett and Sandy Bardsley, *Medieval Europe: A Short History* 12th Edition (Oxford University Press) ISBN-10: 0190064617.

Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Rex Warner (Signet Classics). ISBN-10: 0451531213.

Anonymous, *Beowulf and the Other Old English Poems*, trans. Constance Hieatt (Bantam Classics, 1988). ISBN-10: 0553213474.

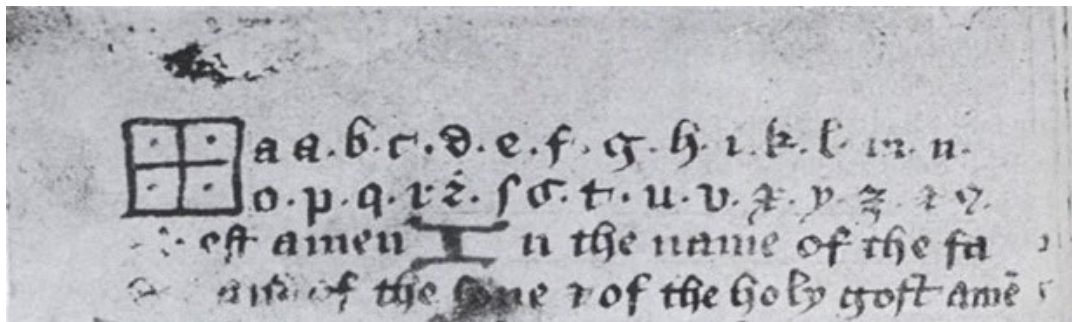
Benedict of Nursia, *The Rule of Benedict*, trans. Anthony C. Meisel (Image, 1975). ISBN-10: 0385009488.

Dhuoda, *Handbook for William: A Carolingian Woman's Counsel for Her Son*, trans. Carol Neel (Catholic University Press of America, 1999). ISBN-10: 0813209382.

Usama ibn Munqidh, *The Book of Contemplation: Islam and the Crusades*, trans. Paul M. Cobb (Penguin Classics 2008). ISBN-10: 0140455132.

The Black Death, The Great Mortality of 1348-1350: A Brief History with Documents, ed. and trans. John Aberth 2nd edition (Bedford/St. Martin's, 2016). ISBN-10: 1319048870.

WEEKLY LECTURES & DISCUSSION READINGS:



Practicing the Alphabet, northern European manuscript, ca. 13th C book hand.

Week 1: Introductions

M: 8/28: Welcome and Course Overview

W: 8/30: In the Shadow of Empires: The Worlds of Late Antiquity

Discussion Readings: TO BE COMPLETED FOR SECTION DISCUSSION (FRIDAYS)

Begin Augustine, *Confessions*, Books I-V (No Critical Assessment due this week)

Week 2: The Worlds of Late Antiquity: Christianity and Classical Culture

M: 9/4: NO CLASS – Labor Day

W: 9/6: Constantine, Conversion, and Old and New Rome

Discussion Readings:

Bennett & Bardsley, *Medieval Europe*, chapter 1 (pp. 1-32)

Finish Augustine, *Confessions*, Books VI-X (*Critical Assessment 1 due in section*)



Mosaics of Emperor Justinian and Empress Theodora, Church of San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy (ca. 547)

Week 3: Migrations and New Kingdoms in the West

M: 9/11: New Beginnings on Old Foundations: Kingdoms of the West

W: 9/13: Roman Survivals: Byzantium and the Bishops

Discussion Readings:

Bennett & Bardsley, *Medieval Europe*, chapter 2 (pp. 33-60)

Anonymous, *Beowulf* (*Critical Assessment 2 due in section*)

Week 4: The Rise of Islam & the New Mediterranean World

M: 9/18: Religious Change and the Emergence of Islam

W: 9/20: Political Realignment and the Rise of Charlemagne (Charles the Great)

Discussion Readings:

Bennett & Bardsley, *Medieval Europe*, chapter 3 & 4, (pp. 61-106)

Selections from the *Qur'an*; [ARTICLE] Conant, "Europe and the African Cult of Saints"
(*Critical Assessment 3 due in section*)



Gold imitation dinar coin of Offa, King of Mercia (757-796, England); Early medieval/Islamic world objects, British Museum, 1913, 1213.1 [Arabic inscription imperfectly copied declares 'There is no deity by Allah, The One, Without Equal, and Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah.']

Week 5: Carolingians, Monasticism & Political Culture

M: 9/25: **No Class** – Professor Lester is away

W: 9/27: The Regulated Life: History, Writing, and Monastic Culture

Discussion Readings:

Bennett & Bardsley, *Medieval Europe*, chapter 5 (pp. 108-132)

Benedict of Nursia, *The Rule of Benedict*; Judith in *Beowulf* (Critical Assessment 4 due in section)

Week 6: Dreaming of Empires: Charlemagne's Long Shadow

M: 10/2: Hostages, Iron Tongues, and the Shades of Empire

W: 10/4: Transformations: Political and Social Realalignments in the Service of Peace

Discussion Readings:

Bennett & Bardsley, *Medieval Europe*, chapter 6 (pp. 133-164)

Duhoda, *Handbook for William*; [ARTICLE] McCormick et. al., "Volcanos and Climate," (Critical Assessment 5 due in section)

Week 7: Power & The Holy: Making of the Papacy

M: 10/9: Monk-Popes and German Kings: A European Revolution in Sacred Authority

W: 10/11: Penance, Pilgrimage, and the Soul

Discussion Readings:

Bennett & Bardsley, *Medieval Europe*, chapter 7 (pp. 165-190) and chapter 9 (only pp. 217-231)

Letters of Pope Gregory VII (Selections); Discuss Midterm Exam

(No Critical Assessments due this week)

Week 8: Self and Society: Vows, Questions, Identity and the Soul

M: 10/16: Yes and No: Harmony, Learning, and the Self in the Twelfth Century

TAKE-HOME MIDTERM EXAM DUE in Class – **Monday 10/16**

W: 10/18: Written in Stone: Building and Vernacular Culture

Discussion Readings:

Bennett & Bardsley, *Medieval Europe*, chapter 8 (pp. 190-216); Marie de France, *Laustic* (Critical Assessment 6 due in section)



Lazarus and Dives, parable of the rich and poor, historiated capital, Abbey church of Moissac (Tarn-et-Garonne), early 12th C, France.

Week 9: The Medieval Economy: Serfs, Freedom, and Urban Life

M: 10/23: The Rhineland and River Networks

W: 10/25: Circulation of Things in the Medieval World: Empires of Trade

Discussion Readings:

Bennett & Bardsley, *Medieval Europe*, chapter 10 (pp. 240-264)

The Life of Herman/Judah; Poems of Lament (Selections)

(Critical Assessment 7 due in section)



Detail from an itinerary map by Matthew Paris, showing an outline of the city of Acre in the Holy Land (Royal MS 14 C VII, f. 4v detail).

Week 10: Crusade and Encounters

M: 10/30: Medieval Medicine: A Story of Continuity and (Ex)change (Sheridon Ward)

W: 11/1: Crusade Cultures in the Latin East & Beyond

Discussion Readings:

Bennett & Bardsley, *Medieval Europe*, chapter 11 (pp. 265-294)

Usamah Ibn Munquid, *The Book of Contemplation: Islam and the Crusades* (Selections)
(Critical Assessment 8 due in section)

Week 11: Lateran IV and New Piety

M: 11/6: Heresy, Sanctity and Dissent

W: 11/8: Response: The Great Council (1215) -- Reform and Its Reach

Discussion Readings:

Bennett & Bardsley, *Medieval Europe*, chapter 9 (pp. 232-239), chapter 13 (pp. 333-365)

The Canons of the Fourth Lateran Council & The Life of St. Francis (Selections)
(Critical Assessment 9 due in section)



A king consults an anchorite. New Haven, Yale University, Beinecke MS 404 (Rothschild Canticles)

Week 12: Royal Power and Its Limits: Inquisition & the Law

M: 11/13: Sovereign Authority and Its Limits: King and *Parlement*/Parliament

W: 11/15: Inquiry and Power, Questions about Questions: Gui Fouquois, A Case Study

Discussion Readings:

Bennett & Bardsley, *Medieval Europe*, chapter 12 (pp. 296-332)

Inquisition texts/*Enquêtes* Records (Selections); [ARTICLE] Sabapathy, "Making Public Knowledge," (*Critical Assessment 10 due in section*)

Week 13: THANKSGIVING BREAK – NO CLASSES

Week 14: Encounters Beyond Europe

M: 11/27: Exploration to the East: The Mongol Archive and Imagined Empires

W: 11/29: The Cultures of the Mediterranean and the later Medieval World (JJ Haddad)

Discussion Readings:

Bennett & Bardsley, *Medieval Europe*, chapter 16 (pp. 421-440)

"The Mongol Archive": *Letters to Louis IX*, William Rubruck, *Journey to the East* (Selections) (*Critical Assessment 11 due in section*)

Week 15: Plague, War, and the End of the Medieval World

M: 12/4: Famine & Plague

W: 12/6: War & Social Change

Discussion Readings:

Bennett & Bardsley, *Medieval Europe*, chapter 14 (pp. 366-395)

The Black Death, The Great Mortality of 1348-1350 (Selections); [ARTICLE] Barker, "Laying Corpses to Rest," (*Critical Assessment 12 due in section*)

FINAL Take-Home EXAM – due Friday December 15th by 12pm (noon)

OTHER IMPORTANT MATTERS

(Many of these statements will be familiar to you, but they are important!)

Academic Integrity

The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Ethical violations include cheating on exams, plagiarism, reuse of assignments, improper use of the Internet and electronic devices, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and falsification, lying, facilitating academic dishonesty, and unfair competition. I take all of this very seriously, especially acts of plagiarism.

Report any violations you witness to the instructor. You may consult the associate dean of student conduct by calling the Office of the Dean of Students at 410-516-8208 or via email at integrity@jhu.edu. For more information, see the Homewood Student Affairs site on academic ethics:

(<https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/student-life/student-conduct/academic-ethics-undergraduates>)

or the e-catalog entry on the undergraduate academic ethics board:

(<http://e-catalog.jhu.edu/undergrad-students/student-life-policies/#UAEB>).

Please also include the following University ethics statement on the final paper of your exams:

"I attest that I have completed this exam without unauthorized assistance from any person, materials, or device." [Signed and dated].

Illness/ Unexpected Absences

Students should do their best to be in communication with the professor regarding illness and unexpected absences. I understand that this happens sometimes; we are all human and the last few years has taught us a great deal. If this becomes an issue (i.e., if you miss more than three classes, or more than two consecutive classes), it will reflect in your overall grade. Please, simply contact me and your TA via email if you will not be in class on a specific day or if you have missed a class. This holds for lectures and discussion meetings.

Weather Events/ Cancelled Classes

Sometimes unexpected weather events or other issues will cause the university or myself to have to cancel class. In this event, I will update the class about changes to the syllabus, the class-meeting schedule, and assignment deadlines. If needed, I will create an updated syllabus for the remainder of the course.

Religious Holidays

Religious holidays are valid reasons to be excused from class. Students who must miss a class or an examination because of a religious holiday must inform the instructor as early in the semester as possible in order to be excused from class or to make up any work that is missed.

For more information: [Religious-holy-days-2018-2019.pdf](#)

Disability Services

Any student with a disability who may need accommodations in this class must obtain an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services, 385 Garland, (410) 516-4720, studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu

Please also come and discuss this with me at the start of the semester.

Anxiety, stress and mental health

If you are struggling with anxiety, stress, depression or other mental health related concerns, please consider visiting the JHU Counseling Center. If you are concerned about a friend, please encourage that person to seek out their services. The Counseling Center is located at 3003 North Charles Street in Suite S-200 and can be reached at 410-516-8278 and online at <http://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/counselingcenter/>

Technology Policy

Like many professors across the country, I prefer that you do **not** use laptops, tablets, phones, or other electronic devices in class. I have this policy for several reasons: First, I often find that students are easily distracted when they have the temptation to go on the Internet or to check email, Insta, snap, etc. Second, I find that laptops and tablets, even when used appropriately, tend to draw students' attention into the device, diminishing engagement with others in the class. Finally, research has shown that writing class notes by hand leads to greater retention of information than does the typing of notes. If, however, you need to use a laptop for some reason, please notify me at the end of the first class or by email.

For all additions and updates to these policies, please see the link posted on the course Canvas site.

Email Correspondence

In addition to Canvas, we will use email to communicate with you about assignments, readings, and the course in general. Please be sure your email is updated and functioning well. I receive well over 100 emails a day, thus if you email me, I ask that you expect at least a 24-hour response time. Moreover, sometimes I am traveling and not able to answer emails promptly. If you need to be in touch with me about missing class, a written assignment, an unresolved question or issue, please try to email me well in advance.

GUIDELINES RELATED TO GRADING AND WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS IN THE COURSE:

An **A** or **A-** paper, written assignment, or exam demonstrates an exemplary command of the course material. Such assignments offer a close and critical reading of the texts and a consideration of issues raised in the course as a whole, offer a synthesis of the readings, discussions, and lectures and present a perceptive, compelling, independent argument. They are clearly written and well-organized. The argument or thesis shows intellectual originality and creativity (a willingness to take risks with ideas and interpretations), are attuned to historical context, supported by a well-chosen variety of specific examples from the texts, and (in the case of papers) rely upon a critical reading of primary material.

A **B+** or **B** paper, written assignment, or exam shares many aspects in common with A-level work, but falls short in either the organization and clarity of its writing (stylistically), the formation and presentation of its argument (organizationally), or in the quality and level of critical engagement (substantively).

A **B-** paper, written assignment or exam demonstrates a command of the course material and a general understanding of the historical context but offers a less than thorough presentation of the writer's independent thesis due to weakness in writing, argument, organization or presentation of evidence.

A **C+**, **C**, or **C-** paper, written assignment, or exam offers little more than a summary of ideas and information covered in the course or presented in the specific question. They are insensitive to the historical context, do not respond to the assignment adequately, suffer from factual errors, unclear writing, lack of organization, or inadequate use of evidence, or a combination of these problems.

Papers, written assignments and exams that belong to the **D** or **F** categories demonstrate inadequate command of the course material:

A **D** paper, written assignment, or exam demonstrates serious deficiencies or clear flaws in the student's command of the course material or readings at hand.

And **F** paper, written assignment, or exam demonstrates NO competence in the course or reading materials. It indicates a student's neglect or lack of effort in the course.

Grading Range:

A = 93+; A- = 90-92.9; B+ = 87-89.9; B = 83-86.9; B- = 80-82.9; C+ = 77-79.9; C = 73-76.9; C- = 70-72.9; D+ = 67-69.9; D = 63-66.9; D- = 60-62.9; F = <60.

*I strongly encourage you to come to my **office hours** (Tuesdays 1-3pm & by appointment) if you have questions or concerns either **before** an assignment is due, or concerning your performance in the course. Graded assignments and exams will be returned in class. After two weeks you can come by my office during office hours, or that of your TAs, to pick up your assignments if you have not picked them up in class. I do not e-mail grades during the semester or at the end of the course. We address a great deal of material in this course, and at times it may feel overwhelming. Please come and talk with me or your TA if that is the case.*