LDST390 Machiavelli
University of Richmond
Spring 2026

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Office Hours: Tuesday and Wednesday 2pm-3pm

Who was Niccolò Machiavelli and why is his name synonymous with amorality, unscrupulousness, and manipulative behavior?
What did Machiavelli actually say about leadership and society?
How were his views shaped both by his reading of authors from classical antiquity and his own lifetime in the crises of late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth-century Italy?

Before Machiavelli, the ethics of leadership in Europe consisted of judging actions based either on the interior intentions of the actor or according to an external set of laws or rules (such a religious text or natural law); or occasionally by insisting that actions had to be both well intentioned and in accordance with external rules. In the early sixteenth century, Niccolò Machiavelli instead argued that the actions of a leader had to be judged on their consequences not the motives nor the act itself and certainly not anything as nebulous as external rules. Famously in *The Prince*, he argued that a leader did not always have to act according to morality and virtue but instead had to "*guarda al fine*" (look toward the end) and act to preserve the state. In the less-well-known *Discourses*, Machiavelli similarly insisted that an apparently criminal act needed to be assessed by its consequences. In this class we will place Machiavelli in the context of fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century Italy in order to understand why he made these (and other arguments) about history and politics.

What I hope you will get from this class
1. A small community that appreciates the fun of learning.
2. An understanding of the historical context of Machiavelli's life and writings.
3. The ability to evaluate Machiavelli's writings in the context of his lifetime.
4. An understanding of Machiavelli's key arguments and concepts.
5. The ability to analyze historical research and historical texts.
6. The ability to demonstrate historical thinking, historical understanding, and critical analysis in written work and classroom discussions.

Readings
You will need to purchase a copy of *The Portable Machiavelli*, edited and translated by Peter Bondanella and Mark Musa (Penguin, 1979). Available via The Spider Shop and all the usual places.
All other readings will be provided digitally via BlackBoard.

Note that Machiavelli's thought and ideas reflect the ideas, culture, society of late-fifteenth-and early-sixteenth-century Italy, a very different time and place to our own. They may contain sentiments, ideas, or opinions that are challenging, upsetting, or even offensive to us, particularly his attitudes toward women. Some of the historical analysis and additional sources that we will read may include descriptions of similarly challenging or upsetting ideas and actions.

Weekly Work

1. Read

Please complete the reading for each week before the class meeting indicated in the schedule. Active, engaged reading is crucial: take notes, mark-up and write all over your books or readings. Reading is the foundation for everything else we will do this semester.

2. Question

For Weeks 2-13 (excluding Spring Break), you need to bring a hand-written question/discussion prompt designed to provoke conversation to each class based on the assigned reading for that class. This is your ticket to class, and you need to submit it to me before we begin for the day. The question/prompt needs to be a thought-provoking query or statement on the assigned reading. It must include a specific quote and page number from the reading. This reference can be part of the question/prompt or appended to it. Each question/prompt will receive a simple letter grade (A-D). The best fifteen (15) of a possible nineteen (19) will count toward your final grade.

3. Discuss

Active participation in our class meetings is necessary for this course. We always learn more in a community than alone.

- Bring an open mind, the assigned reading, and any notes to class.
- Come prepared to offer and discuss specific examples or evidence.
- Bring any more questions that you have (in addition to your class ticket).

Written Assessments

In addition to the Questions/Prompts you will submit the following written tasks.

1. Contextual Paper: Using the assigned readings plus any additional primary source evidence you wish you will place *The Prince* in its the historical contexts (intellectual, social, and political). Due Monday 9 March.
2. The trial of Machiavelli: The principal research and assessment task for this course will be a historical counterfactual exercise in which we put Niccolò Machiavelli on trial. The trial will take place in class in Week 15. The class will be divided into two teams (defense and prosecution) in Week 10. The assessment will include both group and individual portions as well as written and presentation components. Full details on this task will be made available on BlackBoard. Case briefs are due on the first day of the trial, Monday 20 April.

3. Reflection: A reflection of 500-1000 words on your experience of working on the trial of Machiavelli. Full details on this task will be made available on BlackBoard. Due Wednesday 29 April.

Honor Code
All work submitted for this class should be done in accordance with the Honor Code. Any potential violation of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Council for investigation. (See Jepson Leadership School Common Insert at end of this syllabus.)

Generative AI
For assessment in this class, Large Language Models (LLMs, misleadingly called Generative AI) may **only** be used in the following manner:
1. Brainstorm preliminary ideas and avenues for the assessment task.
2. Edit a working draft that you have written.
3. As research assistant to aid you in identifying potentially useful texts and sources for assessment tasks.

The following uses are unacceptable and will be considered a potential violation of the Honor Code:
1. Generate **any** portion of writing submitted as part of an assessment.
2. Generate summaries of any assigned reading or any text/source that you are using for an assessment as an alternative to you reading it yourself.

Any LLM tool used must be identified and acknowledged on the submitted assessment. Students should preserve copies of all logs produced when using LLM and submit them with the assignment.

Note, we will discuss the potential and problems of LLMs in our first meeting.

Grades
Questions/Prompts (15%)
Class Participation (15%)
Contextual Paper (20%)
Trial (40%)
Reflection (10%)

If you are having trouble meeting a deadline for any class task, please talk with me before the assignment is due – see Life Happens below. Submitting work late without discussing an extension with me will negatively affect your grade for that task.

Life Happens
Life happens. We all know this. Sometimes life gets in the way of academic work, sometimes something else in your life is more important than writing a paper or critical reflection for

this class. Hopefully, nothing like this will happen to you this semester, but if it should, please talk with me as soon as possible so that we can work out the best way to keep you on track for the semester. I'm not qualified to solve the problems that life might throw at you and I don't need to know the details, but I can certainly help make sure that work for this class doesn't make things harder. Aside from life, almost all problems related to academic work are easily resolvable, but I can't help you if I don't know there is a problem.

Note, if you email me after 5pm Mon-Thu, expect an answer the following morning. If you email me after 5pm on Friday or anytime Saturday or Sunday, expect an answer on Monday morning. There is nothing that we do in this class that is so urgent that it requires 24/7 email access.

Class Schedule
Please note that the schedule may be modified if necessary. All assigned readings need to be completed before class on the indicated date. There is generally more reading for Monday's class as you have the weekend to prepare.

Class meeting	*Reading and class preparation*	*Other information and reminders*
An Introduction to Machiavelli		
Week 1		
Mon 12 Jan	N/A	
Wed 14 Jan	Palmer, *Inventing the Renaissance,* Ch. 1	
The Intellectual World of Machiavelli		
Week 2		
Mon 19 Jan	*No class: Martin Luther King Jr Day*	
Wed 21 Jan	Caferro *Contesting the Renaissance*, Ch. 4	
Week 3		
Mon 26 Jan	Hankins *Virtue Politics* Ch. 1	
Wed 28 Jan	Grafton *Commerce with Classics*, Ch. 1	
Week 4		
Mon 2 Feb	Brown "Lucretius and the Epicureans"	
Wed 3 Feb	Palmer "Reading Lucretius"	
The Social and Political Worlds of Machiavelli		
Week 5		
Mon 9 Feb	Brucker *Renaissance Florence* Ch. 7 Brown "Lorenzo's New Men"	
Wed 11 Feb	Brucker *Living on the Edge* Ch. 7	
Week 6		
Mon 16 Feb	Ruggiero *Machiavelli in Love* Ch. 4 Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual*, Ch. 6	
Wed 18 Feb	*No class: Dr. Baker will be at a conference in San Francisco.*	Start reading Shaw & Mallett and Bowd in preparation for Week 7 – there is a bit to get

		through, and it is crucial to understand the details in order to understand *The Prince*.
The Prince		
Week 7		
Mon 23 Feb	Shaw & Mallett *Italian Wars* Ch. 1 Bowd *Renaissance Mass Murder* Ch. 1	
Wed 25 Feb	*Portable Machiavelli* pp.54-58, 61-71 (Letters I, III-V), 77-126 (Prince cc. 1-14)	
Week 8		
Mon 2 Mar	*Portable Machiavelli* pp. 126-166 (Prince cc. 15-28)	
Wed 4 Mar	Visit to Rare Books Collection; TBC	
Week 9: **SPRING BREAK 9-13 MARCH**		
The Discourses		
Week 10		
Mon 16 Mar	*Portable Machiavelli* pp. 61-64 (re-read Letter III), 167-207 (Discourses I: Dedication, Introduction, cc 1-10)	
Wed 18 Mar	*Portable Machiavelli*, pp. 207-248 (Discourses I: cc. 11-37)	
Week 11		
Mon 23 Mar	*Portable Machiavelli*, pp. 248-287 (Discourses I: cc. 38-60)	
Wed 25 Mar	*Portable Machiavelli*, pp. 287-326 (Discourses, II: Introduction, cc. 1-21)	
Week 12		
Mon 30 Mar	*Portable Machiavelli*, pp. 326-357 (Discourses II: cc. 22-33, III: cc. 1-5)	
Wed 1 Apr	*Portable Machiavelli,* pp. 357-418 (Discourses III: 6-46)	
The Mandrake Root		
Week 13		
Mon 6 Apr	*The Portable Machiavelli*, pp. 71-76 (Letters VI-VII), 430-479 (The Mandrake Root)	
Wed 8 Apr	*This class is for when we inevitably fall behind the schedule somewhere!*	
Trial Preparation		
Week 14		
Mon 13 Apr	Trial preparation in class	
Wed 15 Apr	Trial preparation in class.	
Machiavelli on Trial		
Week 15		
Mon 20 Apr	Trial Day 1	

Wed 22 Apr	Trial Day 2	

Full Bibliographic Details for Reading Assignments

Stephen Bowd, *Renaissance Mass Murder: Soldiers and Civilians During the Italian Wars* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

Alison Brown, "Lucretius and the Epicureans in the Social and Political Context of Renaissance Florence." *I Tatti Studies in Italian Renaissance History*, 9 (2001): 11-62.

Alison Brown, "Lorenzo's New Men and their Mores: The Changing Lifestyle of Quattrocento Florence." *Renaissance Studies* 16, no. 2 (2002): 113-142.

Gene Brucker, *Renaissance Florence* (University of California Press, 1983).

Gene Brucker, *Living on the Edge in Renaissance Florence: Selected Essays* (University of California Press, 2005).

William Caferro, *Contesting the Renaissance* (Wiley Blackwell, 2011).

Anthony Grafton, *Commerce with the Classics: Ancient Books and Renaissance Readers* (University of Michigan Press, 1997).

James Hankins, *Virtue Politics: Soulcraft and Statecraft in Renaissance Italy* (Belknap Press, 2019).

Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy* (University of Chicago Press, 1985).

Ada Palmer, "Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 73, no. 3 (2012): 395-416.

Ada Palmer, *Inventing the Renaissance: The Myth of a Golden Age* (University of Chicago Press, 2025).

The Portable Machiavelli, edited and translated by Peter Bondanella and Mark Musa (Penguin, 1979).

Guido Ruggiero, *Machiavelli in Love: Sex, Self, and Society in Renaissance Florence.* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

Christine Shaw and Michael Mallett, *The Italian Wars, 1494-1559: War, State, and Society in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2018).

Recommended Additional Readings

There is a veritable industry of scholarship on Machiavelli, here are two good places to start reading.

Christopher S. Celenza, *Machiavelli: A Portrait* (Harvard University Press, 2015)

Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2000, orig. pub. 1981)

If you would like a good, synthetic but interpretative place to start for the history of Florence try,

John M. Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200-1575* (Blackwell, 2006)

Similarly for Italy during the historical period of the Renaissance (in addition to Ada Palmer's brilliant and irreverent Inventing the Renaissance) *start with,*

Guido Ruggiero *The Renaissance in Italy: A Social and Cultural History of the Rinascimento* (Cambridge University Press, 2015)

Jepson School of Leadership Studies
Common Syllabus Insert

Awarding of Credit
To be successful in this course, a student should expect to devote 10-14 hours each week, including class time and time spent on course-related activities.
registrar.richmond.edu/services/policies/academic-credit.html

Disability Accommodations
Students with a Disability Accommodation Notice should contact their instructors as early in the semester as possible to discuss arrangements for completing course assignments and exams.
disability.richmond.edu/

Honor System
The Jepson School supports the provisions of the Honor System. The shortened version of the honor pledge is: "I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work."
https://studentdevelopment.richmond.edu/student-handbook/honor/index.html

Religious Observance
Students should notify their instructors within the first two weeks of classes if they will need accommodations for religious observance.
registrar.richmond.edu/planning/religiousobs.html

Addressing Microaggressions on Campus
Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.[1] Recent research has found that, when professors do not address microaggressions in class, microaggressions foster alienation of marginalized groups.[2] Furthermore, both students and faculty that are exposed to microaggressions more often are more likely to have depressive symptoms and negative affect (a negative view of the world).[3] A comfortable and productive environment where meaningful learning happens can be collectively created through actions, words, or environmental cues that promote the inclusion and success of marginalized members, recognizing their embodied identity, validating their realities, resisting sexism, ableism, and racism.[4]

The University of Richmond is committed to building an inclusive community. To this end, the Student Center for Equity and Inclusion (SCEI) was created in 2021 and offers ongoing support and assistance for a diverse student body.[5] With this in mind, as a community member at the University of Richmond, I pledge to address microaggressions in the classroom by holding myself, other students, and faculty accountable for what is said and being receptive to criticism when perpetuating these slights, snubs, or insults.

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[1]Sue, S., Zane, N., Nagayama Hall, G. C., & Berger, L. K. (2009). The Case for Cultural Competency in Psychotherapeutic Interventions. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *60*(1), 525–548. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163651

[2]Bergom, I., Wright, M.C., Brown, M.K. and Brooks, M. (2011), Promoting college student development through

collaborative learning: A case study of *hevruta*. About Campus, 15: 19-25. https://doi.org/10.1002/abc.20044

[3]Nadal, K. L., Griffin, K. E., Wong, Y., Hamit, S., & Rasmus, M. (2014). The Impact of Racial Microaggressions on Mental Health: Counseling Implications for Clients of Color. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *92*(1), 57–66. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2014.00130.x

[4]Rolón-Dow, R. (2019). Stories of Microaggressions and Microaffirmation: A Framework for Understanding Campus Racial Climate. *NCID Currents*, *1*(1). http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/currents.17387731.0001.106

[5] https://inclusion.richmond.edu/

*Updated 8/2025

Weinstein Learning Center

The Weinstein Learning Center is your go-to destination for academic support. Our services are tailored to help you achieve your academic goals throughout your time at the University of Richmond. To learn more and view service schedules and appointment times, visit **wlc.richmond.edu**. Available services are outlined below.

Academic Coaching

Meet with a professional staff member who will collaborate with you to assess and develop your academic and life skills (e.g., critical reading and thinking, information conceptualization, concentration, test preparation, time management, stress management, and more).

Content Tutoring

Peer consultants offer assistance in specific courses and subject areas. They are available for appointments (in person and virtual) and drop-in sessions. See schedules at wlc.richmond.edu for supported courses and drop-in times.

English Language and Intercultural Learning

Attend one-on-one or group consultations, workshops, and other services focused on English, academic, and intercultural skills.

Quantitative and Programming Resources

Peer consultants and professional staff offer workshops or one-on-one appointments to build quantitative and programming skills and provide statistical support for research projects.

Speech

Prepare and practice for academic presentations, speaking engagements, and other occasions of public expression. Peer consultants offer recording, playback, and coaching for both individual and group presentations. Students can expect recommendations regarding clarity, organization, style, and delivery.

Technology Studio

Visit our student lab dedicated to supporting digital media projects. Services include camera checkout, video/audio recording assistance, use of virtual reality equipment, poster printing, 3D printing and modeling, and consultation services on a variety of software.

Writing

Assists student writers at all levels of experience, across all majors. Meet with peer consultants who can offer feedback on written work and suggest pre-writing, drafting, and revision strategies.