

Course Syllabus
How to Study the World: Liberal Arts Education as Lens
IDS 4930 - 29951, section 3902 / IDH 3931 - 29904, section 3901 - Spring 2024

Instructors:

<p>Todd Best College of Liberal Arts and Sciences - Academic Advising Center o: 2040 Farrior Hall, e: tbest@advising.ufl.edu, p: 352-392-1521 Office Hours: by appointment</p>	<p>Michael O'Malley UF Honors Program o: 201 Walker Hall, e: omalley@honors.ufl.edu p: 352-392-1519 Office Hours: by appointment</p>
--	--

Meeting time:

Thursdays, Period 5 (11:45-12:35), HVR1 114

Required Text:

All reading materials and other supplemental course content will be made available in Canvas. The course will be rooted in selected chapters from:
Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, Harvard University Press, 1998.

Course Description:

What is a liberal arts education? Is there value of the liberal arts and sciences beyond “critical thinking skills”? Can a liberal arts framework inform majors outside of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences? In this 1-credit seminar-style class, we will examine a range of resources for unpacking the enriching humanistic impact of a liberal arts education.

Whether students are in a major that is directly housed in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences or participating in a major in another college at UF, there is a loose liberal arts framework around every undergraduate program. But how are we to understand what that framework provides? We will explore what we mean by liberal arts education and take note of the contours that make up the framework. Additionally, we will consider how the L.A. framework can be more intentionally constructed, analyzed, and appreciated for what it can provide the learner?

This seminar style course will involve a “slow read” of selections from acclaimed University of Chicago philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum’s book, *Cultivating Humanity*. Nussbaum dips into the ancient philosophy to paint a picture of the key features - and payoff - of a liberal arts education. Alongside Nussbaum’s text, we will look at literary and artistic applications of the liberal arts contours she discusses. Students will reflectively consider how their own discipline and learning can benefit from these ideas and virtues.

Course Objectives:

1. Read Nussbaum (and related material) carefully and reflectively
2. Understand and articulate authors' ideas, placing in context of our own experience
3. Engage the text *critically and respond *personally
4. Discuss the ideas in a thoughtful way that includes both careful reading and careful listening.

*Critically does not mean negatively only. It means that it is expected that you will be able to distance yourself enough to fairly and thoughtfully analyze the content, evaluating in ways that allow you to offer a thoughtful response and not merely agree or disagree. This critical stance should be framed by a generous posture on your part. Please read "Reading Charitably" in Canvas.

**Personally* means two things: 1) as you read you are not merely seeking to find what you like and dislike about the book; more than that, you are entering into a conversation with the book/author. 2) As you interact with the reading, you allow the content to be filtered through your own experience in life.

Class Structure and Flow:

The class' structure will be quite simple: reading and in-depth conversation. Each week, students will come to class having read and entered a brief reflection of the content for the week. During class we will discuss the reading. Discussion will be highly dependent upon you, the student, making weekly contributions to the conversation. There will be little lecturing by the instructors, though sometimes a side bar will be used to enhance the conversation. Periodically, there will be additional supplemental class content as we explore multi-media and artistic avenues related to our topic.

Reading and Conversation

Each week we will read one or more chapters and sometimes a supplemental article, video, podcast, or poem. Students will be responsible to read and actively discuss the material each week, as well as write a reflection of personal engagement. *Depending on class size, students may have rotating responsibility to lead part of the discussion.* In-class discussions will sometimes be led by the instructors, sometimes by class members, sometimes by the collective class. Each class member should come to class ready to contribute every week, and not merely to listen.

*Each week, students should come with 1-2 discussion questions/observations from the week's class content that you would want to discuss if you were leading a discussion on the assigned reading.

A Word About Academic and Human Discourse: Going Beyond Civility

This is a humanities class that raises existential questions related to the human experience, specifically learning. It probes issues that are sometimes thorny, don't always have clear answers and includes ones in which people can have strong differences of opinion. One way to think of the class is to see it as a big conversation about big issues. Optimal participation comes from the ability to be fully engaged: observant, reflective, and imaginative as we enter into conversation. In order for us to have a successful class, we need to be able to talk to and with each other well. That involves a conversation in which members are humble, respectful, thoughtfully engaged, and still free to critique (offer friendly push-back). We want to hear the articulation and discussion of individual perspectives, while leaving room for disagreement and friendly critique. All of us should respectfully listen to the author's views as well as each others', without becoming dismissive or defensive; and after listening, we need to be able to converse about what we hear. As these ideals are upheld we hope to create an environment where we all sense that, fundamentally, we are in this together in spite of our differences. (Please see the article in Canvas: "Reading Charitably".)

Weekly Reflections

Students will write 12 weekly brief reflections (100 words minimum, 250 words maximum) in response to the reading assignments. Each weekly reflection should include 1-2 thoughtful questions that could lead to discussion in class. Reflection assignment details will be posted in Canvas.

Reflections will be submitted weekly **AT MIDNIGHT THE DAY BEFORE CLASS, with instructor response periodically. Details will be provided in class. See assignment sheet in Canvas - Assignments.

Film/Creative Review

Details will be announced in class.

Final Reflection Essay/Project

The final assignment will be a culmination of each student's engagement in the class. While it will take some effort, it should be enjoyable to do. Details given in class.

Experiential Learning

Valuing the variety of contexts we can learn through, we will be considering possible experiential learning scenarios. For instance, based on time availability, we might organize a film night, a museum visit, or other creative alternative experiences for enhancing the course.

Workload Expectations

The typical expectations for university coursework is that for every 1 hour in the classroom, students should be expected to put in 2 hours of work in preparation. For our class, however, we value the quality of the time of work and preparation more than the quantity. Our expectations

are that for this 1-credit class, students should expect an hour of work outside of the class. Recognizing that we are purposefully trying to not make the assigned weekly reading burdensome, we do expect that students will be coming to class having given adequate attention to the material with intentional reflection that would come from the idea of “slow reading”.

Attendance and Participation

Since this is a discussion-based class that meets only once a week, attendance is vital and assumed. Except for emergencies, absences should be cleared with the instructor prior to class. Students will be permitted **one** absence over the course of the semester. A second absence will lower the course grade by ½ a letter grade, and a third or fourth absence by an additional full letter grade each. Students cannot receive credit for the class if there are more than four absences.

In addition to attendance, each student is expected to contribute to classroom discussions weekly. Participation will be measured by any avenues of contributing to the conversation of our class.

Summary of Assignments and Grades:

Attendance and Participation ~15% (160 points)

Weekly Reflections ~25% (12 x 20 = 240 points)

Midterm Essay/Project 30% (300 points)

Final Essay/Project 30% (300 points)

*Note: your own writing and speaking (how you communicate your own ideas) is the primary way you will be evaluated.

All assignments will be submitted through Canvas as directed. Students will receive ½ credit for all late assignments up to one week from the due date. Assignments more than one week late will not be accepted, unless prior arrangements are made. Grading for assignments will be based on 1) the accuracy of your understanding of the material; 2) the organization and clarity of your writing; 3) the persuasiveness of your arguments; and, 4) not least, your focus on responding to questions as asked.

Grading Scale:

93-100 (A); 90-92 (A-); 87-89 (B+); 83-86 (B); 80-82 (B-); 77-79 (C+); 73-76 (C); 70-72 (C-); 67-69 (D+); 60-66 (D); 60-62 (D-); Below 59 (E)

UF Grading Policies: [link to the university grades and grading policies](#)

Regarding Technology and Our Classroom:

In a sense, the classroom culture we will work to cultivate is a form of “public discourse” that will probably take some effort to make a pathway for healthy conversation. Specifically, we will need

to work to overcome technological distraction. Your full attention is expected while in class. Please turn off or silence and store out of sight all cell phones, laptops, tablets, and electronic devices prior to class, unless approved by instructors. No electronic devices should be turned on in class, without consent of the instructors.

Academic Integrity:

Students are expected to act in accordance with the University of Florida policy on academic integrity. Cheating, lying, misrepresentation, or plagiarism in any form is unacceptable and inexcusable behavior. For more information, visit:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>

Accommodations for students with disabilities:

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center. [Click here to get started with the Disability Resource Center](#). 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.

Course Evaluation

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Click here for guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner. 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 ufl.bluera.com/ufl/. [Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students here.](#)

A brief note about reading in community:

Late Request

With love's confidence I'm asking,
if you should offer this book
to another, ask of him
as now I ask of you
to read slowly,
and thoroughly, tasting
each word's trouble.
Without doubt, certain passages
should never stand alone,
but will require assistance

offered by others to further
endow their meaning. I fear
for the reader who dabbles,
who gleans, who hurries to take
and flee, and who by doing so acquires
nothing but a novel form
of his current poverty and error.

—Anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*

Weekly Schedule:

For week by week reading details and assignments, see Course Schedule document in Canvas.