This course aims at a survey of English history during the sixteenth century. In 1485 a new family came to the throne of a small kingdom with a recent history of political instability. The prospects for this family were not good, faced as the dynasty was with a dubious claim to the throne, the fiscal weakness of the monarchy, and powerful enemies abroad. The Tudors, over the next century, faced continued challenges arising from an unsettled succession and sometimes unruly subjects. Henry VIII compounded the problem when, for personal and political reasons, he changed the religion of the country. Every major institution of English life (the Church, the monarchy, Parliament, and the law) faced conflict during this period. Yet society remained resilient. Even amidst uncertainty and revolution, old allegiances and habits survived, while new practices and relationships emerged. Against all odds, the Tudor dynasty proved successful in maintaining its grip upon the throne. Henry VIII and Elizabeth became iconic representations of the glory of monarchy. Our task in this course is to explore the successes and failures of the Tudor monarchs. Along the way we will investigate the reality behind the myths that surround these two monarchs.

While this is a lecture course, there will be frequent opportunities for students to participate in class discussion. You are expected to complete reading assignments by the date listed below, and to participate in a discussion of the day’s text. Twice during the term we will watch DVDs that help to illustrate themes central to our examination of the Tudors. We begin with a Shakespeare play, “Henry V”, which presents the idealized portrait of a king whose reputation haunted the monarchs of the sixteenth century. We will also view (during an evening session) "Man For All Seasons", a movie that captures some of the meaning of the religious conflict that accompanied the Reformation in England. The PBS series, "The Six Wives of Henry VIII" and "Elizabeth" (both produced in the 1970s) assist us to explore the power of myth and imagery that surrounded the early modern monarch. The course ends with a reading of another Shakespeare play, "Richard II", a monarch whose failure and death present a sobering portrait of anxieties that marked the conclusion of Elizabeth’s reign.

I will be using Blackboard to provide you with a few additional readings and to pass along study guides for the various reading assignments and exams. The grade for this course will be based on an analytical paper (based on the readings) (30%), a mid-term exam (30%), and a final exam (40%).

Required texts:

- The Paston Letters
- Thomas More, Utopia
- Anthony Fletcher & Diarmaid MacCulloch, Tudor Rebellions
- Christopher Haigh, Elizabeth I
- Shakespeare, Richard II
- John Guy, The Tudors

Course schedule:
Jan. 6  The troubled politics of fifteenth-century England

Jan. 8  Transformation in an agrarian economy


Jan. 15 Henry VII and the foundations of Tudor government  Tudor Rebellions, ch. 1 & 2
"Governance" and "Kingship" on Blackboard

Jan. 20 MLK Day (no class)

Jan. 22 Discontented Englishmen  Utopia

Jan. 27 The ideal of the prince  "Henry V"

Jan. 29 Kings, courts, and courtiers: the reign of Wolsey  Tudor Rebellions, ch. 3

Feb. 3  The Divorce and the Reformation
Essay Due

Feb. 5  Cromwell's vision of the state
"Reformation" on Blackboard
   evening viewing "Man for All Seasons"

Feb. 10  Loyalty, politics, and conscience  Tudor Rebellions, ch. 4

Feb. 12 Mid-term exam

Feb. 17  Succession fears overcome and fulfilled  Tudor Rebellions, ch. 5-7

Feb. 19  Religious controversy and social unrest

Feb. 24  Succession questions  Haigh, ch. 1 & 2; Tudor Rebellions, ch. 8-9

Feb. 26  Parliament, Crown, and money  Haigh, ch. 3-6
   "Poor" on Blackboard

Mar. 3  The age of religious wars  Haigh, ch. 7
   "Religion" on Blackboard

Mar. 5  Puritans and Parliaments  Haigh, ch. 8

Mar. 10  Court and Country  Richard II
Mar. 12  Elizabeth and James