In 1348 approximately a third to one half of all Europeans died from a mysterious illness called the Black Death. This was only one of a number of calamities, including war, famine, and a deep economic depression 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 their personal relationship with God. This course explores that search, which is what we now call the Renaissance. The course will concentrate on developments in Italy, 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, and new forms of political, religious, and scientific thought.