

Ada Palmer  
H-205: Censorship from the Inquisition to the Present  
3–8 August, 2025, Chicago, Illinois

1) *Were the pre-course reading assignments useful? Are there any readings that you would like to see added or removed in future years?*

1. Yes, they were not overwhelming.
2. We did not have any pre-course assigned reading.
3. There was no required reading. I found the optional reading interesting but wish it had been sent out earlier. I only read some before and will have to read the rest after the course.
4. They arrived too late for me to make use of them. I recommend sending any assignments before the start of all RBS courses. Even better — include them in the course description or the RBS website.
5. N/A
6. Very valuable.
7. Pre-course reading received last minute. Few of the readings mentioned in class. Readings were presented as after the class concluded readings.

2) *What are your thoughts on the course workbook and/or other teaching materials distributed during class? Was the content appropriate and useful? Will it continue to be useful for you after the course?*

1. Useful.
2. There wasn't actually much material distributed in class, with the exception of an exhibition catalog for a prior exhibition on censorship, which is quite robust and which I do feel will be useful to me in the future.
3. The only handout was the exhibit catalog and I'm very glad to have that.
4. Not really applicable. It would have been nice if we were notified on the first day about the availability of printed syllabi.
5. Yes, the exhibit catalog from AD's exhibit at UChicago will prove very useful as I return to distill information from the class to my colleagues.
6. Very grateful to have both the exhibition catalog and syllabus noting materials arranged by date. It will add to my teaching materials.
7. Reading's sent were useful and the catalog of an exhibition on censorship at the library a few years ago was useful (Received print and PDF of catalog).

3) *Which aspects of the course were most intriguing and relevant for you as an individual? Did you walk away with any new insights, ideas, or project plans?*

1. The course had an arc that we revisited with materials and examples across time. It was effective. It was also effective that the experiences of individual students with censorship were incorporated into the discussions by the instructor. I gained

new ideas, better comprehension of how censorship works, ideas about teaching it using historical materials, and hope for the future.

2. The topic itself was what appealed most to me. The topic of censorship is extremely relevant to my professional life at this very moment, as someone working at a university in a state with anti-DEI laws. I was interested in learning more about censorship's history in order to deal with it in my work but also to teach my students about it more effectively.
  3. Access to the original materials was a highlight of the course. They were well selected, {illegible}, and very worthwhile.
  4. The best part was the ability to compare and contrast primary resources.
  5. I plan on putting together a small exhibit at my library using what I learned for the course — not required by my supervisors, but just because the class inspired me!
  6. It is good to understand the wide variety and variability of tools humanity uses to deal with emotion and ambiguity about the future.
  7. The course was rich in intellectual history especially on 15<sup>th</sup>–17th century book, history of the Inquisitions, and history of Renaissance Florence.
- 4) *Did the instructors help you to acquire all the skills and information promised in the course description? Did you learn what you had hoped to learn?*
1. Yes.
  2. Absolutely. AP is incredible. She is probably one of the most intimidatingly intelligent people I have ever met but is excellent at conveying her thoughts and telling the stories of history in a way that is clear and interesting and accessible. I knew very little about the Inquisition (I now know), and I feel I have a much firmer grasp on it now. I'm better able to articulate the purposes of censorship, the history of book censorship specifically, and why we as humans feel so inclined to censor.
  3. One of my motivations to take the course was to have an opportunity to study with AP. She is, indeed, an incredible polymath. I learned a tremendous amount on multiple subjects, not only censorship.
  4. I wasn't sure what to expect, but I have a more nuanced perspective of the relationship between power, knowledge, technology and economics.
  5. Yes. AP is a gem, simply put. Not only is she very kind and accessible during class, she is possibly the smartest person I've had the pleasure of learning from.
  6. I gained much interdisciplinary understanding. I actually hoped for inspiration, and my wish was deeply fulfilled.
  7. {no response}
- 5) *How do you plan to use the skills and knowledge acquired during your time here?*
1. In research, teaching, and my personal life.
  2. The information about the Inquisition will be immensely useful in a practical sense, as my library has many books from that period of history, and I will now be able to discuss them with much greater confidence. Learning about and discussing the history of censorship also gave me the confidence to talk about current censorship I may face, and to put it in a proper historical context.

3. Self-enrichment. Share with family and friends.
4. I will think more critically about laws, policies, and history related to censorship. I also have a better idea of which courses I will study as I pursue continuing education.
5. I feel I now have a wealth of new knowledge and perspectives on censorship, historical and contemporary, that I plan to use as a toolbox or weapon against misinformation in our digital age.
6. I plan on using methodologies to analyze narrative and social power systems. I will also take these materials to teach critical thinking to juniors in my discipline.
7. The class provided an opportunity to learn more about the history of censorship in its many manifestations. Last class or classes could have focused more on contemporary examples and issues.

6) *Who might benefit the most from taking this RBS course?*

1. I think the makeup of this course demonstrated that it is useful for anyone to experience it.
2. People who study the Renaissance or work with Renaissance-era books would benefit greatly from this class. There was much less emphasis on the modern era, so people expecting 19th and 20th century material may be disappointed. However, the topic of censorship is quite universal, so even if someone is not familiar with this particular era, they will definitely be able to get something out of it.
3. It is a course that any educated intellectually curious person could enjoy. Could be marketed beyond your usual audience of professionals. Especially to me {illegible} bibliophile.
4. Anyone who disseminates knowledge for a living.
5. Genuinely anyone in the information field. The topic is increasingly relevant for us.
6. Everyone can benefit from the understanding that social structures are not monolithic, rarely unified — and not neutral.
7. Students with an interest and background in intellectual history.

7) *If applicable, what were the most original, powerful, or otherwise noteworthy educational moments in the course? Were there any "aha!" moments you'd like to share?*

1. The realization that false assumptions about how censorship historically has functioned, in a top-down 1984 manner, have led us to not 'see' censorship in everyday life. Honestly, there were AHA moments in every session of this course. Many of us were so moved by some of the examples and our own empowerment in understanding their power that we wept.
2. AP's passion for the subject was infectious, and her teaching was genuinely a noteworthy aspect of the class. Her reading aloud an essay by Yvegn Zamyatin was probably one of the most powerful parts of the whole class. I also really enjoyed getting to know my classmates, all of whom have so much knowledge and experience. Our discussions were always fun and interesting, with everyone having some unique input.

3. That the usual {illegible} of THE INQUISITION really applies to Spain and not all Catholic countries.
4. Actually seeing the crossed-out passages, title pages, and physical markings in books brought the course topic to life. AP provides useful frameworks for studying/analyzing complex topics.
5. On the last day, AP read us the short essay "Tomorrow" by Yevgeny Zamyatin. Incredibly impactful and relevant, everyone should read it. It was the perfect 'closure' to the course.
6. That every age has suffered terrifying political uncertainty, and responded in a number of ways.
7. Insights into the works of some of the authors discussed e.g. Hobbes, Descartes, Machiavelli, among others.

8) *Are there any other ways in which the course could have been improved?*

1. Having a break for looking at materials in the reading room (or traveling to the Newberry for a related Collection Presentation) would have made good use of the resources in Chicago beyond the course materials.
2. I do wish there had been slightly more from the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries. Some of the discussion about the time period also got a bit more detailed than I could really keep up with, as someone who is not a scholar of Renaissance Europe.
3. It slowed down in days 3-4. Could have been stronger on period 1700-2000
4. It could be shorter. {private response}
5. I wish the days could have been broken up with a few other activities, such as a tour of the stacks, or field trip to the Newberry.
6. No — this was the best of possibilities.
7. More attention to the actual books, e.g. paper, printing, printers, bookselling and distribution variant editions, book trade, structure of book. The ideas expressed in the books were generally brilliantly covered.

9) *Do you feel that you got your money's worth? How likely are you to recommend this course to others? On a 1-10 scale, 1 would indicate that you disagree that you got your money's worth, 5 would indicate a neutral response, and 10 would indicate that you agree that you got your money's worth.*

1. 10
2. 10
3. 10. — It was exhausting but equally stimulating. I will certainly recommend to others.
4. 8. — It could have been shorter; but I enjoyed visiting the University of Chicago.
5. 10
6. 10 — 15. Over and above the money and sweat equity expended - I will recommend to others willing to engage with this materials.
7. 7 — Amazing intellectual history. Discussion often drifted from censorship and related issues to themes and subjects that were less relevant.

10) *If your course made any (virtual) field trips outside of the classroom or had guest speakers, do you feel that they enhanced the course experience?*

1. {no response}
2. {no response}
3. NA
4. Not applicable
5. {no response}
6. {no response}
7. N/A

11) *Do you have any additional thoughts or advice for anyone considering taking this course in a future year?*

1. {no response}
2. Take it! The opportunity to learn from AP cannot be missed.
3. {no response}
4. Provide more of an orientation for students on the first day of class. Distribute syllabi and guides prior to the start of summer RBS courses.
5. Plan to be exhausted at the end of each day with the new info crammed into your brain! Rest is essential.
6. {no response}
7. We look at any books and publications. It is a class more about intellectual history and ideas, with less focus on the materiality of the book. Good to learn that in advance.

12) *If you had to sum up your RBS experience with a single sentence, phrase, or haiku, what would you say?*

1. I feel empowered with historical knowledge and confident in facing contemporary debates about censorship.
2. Exhausting but so rewarding!
3. Thank you to U-Chicago for hosting.
4. Enlightening and interesting. The students are fabulous. I enjoyed the interactions very much. The free-form discussions were both a blessing and a curse. Footnotes and citations keep things authoritative, but can be informationally dense.
5. My favorite part was when we -----!
6. Inspired.
7. Agreeable with moments of intellectual excitement.