

## GREAT IDEAS I

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### Course Description

This course is designed both to introduce students to some of the major texts of the Western tradition and to help students develop their **critical thinking skills, including the ability to understand, assess and formulate logical arguments**. To pursue these goals we will read, discuss and write about works loosely organized around two themes: 1) god(s); 2) power. The oldest of these texts was composed almost 3000 years ago; the most recent was composed about 300 years ago.

### Reading List

- 1) Homer, *Odyssey* (Fagles, trans.), Penguin (ISBN 0140268863)
- 2) Fox, Everett (trans.), *Five Books of Moses*, Schocken (ISBN 0805211195) [Genesis]
- 3) Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates*, Penguin (ISBN 9780140449280)
- 4) *Beowulf* (Heany, trans.), Norton (ISBN 0393320879)
- 5) Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Waveland (ISBN 0881334448)
- 6) Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Bantam (ISBN 0553212982)
- 7) Bacon, *New Organon*, Cambridge (ISBN 0521564832) [Selections]

Students may use other “adult” translations / editions that they have access to.

### Requirements

Reading, discussing and writing about a text are interdependent. Working at each task helps one do the others better. For this reason, students will be required to do all three. However, since this is a discussion course operated according to what is sometimes called the “Socratic Method” (see below) rather than a lecture course, **it is particularly important that all students prepare for, attend and actively participate in class discussions.**

**Reading:** Students are required to do all the assigned reading for each class in a thoughtful and open-minded manner that prepares them to participate in classroom discussion. This will require time and concentration. Questions raised by the reading are especially encouraged.

**Discussing:** Students are required to actively participate in each class discussion, sharing their own viewpoints and listening to those of others. Through this collaboration the class will try to get a better understanding of each work and its implications. Since we will be referring to the reading during class, **students must bring the current text to each class.**

**Writing:** Students will be required to write two short papers on assigned topics and to write several in-class essays on the mid-term and final exams. Each paper will be roughly 6-8 pages long (typed in a standard 12-point font, double-spaced, 1” margins) and will be reviewed as part of a classroom exercise, in addition to being graded. The first paper will be revised based on instructor and class feedback. See schedule for

due dates. *(Note: Plagiarism is absolutely unacceptable. All quotations and paraphrases of others' work must be cited using an appropriate format. However, since no outside research will be required or expected, this issue should only arise when referring to portions of the texts read and discussed in class.)*

### **Grading**

Final grades will be based on an assessment of a student's:

- 1) Ability
- 2) Effort
- 3) Writing

as determined in approximately the following manner:

Class Participation	40%	Paper 2	15%
Paper 1	7.5%	Mid-Term Exam	15%
Paper 1 Revision	7.5%	Final Exam	15%

Class participation grades are based on attendance and active, thoughtful participation; unexcused absences, late arrivals, early departures and/or silent non-participation will lower this part of the grade. Papers are due at the beginning of the class on the day due. Late papers will be penalized one grade "step" for each part or whole day late (e.g. an "A" becomes an "A-" if it's up to one day late). Occasional homework in addition to the assigned reading and unannounced "pop" quizzes may be given at any time and will also influence the grade.

### **"Socratic Method"**

This class is operated according to what is sometimes called the "Socratic Method" in which students are required to learn for themselves through the various class activities. The role of the teacher is primarily to facilitate discussion, pose questions, and offer occasional insights into the text and/or ideas under discussion—not to lecture on "what the book means". The success or failure of such a class therefore depends primarily on the combined contributions of all participants.

### **Etiquette**

A collaborative exploration of ideas requires that participants treat the material and each other with respect. Participants may argue for or against any relevant idea as long as they do so based on the readings and an acknowledgement that others may hold different points of view. In addition, students should:

- 1) arrive for class on time and **not leave the room during the class session;**
- 2) **turn off cell phones,** pagers, and other disruptive devices;
- 3) not eat or drink to the extent that it will affect their or others' participation;
- 4) exercise common sense and courtesy in their dealings with others.

Students who do not abide by these rules will be marked down substantially in the "class participation" portion of their grade and risk not passing the course.

**Schedule**

Wk	DAY	ACTIVITY	SPECIAL
1	Tue	COURSE INTRO	
	Thu	<i>Odyssey</i> (1-4) [& Handouts]	
2	Tue	<i>Odyssey</i> (5-8)	
	Thu	<i>Odyssey</i> (9-12)	
3	Tue	<i>Odyssey</i> (13-16)	
	Thu	<i>Odyssey</i> (17-24)	Paper 1 Topic Out
4	Tue	PAPER 1 PREP	
	Thu	Genesis (1-11)	
5	Tue	Genesis (12-36)	
	Thu	Genesis (37-50)	
6	Tue	PAPER 1 REVIEW	<b>Paper 1 Due</b>
	Thu	<i>Euthyphro</i>	
7	Tue	<i>Apology</i>	
	Thu	<i>Crito</i>	Paper 1 Returned
8	Tue	MID-TERM PREP	
	Thu	MID-TERM EXAM	
9	Tue	<i>The Prince</i> (E-V)	
	Thu	<i>The Prince</i> (E-XIV)	
10	Tue	<i>The Prince</i> (XV-XXVI)	<b>Revision 1 Due</b>
	Thu	<i>Macbeth</i> (1-2)	
11	Tue	<i>Macbeth</i> (1-4)	
	Thu	<i>Macbeth</i> (1-5) & PAPER 2 PREP	Paper 2 Topic Out
12	Tue	<i>Beowulf</i> (1-1599)	
	Thu	<i>Beowulf</i> (1600-3182)	
13	Tue	<b>NO CLASS</b>	
	Thu	<b>NO CLASS</b>	
14	Tue	PAPER 2 REVIEW	<b>Paper 2 Due</b>
	Thu	<i>New Organon</i> (Selections)	
15	Tue	<i>New Organon</i> (Selections)	
	Thu	FINAL EXAM PREP	
		<b>FINAL EXAM</b>	