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Contact: Bonnie Gordon (505-661-4691)
bjgordon@unm.edu

UNM-LA class will explore our relationship to ancient Rome

Ancient Rome has fascinated Americans since the days of the founding fathers, but the way we view the Roman world has varied as our own society and culture have changed and developed. Classics professor Dr. Hans Hanson will use the context of entertainment to explore our relationship to Rome and what it reveals about the Romans—and us.

The Classical Tradition II (CLST 215) will meet Tuesdays and Thursdays from 4:00-6:00 p.m., beginning June 8. Take the class for three credits or audit for personal enrichment. Visit www.la.unm.edu for registration information or call 662-0332.

Concentrating on film, but including literature and such cultural phenomena as Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas, the class will use the lens of popular culture to examine our assumptions about the Roman world.

"In the 50s and 60s, Romans were often seen as the bad guys," said Hanson. "In films like 'Spartacus' we identified with the outsiders—slaves and colonized people."

Roman "villains" often had British accents, while the "good guys" were American actors with American accents, underscoring our identification with the colonized rather than with the empire builders, he said.

"Gladiator," made in 2000 presents a different view of Rome, one in which Americans identify with Rome as a super power, perhaps in danger of losing its key place in the world. The HBO series "Rome" encourages identification with average Romans as well as the elite and includes the world view of slaves and women.

Roman historians wrote to entertain as well as to educate and what they chose to emphasize has always colored our view of the Roman world, said Hanson. By exploring what we find intriguing about the Romans, now and in the past, the class will shed light on a society that helped shape the modern world and has many lessons to teach us about our current situation.

Dr. Hanson recently received his doctorate in Classics from the University of Washington. He will be teaching Roman Civilization as well as Greek and Latin at UNM-LA this fall.