Edward Muir  
History 333-0  

**AGE OF THE RENAISSANCE**  
Day/Time: TTH 11:00-12:20  
Discussion Sections: TBD  
Office Address: Harris Hall Room 244  
Office Phone: (847) 491-3653  
Email Address: e-muir@northwestern.edu  
Maximum Enrollment: 45

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** In 1348 perhaps a third to one half of all Europeans died from a mysterious illness called the Black Death, which was only one of a number of calamities that disrupted normal life. In the wake of these disasters thinkers, artists, and a surprising number of common people began to search for explanations for what had gone wrong by asking questions about their own personal identities, about the obligations of a moral life, about the virtues of civic service, and about the their personal relationship with God. This course explores that search, which is what we now call the Renaissance. It began among the independent city-states of Italy, particularly Florence and Venice, and spread from them to the rest of Europe. The course will compare developments in Italy with those in northern Europe, especially on the political and family structures of the city-states, the culture of the princely courts, the ambitions of the Roman popes, the social and intellectual basis for artistic creativity, the origins of modern political thought and the scientific method, and the constraints and opportunities available to women.

**AREA OF CONCENTRATION:** Europe

**TEACHING METHOD:** Lecture and class discussion

**EVALUATION METHOD:** Participation in class discussions, two short papers (ca. 5 pages), and a final paper (10-15 pages)

**GRADING BASIS:** Student option (P/N allowed)

**TENTATIVE READING LIST:**  
Margaret L. King, *Renaissance Humanism: An Anthology of Sources*, 9781624661112.

**INSTRUCTOR PROFILE:** Edward Muir grew up in the foothills of the Wasatch Mountains in Utah, close-by the Emigration Trail along which wagon trains of Mormon pioneers and California-bound settlers made their westward. As a child he loved to explore the broken-down wagons and abandoned household goods left at the side of the trail and from that acquired a fascination with the past. Besides the material remains of the past he grew up with stories of his Mormon pioneer ancestors and an appreciation for how the past continued to influence the present. From a teenage fascination with music and opera he became interested in Italy and during his undergraduate years lived and studied in Florence during the year after the devastating floods. Later as a graduate student he worked in a team to re-identify flood-damaged Renaissance manuscripts in the Uffizi archives. Besides his frequent travels to Italy, his twin passions are skiing in the Rocky Mountains and rooting for the Chicago Cubs, who managed last year to prove that the impossible can happen.