

IDS 2935, Section 1D54

Higher Education, Creative Reading, and the Examined Life

UF Quest 1 – Examined Lives

General Education – Humanities

Note: A minimum grade of C is required for General Education Credit

Time and Place

Tuesday, Period 4 (10:40-11:30 a.m.); Turlington 2334

Thursday, periods 4-5 (10:40 a.m.-12:35 p.m.); Turlington2342

Instructors

Dr. Phillip Wegner

Professor and Marston Milbauer Eminent Scholar in English

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Phone: 352-294-2813

Office location: Turlington 4115

Office Hours: Thursday, 1-3 p.m.; and by appointment

Note: It is best to schedule an appointment by email to see Dr. Wegner, as otherwise you may have to wait during scheduled office hours.

Teaching Assistant: Kel Martin

TA email: kellygmartin@ufl.edu

TA Office: TUR 4337

TA Office Hours: Tuesday, 1-3 p.m.; and by appointment

Course Description

This course will explore the importance of a rich and wide ranging reading in the humanities for living the best possible and most fulfilling life, and enacting to the fullest extent the principles of democratic self-governance. In his *apologia*, or defense speech at his trial, the Greek philosopher and teacher Socrates expresses the deep value of finding time every day for “conversing and testing myself and others;” this is because, Socrates concludes, “the unexamined life is not worth living.” Socrates’ words would profoundly shape for the next two millennia notions of the value of higher education: a full education should provide us not only with specific skills and technical training, but also the tools for engaging in an ongoing, rigorous, and even sometimes painful examination of ourselves and the complex world in which we live. At the very heart of such an education in the humanities is the creative activity of *reading*, the latter understood in its broadest sense as a scene of an encounter and conversation with books, visual arts, theater, and film. If read in a truly creative fashion, these diverse works provide us with a way of accessing

the other lives and values necessary to reflect upon and examine our own. The founders of the United States similarly saw such an education as indispensable for the continuation of the fragile democratic experiment they had recently undertaken—and it is no coincidence that among the first things any tyrant does is to ban books and art, if not to undermine the activity of reading altogether. In our course, we will work to create a foundation for a life long practice of creative reading, both by looking at a rich variety of works that take up the themes of education, reading, and the examined life, and by engaging in such practices for ourselves. After reading Plato's account of Socrates' statements at his trial, we will look at to a handful of short readings that meditate on the role of higher education and especially its value for a democratic culture. We will then turn to a number of works where the themes of the importance of education and reading for an examined and free life are at the forefront. In the second half of the semester, we will shift our attention to diverse expressions of examined lives, from some of the earliest existent works of art to exciting recent fiction and film. These works will be drawn from a wide range of different national cultural traditions, and a number will deal directly with the issue of cultures in contact. In this way, they will also provide the means of thinking about what it means to live in an increasingly interconnected global world.

Course Policies

1) Attendance

As one of the fundamental aims of this course is to familiarize you with the core humanities practices of close reading and deep listening, your engaged presence in class is indispensable for our work. Given that this class will meet only two days a week, every student will be allowed to miss during the course of the semester no more than 6 hours of classroom time: I would recommend you reserve these for various appointments, short-term illnesses, or other reasons. Each additional absence will result in a lowering of the attendance grade by 20 points. If the attendance grade drops to a zero, you will be considered not to have completed the requirements of the course, and hence will not receive a passing grade. Late arrivals and/or early departures from class meetings (especially at the break on the two-hour meeting day) will be counted as absences. Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

2) Participation

You will discover that there are great benefits to your active engagement in our discussions in class. As someone who as a student was quite shy, I will be more than happy to meet with you individually to discuss strategies to enrich your participation in all of your future UF classes. However, participation is by no means simply a quantitative assessment of the number of times we hear your voice.

Rather, participation encompasses the qualities of all your activities for the course. This includes the preparation demonstrated in both your oral and written work for each class meeting; bringing the materials to be discussed in class to each and every meeting; the seriousness and respect for the readings, the professor and your fellow students demonstrated in any contributions you make to the course; the timeliness of your turning in your assignments; and so forth.

3) Use of electronic devices

Students may use computers or other electronic platforms for accessing readings and/or taking notes. However, Wi-Fi connections should be turned off unless otherwise instructed, and students are not allowed to surf the web, work on other assignments, read novels, play games, view other pages, or engage in any other such activities during course discussion. Cell phones also should be turned off or silenced as soon as class begins. Violations of this policy will be deducted from your participation points, and may count as absence for that class meeting. If you have any questions about appropriate use of these devices please come and see me.

4) Course Reading

Readings should be completed before the class meeting in which they are to be discussed. This means that from our first meeting onward, you should be reading continuously, with the aim of getting ahead of our discussions. You are also required to bring copies of the readings to class. This course will ask you to do a good deal of reading, some of which you may find challenging in that they may lead to questions about deeply ingrained and unexamined assumptions and expectations. If you approach these works with an open mind, a spirit of adventure, and a willingness to expand your horizons, I think you will find the effort required well worth it. However, this will also mean that you need to work on developing in your reading skills new levels of attentiveness, concentration, and listening. The first step in becoming a stronger creative reader is to become a more active and engaged one. If you do not already do so, start reading with a pencil or pen in hand, marking passages that seem especially important or intriguing to you, and jotting insights and questions in the book's margins or on a near-by note pad. At the same time, you should try as much as possible to inhabit the intellectual and cultural contexts of the work's author. Ask yourself these questions of the readings: What are the writer's goals? What things does she or he challenge or call into question? What are the writer's own expectations and assumptions? How does she or he work to achieve both their stated and implicit goals? And most importantly, in what ways does this work enable you to think in new ways?

During the course of the semester I will ask you to identify in advance at least three passages or scenes in the week's readings that are especially of interest to you or raise difficulties or questions, and which you would like to see addressed in class. This will be very straightforward, involving no more than noting the passage

followed by a one- or two-sentence statement concerning why this passage intrigued you. For example:

-- Plato's *Apology*, pg. 33: "the unexamined life is not worth living." This seems very important for Plato. How do we examine life?

I do ask that you give points from three different places in any reading, and preferably from different readings (i.e. three passages from the first two pages of one essay won't fulfill the assignment).

Given the demands of all of our schedules, you will need to do this for only 10 of the 15 weekly readings, beginning with the second week of the semester. Of course, you may do the readings and submit your notes in advance. We will try to touch on a number of your points in discussion.

5) Writing assignments

A) As our course will explore a number of different practices and forms in the humanities, I will be asking you to prepare four 2-page written assignments where you summarize the protocols of reading for non-fiction, fiction, visual arts, and film, as these are developed in our class discussions. Think of these as short take-home quizzes more than a formal paper.

B) A mid-term 4-6 page close reading essay. This will be the semester's formal writing assignment, wherein I will ask you to select a passage from one of the work's of fiction we have read up to that point, and explain both the significance of the passage and how it relates to the larger themes and issues of the course.

6) Encounters beyond the classroom

A) Around mid-semester, we will plan a trip to UF's Harn Museum of Art, in order both to familiarize you with this extraordinary campus resource and to think a bit about the difference between reading visual art forms when viewed in person and in reproduction.

B) Interview project. During the course of the semester, every student will be required to meet with a faculty member in a UF humanities departments of interest to you. In advance of the meeting, you will do a short bit of research on the faculty member concerning their education, research, and scholarship (these are readily available on UF Department websites). This will be followed by a short, no more than 15 minute interview where you ask that teacher about what led them to choose their vocation, and those things they find most rewarding about working in the humanities.

7) final exam

In order to encourage you to take good notes throughout the semester, the final exam will be open note, and involve short written responses to themes and issues we discuss during the semester. Typical questions might include:

- What is the name of the particular strategy of reading Homer's *Odyssey* that Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno practice in their essay? Discuss how they use this strategy to engage in a reading of the role of art and education in the present.
- Discuss two changes made in Gabriel Axel's film adaptation of "Babette's Feast." How does such a reading transform the story?

UF Policy Statements

1) Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter, which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

2) UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see: <http://hr.ufl.edu/manager-resources/policies-2/sexual-harassment/>

3) 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 Student 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 (<http://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 in this class.

4) Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>.

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

Grading percentages

1) Attendance (see above Course Policies 1)

100 points

2) Participation (see above Course Policies 2)
100 points

3) Passage identification assignments (see above Course Policies 4)
10 X 30 points each = 300 points

4) Short “How to Read” papers (see above Course Policies 5)
4 X 50 points = 200 points

5) Mid-term close reading essay (see above Course Policies 5)
100 points

6) Interview (see above Course Policies 6)
50 point

7) final exam (see above Course Policies 7)
150 points

TOTAL: 1000 possible points

Grading Scale

	A = 94-100% of points	A- = 90-93%
B+ = 87-89%	B = 84-86%	B- = 80-83%
C+ = 77-79%	C = 74-76%	C- = 70-73%
D+ = 67-69%	D = 64-66%	D- = 60-63%
<60=F		

See the following web page for UF policies for assigning grade points:
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>.

Required texts

William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (illustrated edition)
Michelle Cliff, *Free Enterprise*
Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*
Frederick Douglas, *A Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas, A Slave*
William Shakespeare, *Love’s Labor’s Lost*
Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*
Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*

As we will be doing a good deal of close reading in class, you need to pick up copies of the editions ordered for our course.

All shorter readings and images of paintings we will discuss will be made available on the course Canvas web site.

Beginning in week 6, we will be screening a number of films. I will arrange evening screening times; if these are unworkable for you, we can discuss other possibilities for viewing the films.

Anticipated Schedule

This schedule is tentative and subject to change.

Part I: Introduction: Education for an Examined Life

Week 1, January 8-10: Plato, *Apology* (c. 399 B.C.)

Week 2, Jan. 15-17: Immanuel Kant, "Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?" (1784)

Thomas Jefferson, from *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Query 14: Laws (1787); and "A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge," Section I (1778)

John Taylor, "The Virtue of an Educated Voter" (2016)

Part II: Why Read?

Week 3, Jan. 22-24: Franz Kafka, letter to Oskar Pollack (1904)

David Foster Wallace, "This is Water" (2005)

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic*, Preface and First Treatise (1887)

Week 4, Jan. 29-31: "The Twelve Articles of the Swabian Peasants" (1525)

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818)

"How to Read Non-Fiction" short paper #1 due on Tuesday, January 29

Week 5, February 5-7: Frederick Douglas, *A Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas, A Slave* (1845)

Week 6, Feb. 12-14: Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961)

Micha Ullman, *Bebelplatz Bibliothek Memorial* (1995)

Part III: Examined Lives I

Week 7, Feb. 19-21: *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, d. Werner Herzog (2010)

Chauvet-Pont-d'Arc Cave paintings (29,000 – 27,000 B.C.)

Kim Stanley Robinson, from *Shaman* (2013)

Visit to Harn Museum of Art

“How to Read Fiction” short paper #2 due on Tuesday, February 19

Week 8, February 26-28: Homer, *Odyssey*, Book 12 (8th century B.C.)
Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, “Parable of the Oarsmen” from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944)

Week 9, March 5-7: Spring Break!

Week 10, March 12-14: William Shakespeare, *Love’s Labor’s Lost* (1597)
filmed performance of the play

Midterm close reading paper due Thursday, March 14

Week 11, March 19-21: Michelangelo de Caravaggio paintings (1571-1610)
Simon Schama’s episode of *Power of Art* (2006)
John Berger, “Carravagio” (1984)
William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790); with Blake’s illustrations

Part IV: Examined Lives II

Week 12, March 26-28: Michelle Cliff, *Free Enterprise* (2004)
J. M. W. Turner, *The Slave Ship* (1840)

“How to Read a Painting” short paper due on Tuesday, March 26

Week 13, April 2-4: Isak Dinesen, “Babette’s Feast” (1950)
film adaptation, *Babette’s Feast*, d. Gabriel Axel (1987)

Week 14, April 9-11: Joseph Conrad, “Preface” (1897) and *Heart of Darkness* (1899)
Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d’Alger (O. J. R. M.)* (1907)
Lu Hsun, Preface to *Call to Arms* and “A Madman’s Diary” (1922)

Humanities Faculty Interviews due on Thursday, April 11

Week 15, April 16-18: James Joyce, “The Dead” (1907)

Week 16, April 23: Ted Chiang, “Story of Your Life” (1998)
film adaptation, *Arrival*, d. Dennis Villeneuve (2016)

“How to Read a Film” short paper #4 due at the last class meeting, Tuesday, April 23

Finals week, May 2, 12:30-2:30 p.m. : final examination

