

**Faculty Research Seminar on  
The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity  
Proposal**

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***General Introduction***

The research seminar is a fundamental part of scholarly activity in any first-rank research university. By bringing together scholars working in closely allied fields or a single time period and providing a formal structure for their interaction, it furthers the individual research goals of each participant. As importantly, research seminars help create an air of professional seriousness in a university environment, by encouraging scholarly interaction above and beyond the requisite classroom and departmental service. At an institution like UT, with growing scholarly strength in many humanities programs, this model of professionalism is particularly important. It will help us retain promising junior faculty who have profitted from such research seminars in their top-tier graduate programs. It will also help us professionalize our graduate students and convey to them the inherent seriousness of scholarly endeavor, which should in turn help undermine the “commuter mentality” that still characterizes too many of our graduate students. The research seminar is a particularly useful means of fostering scholarship at the university because it provides a permanence and continuity independent of the individual scholars residing at the university at a given time. It is, therefore, the sort of program that the Humanities Initiative might consider supporting as a means of furthering its mission.

### *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity Seminar*

The Mediterranean world of the third century C.E. was a mosaic of religions, languages, and cultures that all defined themselves – at least in part – by their relationship to a Roman empire that governed the whole Mediterranean basin and much of its European, Near Eastern and North African hinterland. During the fourth and fifth centuries, the imperial government and the myriad cultures it encompassed underwent several fundamental transformations, from the development of Christianity as a political power, to the collapse of the western empire and its division into various barbarian kingdoms, to the establishment of a single imperial power based at the new city of Constantinople on the Bosphorus. In this new world of late antiquity there arose the new religion of Islam, and it was conquering Muslim armies that ushered in further momentous transformations that ended the fundamentally Roman unity of the late antique period.

The proposed interdisciplinary seminar will bring together faculty and advanced graduate students whose research lies in the Mediterranean world of late antiquity. The founding participants – Michael Kulikowski (History), Thomas Heffernan (English), and Christine Shepardson (Religious Studies) – are not only based in three different departments, but also come from different disciplinary backgrounds. Each possesses specialist knowledge, language skills, and methodological approaches to textual and material evidence that can help inform the research of the others. These differences will allow for genuinely interdisciplinary discussion that will strengthen the breadth and depth of each participant's individual work. The general purposes of a research seminar have already been addressed and the Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity seminar addresses each of these purposes. It of course provides a forum for currently active research scholars to meet and discuss their work. But it also gives permanent

legitimacy to the study of an inherently interdisciplinary period that is not readily accommodated within traditional divisions between disciplines and departments. On the other hand, the relatively broad focus of the seminar will allow it to include participants in allied fields or periods when appropriate. Moreover, this breadth will allow the seminar to continue to exist in the absence of one or more of its founding participants.

The seminar will contribute to the continuing professional development of the faculty participants but, equally important, it will play an important part in the professionalization of participating graduate students. As a rigorous, but not evaluated, forum for scholarly discussion, it will offer graduate students already engaged in their own research an opportunity to present their findings and test their scholarly insights without holding back for fear of a bad grade or other negative consequence. As we prepare our students for academic employment, the discussion and disputation of a seminar in which more than one practicing scholar is present can offer an invaluable model for scholarly development, and also for the seriousness which real scholarship requires.

### ***Format***

This seminar will have three components: (1) core participant research workshops; (2) visiting scholar research workshops; (3) current scholarship workshops. These three components complement each other as described below. In any given year, the seminar's three core participants, including the chair, are expected to attend all components of the seminar, to participate fully in each, and to present their own research to the seminar annually. The addition of new core participants is by invitation of the chair and subject to the approval of the steering committee of the Humanities Initiative. A demonstrably active research agenda in the

appropriate period is a prerequisite for participation. Graduate student members of the seminar will be invited to participate on an annual basis, and to take part in all components of the seminar, presenting their research to the seminar as appropriate and at the discretion of the chair. Core participants and graduate students may be joined for one or more workshops by other faculty and advanced graduate students with relevant interests and active research agendas. When in attendance, such faculty and graduate students will be expected to participate in full. Meetings will conclude with modest refreshments, to encourage less formal discussion about the material covered in a given workshop.

The three types of workshop and their frequency will be as follows:

1) Core Participant Research Workshops (3 meetings):

First and foremost, once each year the core participants (at this time Kulikowski, Heffernan, and Shepardson) will each present their current scholarly work to the seminar. The presenter will circulate the paper among the group at least one week in advance of the workshop, to allow for serious critical discussion of the paper after its presentation. Expected presentations in this first year are: Kulikowski, Fall 2005, "*Barbaricum* as place and idea in late antiquity"; Shepardson, Spring 2006, "The Politics of Religious Space in Chrysostom's Antioch"; Heffernan, date and title to be confirmed. Intensive discussion of the distributed material will shed new light on the presenter's research, improve the quality of its published form, and increase the probability of its publication in the most prestigious forum possible.

## 2) Visiting Scholar Research Workshops (2 meetings):

Interaction with new research is of great importance to one's scholarly growth. For that reason, two workshops each year will be devoted to bringing to campus young faculty and advanced graduate students whose work at a nearby institution is both intellectually promising and relevant to the research interests of the seminar's participants. In the first year, we will aim to bring to UT two speakers, one in the Fall and one in the Spring, each in a month in which the core participants will *not* be presenting their own research to the seminar. Interested faculty and advanced graduate students will be encouraged to attend these presentations, with the expectation that they will participate actively in the discussion that follows. Visiting Scholar Research Workshops will encourage UT participants to remain current in their fields by interacting with newly trained scholars and hearing their ideas. As importantly, visiting scholars will provide models of active and precocious scholarship that we can expect UT graduate students to emulate. Finally, bringing to campus other scholars from the southeast will strengthen connections with nearby colleagues and add to an awareness of UT's strength in this field.

## 3) Current Scholarship Workshops (6 meetings):

No matter how critical scholars are willing to be in front of an author, many productive conversations about a work and the issues it raises happen only when the work's author is absent. As importantly, one's own research is frequently improved by serious discussion of new research with others working in the same field. This research seminar will therefore devote six workshops annually (in September, October, November, January, February, March) to critical analysis of a significant new monograph on Mediterranean late antiquity; part of the seminar budget (see below) will allow participants to purchase the monographs for discussion. The primary aim of

these workshops is for the core participants and the graduate student members of the seminar to submit new works to in-depth critical discussion and to evaluate the importance of these works to the participants' own current research. Before each Current Scholarship Workshop, one participant will be asked to present the workshop's reading and chair the meeting.

***Budget:***

Visitors' travel, food and lodging (2 visitors/yr @ ca. \$500/visit) = \$1,000

Modest refreshments with each meeting (11 meetings @ ca. \$20/meeting) = \$220

Books for participants (6 meetings, ca. 6 participants, @ ca. \$50/title) = \$1,800

Total: \$3,200