

*The Confessions* of Saint Augustine  
Fall 2023 | Class #: 28717  
IDH2930 | Honors, (Un)Common Reads

Time and Location

Wednesday, Period 9 (4:05 pm - 4:55 pm)  
Little Hall, 0119

Instructor

Nathan Pinkoski, DPhil (Oxon)  
nathanpinkoski@ufl.edu  
Office Hours: Wednesdays, 10:30 am-11:30 am, 2-3 pm, or by appointment.  
Location: Computer Science and Engineering Building (CSE/E) 338.

Description

This seminar is an interdisciplinary exploration of St Augustine's *The Confessions*, one of the most important books ever written. *The Confessions*, a literary masterpiece of autobiography and self-examination, describes Augustine's slow yet systematic conversion to Christianity as he candidly details his own defects. It contains some of the most famous scenes in Western literature, including Augustine's examination of his own vices through a meditation on the seemingly unimportant theft of a pear. It recounts the moving relationships between Augustine, his friends, and his family, especially with his mother Monica. Augustine's writing contains deep psychological insights and have formed the pattern for centuries of spiritual and contemplative reflection. He also pioneered the genre of confessional literature that probes the self in a quest for greater integrity and authenticity.

The text is also a monument to Augustine's philosophical and theological genius. Its reflections on the nature of belief, knowledge, friendship, and freedom have provided much of the intellectual framework for Western civilization. He was a forerunner of—and source for—the existentialist philosophers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The book concludes with profound reflections on the nature of memory, time, and creation that have transfixed theologians and philosophers down to the present day.

Throughout this course, you will have a chance to read, reflect, discuss, and write about *The Confessions* while engaging with the timeless ideas the text raises. Our exploration of St Augustine's text draws insights from literature, philosophy, psychology, theology, and the history of Christianity and the Roman Empire. We shall also discuss how Augustine's thinking permeates Western culture. Moreover, the seminar will consider how religion and how different kinds of religious experience figure in the broader context of human affairs, with a view to grasping the perennial questions on the meaning of human life that *The Confessions* raises. No prior philosophical or theological aptitude, nor any religious commitment, is required for this course.

Required Text

St Augustine, *The Confessions*, translated by Maria Boulding, O.S.B. (New York: Vintage Books, 1998)  
Paperback ISBN: 978-0375700217

The focus for each week will come from the *Confessions*, as noted in our course schedule below. However, all students are encouraged to read the whole book as soon as possible. If they wish to know more about Augustine's life, they are also encouraged to review the following supplementary reading:

-Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

There is an enormous philosophical, theological, and historical literature on *The Confessions*. If a particular theme, question, or idea interests you, please write to the instructor and I'll be happy to suggest some relevant further reading.

### Course Schedule

Aug. 23	Introduction
Aug. 30	Book I
Sep. 6	Books II-III
Sep. 13	<i>[Imitation and Reflection Essay Preparation. Extended office hours Monday and Tuesday (Sep. 11-12), but no class; see note*]</i>
Sep. 20	Book IV <i>[Imitation and Reflection Essay Due]</i>
Sep. 27	Book V
Oct. 4	Book VI
Oct. 11	Book VII
Oct. 18	Book VIII
Oct. 25	<i>[No class; see note*]</i>
Nov. 1	Book IX
Nov. 8	Book X
Nov. 15	Book XI
Nov. 29	Book XII <i>[Term Paper Preparation. Extended office hours Monday and Tuesday (Nov. 27-28)]</i>
Dec. 6	Book XIII <i>[Term Paper Due]</i>

\**Note:* At two points in the term, class will be cancelled, as the instructor and his wife are expecting a baby. On our schedule, the latter cancellation is pencilled in for October 25th, but this is subject to change and the cancellation may be last-minute. I will send out an email when the time comes with further details.

### Grading

Assignment	Due Date	Value
Participation	All term	40%
Imitation and Reflection Paper	Sep. 20th	30%
Term Paper	Dec. 6th	30%

#### I. Attendance and Participation (40%)

This is a text-focused, discussion-based seminar. You should come to class on time and fully prepared to discuss the assigned reading for the week. Your participation grade comprises both active class participation and the submission of written discussion questions:

1. 20% of your grade is based on class participation. An exemplary participant shows evidence of having completed the assigned reading before each class, consistently offers thoughtful points and questions for discussion, and listens respectfully to other students and the instructor. Half of your participation grade each week depends on being present and respectful in class, and half of it depends on your coming to class having carefully read the assigned text.
2. 20% of your grade depends on the submission, once a week, of either a discussion question or reading reflection. Submissions should be 150-300 words in length and demonstrate close

engagement with the text. Submissions should not include lengthy quotes from the text; you may paraphrase as needed (citing page numbers appropriately), but the content of your submission should be your own original work. Submissions should be posted to our Canvas discussion board by the night before class each week (so, Tuesday before midnight); no credit will be given for late submissions. Students should be prepared to discuss their submissions during class time. Submissions are only due in weeks when there is new/assigned reading.

Class participation involves regular and timely attendance. Students are allowed one free unexcused absence during the semester; any further unexcused absences will result in a 5 point deduction from your *overall course grade*. Please see the Attendance Policy below for further details on excused absences. Students are expected to be present, engaged, and respectful towards the instructor and fellow students. Please avoid cell phone use, and please do not eat in class.

## II. Imitation and Reflection Paper (30%)

This paper (4 pp.) is a combination of imitation and critical response for which you will write about a personal experience, modelled on a chosen passage from *The Confessions*, and then reflect on insights gained about St. Augustine as a writer and thinker.

## III. Term Paper (30%)

The term paper (7-8 pp.) is an intensive study of a chosen section or theme from the *Confessions*. Suggested topics will be announced in early November.

A minimum grade of B is required to earn Academic points towards your Honors Completion Requirements. (Exception: Honors Quest I and II sections require a C). Once you have earned your final grade in this course, please upload the course information and final grade from your Unofficial Transcript into your Honors Canvas Cohort: Honors Completion module to earn Honors Completion credit.

### A Note on Technology

To avoid distractions, please silence your phone and put it away during class. Unapproved/inappropriate phone use in class will affect your participation grade for the day.

In the interest both of a productive and engaged discussion, and of protecting your own focus, I strongly encourage you to take notes by hand and keep all technology use to a minimum. However, I understand that some students may need to use a laptop to take notes. If you plan to use a laptop in class, please avoid Internet use, and use your laptop only for note-taking. Inappropriate laptop or tablet use will affect your participation grade.

### Attendance Policy

Class attendance and participation are expected, and are an important part of your final grade. One free unexcused absence per semester is allowed; any further unexcused absences will result in a 5 point reduction in your overall final grade. Excused absences are permitted consistent with university policies in the undergraduate catalog (<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>). Students requesting an excused absence should email the instructor as soon as possible and may be asked to provide supporting documentation of the reason for their absence.

Make-up dates for in-class exams will only be allowed in the event of a documented illness or emergency. Students should contact the instructor as early as possible to make arrangements.

### Students Requiring Accommodation

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs as early as possible in the semester.

### UF Evaluations Process

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

### University Honesty Policy

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor.

### Counseling and Wellness Center

Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/> , 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

### The Writing Studio

The writing studio is committed to helping University of Florida students meet their academic and professional goals by becoming better writers. Visit the writing studio online at <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/> or in 2215 Turlington Hall for one-on-one consultations and workshops.

### Honors Program

Contact: Honors Program, 201 Walker Hall, 352-392-1519

Quick questions for an Honors advisor? Email [advisor@honors.ufl.edu](mailto:advisor@honors.ufl.edu)

Need an Honors advising appointment? Schedule via Microsoft Bookings: <https://bit.ly/ufhonorsadvising>