Western Civilization I

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| **Credit level:** 4 |
| **Length:** semester 1 |
| **ECTS credit value:** 8 |
| **College and School:** Lazarski University in Warsaw, Faculty of Economics and Management |
| **Module Leader:** Prof. Christopher Lazarski |
| **Host Course:** BA in International in Relations |
| **Pre-requisites:**N/A |
| **Co-requisites:**N/A |
| **Special features:**N/A |
| **Access restrictions:**N/A |
| **Summary of module content:** This module introduces students to Europe and its society from antiquity until 1788. It centres on various interpretations and understanding of fundamental ideas and processes which shaped European (and Western) identity, while facts and pure history are of secondary importance. The module aims to show the birth and growth of principal ideas, concepts, institutions, and trends such as government, citizenship, liberty, equality, limited vs. absolute power, the state, society, and economy in each of Europe’s main epoch. The module also aims at stablishing common background knowledge for the diverse student body, coming from different continents and educational systems. It is a foundation module, with no formal pre-requisites. |

**Assessment Methods**

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| Rank | Assessment type | Assessment name | Weighting | Qualifying set (where the minimum mark required applies across multiple assessments) |
| 1 | Coursework | Portfolio | 60% |  |
| 2 | Closed Book Exam | Final exam | 40% |

**Synoptic assessment**

N/A

**Learning outcomes**

By the end of the module the successful student will be able to:

1. Trace the origins of Western Civilisation and indicate the main sources of its uniqueness in relation to broader political and cultural developments.
2. Critically evaluate the growth and decline of authority and liberty at each stage of European history and identify the forces which supported that growth or were against it.
3. Observe the evolution of the state, its concept and practise throughout ages, comparing medieval and early modern European societies and their influence on modern governance.
4. Compare and discuss basic developments in Western, Central-Eastern and Eastern Europe in the early modern times, demonstrating an understanding of regional differences and their impact on political and social transformation.
5. Apply the knowledge of Western Civilization to conditions of contemporary society, drawing connections between past developments and present-day political and cultural challenges.
6. Study further and understand the need for permanent learning, use of academic resources and developing the knowledge and skills necessary for professional development.

**Course outcomes the module contributes to:**

* L4.3 Sensitivity to the role of political culture and power in shaping our perceptions of political order within International Relations, understood through different regional, theoretical and cultural frameworks.
* L4.5 The ability to evaluate the role of historical, structural, cultural and ideational dimensions of domestic and international political processes, in theory and in practice.
* L4.6 Awareness of the importance of information literacy and library skills for studying and researching at university.
* L4.8 A successful transition to the demands and expectations of university-level study.

**Indicative syllabus content**

* The Oldest Civilizations in the region: Egypt & Mesopotamia and Crete and Mycenae.
* Ancient Roots of European identity: Israel, Greece, Rome, and Christianity. Main features of Greek and Roman civilisations. Byzantium and Islam.
* Middle Ages: “Barbaric Europe” and the birth of nations and states; feudalism; society of estates and provincial rights; the growth of the High Middle Ages and the crisis of the Late Middle Ages; the state, citizens and freedom in the Middle Ages.
* Early Modern Europe: Nation State; Renaissance and Reformation; Absolutism vs. Constitutionalism; daily life in town and village.
* Central and Eastern Europe: The Case of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Muscovy-Russia.
* The Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment: the foundation for modernity.

**Teaching and learning methods**

Teaching combines weekly lectures (module leader) and workshops (led by one or two other teachers, depending on the number of workshop groups). The lectures present the content of the module in a chronological way (by epochs) and by topics within each epoch. Each class has a separate power point presentation that highlights key points for a given topic (for further study in the textbook and other resources). The lecturer encourages students to engage in discussion to ensure they are following and understanding the reviewed material, especially as it relates to the evolution of such fundamental ideas as citizenship, government, liberty, equality, power, etc. Workshops review assigned readings, explore historical case study and scenario individually or in small groups, encourage research using IT tools, and provides opportunities to clarify more complex issues covered in lectures.

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| Activity type | Category | Student learning and teaching hours\* |
| Lecture | Scheduled | 45 |
| Seminar | Scheduled |  |
| Tutorial | Scheduled |  |
| Project supervisor | Scheduled |  |
| Demonstration | Scheduled |  |
| Practical classes and workshops | Scheduled | 45 |
| Supervised time in studio/workshop | Scheduled |  |
| Fieldwork | Scheduled |  |
| External visits | Scheduled |  |
| Work based learning | Scheduled |  |
| Scheduled online learning | Scheduled |  |
| Other learning | Scheduled |  |
| Total scheduled |  | 90 |
| Placement | Placement |  |
| Independent study | Independent | 110 |
| Total student learning and teaching hours |  | 200 |

\*hours per activity type are indicative and subject to change.

**Assessment rationale: why has this assessment been used for this module?**

The assessment structure for the 1st semester module at Level 4 has two main goals: first, understanding module content and second, fostering effective study habits, essential for level 4 and beyond. Brief reactive notes on issues discussed in class or in assigned readings, along with in-class exams, help track progress, reinforce regular learning, and distribute the assessment load more evenly throughout the semester.

**The portfolio** grade (worth 60%) is made up of four reactive notes (about 600 words) . Feedback on reflective notes helps students improve their analytical and writing skills. This approach ensures student engagement and consistent progress by requiring regular reading and active participation. (LOs 2, 3, 5, and 6).

The reactive notes are submitted collectively as a single portfolio assessment, which constitutes 60% of the total module grade. Students are required to complete these notes regularly, following the schedule provided by the instructor at the beginning of the semester. This ongoing process enables students to receive continuous feedback and remain actively engaged throughout the module. Each individual note carries equal weight within the overall portfolio mark.

**Final exam** (90 minutes, 40% of the total grade) usually consists of three broad, essay-type questions evaluating a thorough comprehension of European tradition. This assessment method tests students' knowledge and understanding of Europe’s evolving past, while challenging their analytical skills. The final exam aligns with LOs 1, 3, 4, and 5.

**Assessment criteria: what criteria will be used to assess my work on this module?**

Reactive notes will assess students' knowledge and understanding of assigned readings and class materials, specifically evaluating their consistency in studying module content. The evaluation criteria, each carrying equal weight, are as follows: (1) Accuracy and understanding; (2) Relevance; (3) Background knowledge; (4) Clarity and coherence; (5) Quality of analysis.

The final exam features much broader and more challenging questions; therefore, its assessment is based on the following criteria: (1) Relevance and precision—demonstrating the ability to directly address exam questions with concise, well-structured responses: (2) Analytical depth and critical thinking; (3) Background knowledge and the ability to compare and contrast (4) Clarity and coherence—ensuring logical structure, readability, and effective communication. While writing quality is also considered, it holds less weight in the overall assessment.

The assessments will examine to what extent the student has demonstrated ability to:

* Explain the fundamental trends in each major period of Western history, from antiquity to the eighteenth century, emphasizing their role in shaping Western Civilization’s uniqueness.
* Assess the changing notions of authority, equality and liberty, identifying the key forces that shaped their rise and decline across different periods of European history.
* Analyze the evolution of state structures and governance models, comparing medieval and early modern European societies and assessing their impact on modern political thought.
* Compare the historical development of political and social structures in different European regions.
* Assess the influence of historical traditions on contemporary society.
* Demonstrate an awareness of the importance of continuous learning and research, utilizing academic resources and critical thinking skills.

**Sources**

**Essential Reading**

J.P., McKay, et all (2008, or earlier editions; later editions are not as good). *A History of Western Society* (§ 1-18, 20). New York: Houghton Mifflin (or any other textbook on Western Civilization – our library has a rich choice of such textbooks – but McKay is strongly recommended).

**Recommended Reading**

George Huppert (1998 or later eds), *After the Black Death: A Social History of Early Modern Europe*, New York, § 1-6 (library, teaching materials)

Russell Kirk (2002), *The Roots of American Order*, 11-38 (class on Israel); 60-73 (class on Greece); 177-192 (class on the Middle Ages); library, teaching materials

Christopher Lazarski (2012), ‘Liberty’s Ancient Roots: From Ancient Israel to the Fall of the Roman Empire’ in *Power Tends to Corrupt: Lord Acton’s Study of Liberty* (chap. available also in our student resources)

Pericles, “Funeral Oration” and “Melian Dialogue” (fragments from Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*) – online

Max Weber (1992), *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London & New York (pp. 1-39)