

IDS 2935: Wisdom and Heroism: Great Books in the Medieval World

Quest 1: The Examined Life

Honors Section

I. General Information

Class Meetings

- Spring 2025
- 100% In-Person, no GTAs, 35 residential students
- T Period 4 (10:40 AM-11:30 AM)
- R Periods 4 and 5 (10:40 AM-12:35 PM)
- Little Hall, Room 0125
- 3 Credits

Instructor

- Karl Gunther
- CSE E512
- Office Hours: Thursdays 1-4pm and by appointment
- k.gunther@ufl.edu
- 352-294-6829

Course Description

What did it mean to be wise and heroic in the middle ages? How do medieval European views of wisdom and heroism compare with modern views? We will explore these questions by examining different ideals of wisdom and heroism in medieval history, literature, philosophy, art, architecture, and music.

Quest and General Education Credit

- Quest 1
- Humanities

This course accomplishes the [Quest](#) and [General Education](#) objectives of the subject areas listed above. A minimum grade of C is required for Quest and General Education credit. Courses intended to satisfy Quest and General Education requirements cannot be taken S-U.

Required Readings and Works

1. Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy* (Penguin, 1999) – available on reserve
2. Cicero, *On Obligations* (Oxford, 2000) – available on reserve
3. *Beowulf*, trans. Seamus Heaney (Norton, 2000) – available on reserve
4. All other readings and works will be made available through Canvas.
5. Materials and Supplies Fees: n/a

Course Objectives

1. Identify, describe, and explain the methodologies used across humanities disciplines to examine essential questions about the wisdom and heroism as ideal aspects of character in the medieval world.
2. Identify, describe, and explain the historical, philosophical, and literary evidence for the twin ideals of wisdom and heroism as constitutive elements of the examined life in the medieval world, and the interpretive and normative questions that arise in seeking to understand the medieval approach to a life well lived.
3. Analyze how works across disciplines and genres from the medieval period represent the quest for defining heroism and wisdom amidst great social change.
4. Analyze and evaluate specific accounts of the pursuit of the ideals of wisdom and heroism, across diverse texts and works from a specific historical period, using close reading, critical analysis and group discussion, and personal reflection.
5. Develop and present clear and effective written and oral work that demonstrates critical engagement with course texts, visual and auditory media, and experiential learning activities.
6. Communicate well-supported ideas and arguments effectively within class discussion and debates, with clear oral presentation and written work articulating students' personal experiences and reflections on ideals of heroism and wisdom in the quest for the examined life.
7. Connect course content with students' intellectual, personal, and professional lives at UF and beyond.
8. Reflect on students' own and others' experience with the pursuit of the examined life in active class discussion.

II. Graded Work

Description of Graded Work

1. Active Participation and Class Attendance (20pts total)

a. Active Participation (15pts)

- i. An exemplary participant shows evidence of having done the assigned reading before each class, consistently offers thoughtful points and questions for discussion, and listens considerately to other discussants.
- ii. Students with concerns about speaking in class discussions should reach out to the instructor directly.
- iii. You will receive an active participation grade at three points during the semester (5 pts each time): February 4th (for the first third of the class), March 6th (for the second third of the class), and April 22nd (for the final third of the class).
- iv. For details about how active participation will be assessed, see participation rubric below.

b. Class Attendance (5pts)

- i. On-time class attendance is required for this component of the course grade. You may have two unexcused absences without any penalty, but starting with the third unexcused absence, each unexcused absence reduces your attendance grade by 1 point.
- ii. Except for absence because of religious holiday observance, documentation is required for excused absences, [per university policy](#). Please contact me as soon as possible to request an excused absence. If you miss 10 or more classes (excused or not), you will miss material essential for successful completion of the course.

2. Self-Reflection Essays (15pts total, 5pts each)

- a. Three times during the semester, you will write a brief reflection essay (min. 200 words) that discusses one way that our course readings and discussions have changed, refined, or confirmed the way you think about wisdom and/or heroism.
- b. These will be assessed as full credit/half-credit/no credit assignments; to earn full credit, the assignment must:
 - i. meet or exceed the required word count
 - ii. state a thesis (a claim) about how an aspect(s) of assigned readings has affected your thinking about wisdom and/or heroism
 - iii. discuss a specific passage (with citation) from the readings to explain how it have affected your thinking about wisdom and/or heroism
- c. Reflection essays will be due no later than 11:59pm on the Fridays of weeks 4, 8, and 14. Late essays will be penalized -1 points per day late.

3. Experiential Learning Rare Books Collection Activity (5pts)

- a. On Tuesday, March 25th, we will visit the Harold & Mary Jean Hanson Rare Book Collection in the UF Smathers Library, Room 100. Students will examine a range of medieval manuscripts and early printed books from the collection of texts that we are reading in this class. Students will experience handling these rare materials with their own hands and inspecting them directly. By Friday, March 28th at 11:59pm, students will submit a minimum 200 word assignment that compares at least two physical characteristics of a

medieval/early modern book examined at the library with a book you own (including photos of the relevant features of each).

4. Analytic Essay (15 pts)

- a. What can a person learn about wisdom and heroism by reading the poem *Beowulf*? You will write a 1,000-word analytic essay that answers this question from the perspective of either Cicero or Boethius, whose authorial persona you will adopt for this essay. Your essay must have a clear thesis statement that states your argument (e.g., “Readers will learn X, Y, and Z by reading *Beowulf*”). You must discuss at least three specific passages from *Beowulf*, including appropriate quotations and citations, and your analysis of those passages must clearly invoke (with quotations and citations) passages from either *On Obligations* or *The Consolation of Philosophy* (depending on which author you are impersonating).
- b. A full draft of the analytic essay will be due by 11:59pm on Friday, February 13th. Failure to submit a full draft on time will reduce your final analytic essay grade by 2 points.
- c. You will receive a provisional grade on the draft and I will also provide you written feedback to help you revise for the final draft.
- d. The final draft of the analytic essay will be due by 11:59pm on Friday, February 28th. Only the grade for the final draft will count towards your overall course grade.
- e. For details about how this assignment will be graded, see the rubric below.

5. Quizzes (45pts total, 9pts each)

- a. On the Thursdays of Week 3, 6, 9, 12, and the Tuesday of Week 15 we will begin class with 15-minute in-class quizzes on content from readings, class discussions, and lectures. The quizzes will not be cumulative (i.e., they will only cover material since the previous quiz) and may include multiple choice, identification, and/or short answer questions.

III. Annotated Weekly Schedule

Week	Topics, Homework, and Assignments
Week 1 Jan. 14-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Introduction • Summary: This week will introduce the course and the approach we will be taking in our study of wisdom and heroism in the middle ages. Why would we read old books about these topics? And why read such a wide range of philosophical, literary, historical, and religious texts? How will we be analyzing these texts? We will also begin discussing an ancient book that would have an outsized influence on medieval views of wisdom and heroism: Cicero’s <i>On Obligations</i>. • Required Readings/Works: Cicero, <i>On Obligations</i>, Book 1
Week 2 Jan. 21-23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Ancient Ideals and Medieval Wisdom & Heroism • Summary: This week we will continue our discussion of Cicero’s <i>On Obligations</i>. Cicero wrote to impart wisdom about three subjects: doing what is right, doing what is useful in daily life, and what should happen when doing what is useful conflicts with doing what is right. How did Cicero answer these questions and how do his answers compare with common modern answers to these questions? We will also begin discussing Boethius’s <i>Consolation of Philosophy</i>. • Required Readings/Works: Cicero, <i>On Obligations</i>, selections from Books 2-3; Boethius, <i>The Consolation of Philosophy</i>, Book 1
Week 3 Jan. 28-30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Wisdom & Heroism in Early Medieval Philosophy • Summary: Having experienced a dramatic reversal of fortune, Boethius sought consolation from “Lady Philosophy,” wisdom personified. What wisdom did Lady Philosophy seek to impart to Boethius about the nature of fortune, happiness, and justice? How do these views compare with Cicero’s and with modern views? • Required Readings/Works: Boethius, <i>Consolation</i>, Books 2-4 • Assignment: In-class quiz on Thursday.
Week 4 Feb. 4-6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Wisdom & Heroism in Early Medieval Literature • Summary: <i>Beowulf</i> is one of the most famous epic poems of the middle ages. What ideas about heroism and wisdom are embedded in this early medieval narrative about a warrior doing battle against monsters and a dragon? How does this vision of heroism and wisdom compare with those we have already studied? Do these ideals continue to animate modern thinking about these topics? • Required Readings/Works: <i>Beowulf</i>, trans. Seamus Heaney (ca. 100 pp. of verse) • Assignment: Self-Reflection Essay #1 due by 11:59pm on Friday.
Week 5 Feb. 11-13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Wisdom & Heroism in Early Medieval History & Religion • Summary: In this week, we will move on from philosophy and literature to consider what we can learn from historical and religious texts about medieval views of wisdom & heroism. We will read Einhard’s biography of Charlemagne and consider the ways he depicts Charlemagne as a wise and heroic ruler. We will also read early

	<p>Islamic texts and discuss the way the authors view tradition as crucial to the cultivation of wisdom.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Einhard, <i>The Life of Charlemagne</i> (17 pp.) ○ Primary sources on the Quran and Islamic law in F. E. Peters (ed.), <i>A Reader on Classical Islam</i> (Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 212-239 (27 pp.) • Assignment: Rough draft of the analytic essay due by 11:59pm on Friday.
<p>Week 6 Feb. 18-20</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Wisdom & Heroism in the 12th Century • Summary: This week, we will discuss developing views of wisdom and heroism during the 12th century, focusing especially on how the Crusades and the “Renaissance of the Twelfth Century” shaped medieval European thinking about these topics. We will discuss <i>The Song of Roland</i>, the foundational poem of medieval French literature, and consider the way it poses a possible conflict between wisdom and heroism as competing ideals. • Required Readings/Works: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Urban II, <i>Sermon at Clermont (1095)</i> (10 pp.) b. Selections from <i>The Song of Roland</i> (30 pp.) • Assignment: In-class quiz on Thursday.
<p>Week 7 Feb. 25-27</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Wisdom & Heroism in Medieval Monasteries & Schools • Summary: This week we will continue to examine medieval ideals of wisdom and heroism in the 12th century, focusing now on the views of monastics and political thinkers. We will listen to and discuss the concept of spiritual wisdom and heroism in Hildegard of Bingen’s <i>Ordo Virtutum</i>, the first work of musical theater in the European tradition, and we will consider John of Salisbury’s vision of political wisdom and heroism in his <i>Policraticus</i>, the first work of political theory in medieval Europe. • Required Readings/Works: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Hildegard of Bingen, <i>Ordo Virtutum</i>, 1150 (20 pp.) b. Selections from John of Salisbury, <i>Policraticus</i> (34 pp.) • Assignment: Final draft of the analytic essay due by 11:59pm on Friday.
<p>Week 8 Mar. 4-6</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Wisdom & Heroism in Medieval Institutions • Summary: This week, we will look at two of the crucial institutions developed in medieval Europe to impart ideals of wisdom & heroism. First we will look at the creation of the first universities at the turn of the 13th century and consider the methods they used to convey wisdom to later generations and the ways they compare with modern universities. Then, we will look at the development of gothic cathedrals and discuss the ways that their builders saw them as embodying ideals of wisdom and heroism. • Required Readings/Works <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Robert de Courçon, <i>Statutes for the University of Paris, 1215</i> b. Gregory IX, <i>Statutes for the University of Paris, 1231</i> c. <i>University of Paris, Condemnation of Errors, 1241</i> d. Jacques de Vitry, <i>Life of the Students at Paris</i> e. Abbot Suger, <i>On What Was Done In His Administration</i>, 12th c. f. Bernard of Clairvaux, <i>Apology</i>, 1125

<p>Week 9 Mar. 11-13</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Wisdom, Heroism, and Saints • Summary: This week, we will consider another strain of heroic ideals that ran throughout the entire medieval period: the idea of saintly heroism. We will discuss the development of the ideal of sanctity in medieval European and read medieval biographies of two of the most prominent saints of the 13th century, Francis and Dominic. We will also discuss medieval books themselves as we prepare to visit special collections after Spring Break. • Required Readings/Works: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Thomas of Celano, <i>Lives of St. Francis</i> (9 pp.) b. Gerard de Frachet, <i>The Legend of St. Dominic</i> (17 pp.) • Assignment: In-class quiz on Thursday.
<p>Week 10 Mar. 18-20</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NO CLASS - SPRING BREAK
<p>Week 11 Mar. 25-27</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Wisdom, Heroism, and Medieval Books • Summary: Thus far, we have read many books written during the middle ages about wisdom and heroism, but this week we will have the opportunity to handle <i>actual</i> medieval books. We will visit special collections in Smathers Library and examine medieval manuscripts and early printed books, many of them copies of texts we have/will read in this class. • Required Readings/Works: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. View recorded lecture on Dante's <i>Divine Comedy</i> and begin reading <i>Inferno</i>. • Assignments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Class meets at Smathers Library Room 100 on Tuesday – attendance is mandatory. b. Self-Reflection Essay #2 due by 11:59pm on Friday.
<p>Week 12 Apr. 1-3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Wisdom & Heroism in Dante's <i>Inferno</i> • Summary: This week, we will discuss a text that has been described as the literary cathedral of the later middle ages: Dante's <i>Inferno</i>. As Dante underwent a literary journey through the underworld, he depicted a wide range of people who he thought had <i>not</i> lived wisely or behaved heroically. What <i>positive</i> vision of wisdom and heroism was he articulating? • Required Readings/Works: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Dante, <i>Inferno</i>, Cantos 1-7, 32-34. • Assignment: In-class quiz on Thursday.

<p>Week 13 Apr. 8-10</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Wisdom & Heroism after the Black Death • Summary: This week we will discuss two books written in the wake of the Black Death in the mid-14th century. How does William Langland's <i>Piers Plowman</i> raise questions about the wisdom of purportedly wise people and institutions of late medieval England? And how does Geoffrey Chaucer's <i>The Knight's Tale</i> return to Boethius's questions about a wisdom, the passions, and fortune? We will complete our discussion of Chaucer at the beginning of the next week. • Required Readings/Works: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Selections from William Langland, <i>Piers Plowman</i> ○ Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale," Parts 1-2
<p>Week 14 Apr. 15-19</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Wisdom & Heroism at the end of the Middle Ages. • Summary: We began this course with Cicero's <i>On Obligations</i>, a book written before the middle ages, but one that had an enormous influence on medieval ideals of wisdom and heroism. We end the course with a book written at the end of the middle ages, Machiavelli's <i>The Prince</i>. Machiavelli had Cicero's book very much in mind as he wrote: how did the ideals of wisdom and heroism found in <i>The Prince</i> compare with those found in <i>On Obligations</i>? • Required Readings/Works: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale," Parts 3-4 ○ Selections from Machiavelli, <i>The Prince</i> • Self-Reflection Essay #3 due by 11:59pm on Friday.
<p>Week 15 Apr. 22</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Looking Back: Medieval Ideals of Wisdom & Heroism • Summary: In our final class session, we will review what we have learned about medieval ideals of wisdom and heroism and consider the extent to which they were marked more by unity or diversity. • Assignment: In-class quiz on Tuesday.

IV. Grading Scale and Rubrics

Grading Scale

For information on UF's grading policies for assigning grade points, see [here](#).

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

Grading Rubrics

Participation Rubric

5 pts	3 pts	1 pt	0pts
Offers informed contributions in nearly every class discussion	Offers informed contributions in about 50% of class discussions	Offers informed contributions infrequently in class discussion	Participates very minimally or not at all in class discussion

Analytic Paper Rubric

	Excellent (full credit)	Good (-1 pt)	Average (-2pts)	Insufficient (-3pts)	Unsatisfactory (- 4pts)
Articulates a clear thesis and defends it with a clearly organized, logical argument (4pts)					
Offers in-depth analysis of at least three passages from Beowulf (4pts)					
Analysis of Beowulf clearly reflects either the perspective of Cicero or Boethius and their writings (4pts)					
Paper is clearly written, is free from substantial grammatical errors, meets or exceeds the word requirement, and has proper citations (3pts)					

Experiential Learning Assignment

	Fulfills requirement (full credit)	Does not fulfill requirement (-1 pt)
<p style="text-align: center;">Photos (1pt)</p> <p>Includes photos of a book handled in Special Collections and a modern book the student owns, highlighting a feature discussed in the paper</p>		
<p style="text-align: center;">Prose (1pts)</p> <p>Paper is clearly written, is free from substantial grammatical errors, and meets or exceeds the word requirement</p>		
<p style="text-align: center;">Comparison 1 (1.5 pts)</p> <p>Makes an insightful comparison, highlighting both similarities and differences, of a physical feature of the medieval and modern book</p>		
<p style="text-align: center;">Comparison 2 (1.5 pts)</p> <p>Makes an insightful comparison, highlighting both similarities and differences, of a physical feature of the medieval and modern book</p>		

V. Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

At the end of this course, students will be expected to have achieved the [Quest](#) the [General Education student learning outcomes](#) for Humanities (H).

[Humanities \(H\)](#) Humanities courses must afford students the ability to think critically through the mastering of subjects concerned with human culture, especially literature, history, art, music, and philosophy, and must include selections from the Western canon.

Humanities courses provide instruction in the history, key themes, principles, terminology, and theory or methodologies used within a humanities discipline or the humanities in general. Students will learn to identify and to analyze the key elements, biases and influences that shape thought. These courses emphasize clear and effective analysis and approach issues and problems from multiple perspectives.

Content: *Students demonstrate competence in the terminology, concepts, theories and methodologies used within the discipline(s).*

- Identify, describe, and explain the methodologies used across humanities disciplines to examine essential questions about the wisdom and heroism as ideal aspects of character in the medieval world. (Quest 1, H) **Assessments:** Active class discussion, in-class examination, reading questions, analytic essay.
- Identify, describe, and explain the historical, philosophical, and literary evidence for the twin ideals of wisdom and heroism as constitutive elements of the examined life in the medieval world, and the interpretive and normative questions that arise in seeking to understand the medieval approach to a life well lived. (Quest 1, H). **Assessments:** Active class discussion, in-class examination, reading questions, analytic essay.

Critical Thinking: *Students carefully and logically analyze information from multiple perspectives and develop reasoned solutions to problems within the discipline(s).*

- Analyze how works across disciplines and genres from the medieval period represent the quest for defining heroism and wisdom amidst great social change. (Quest 1, H). **Assessments:** In-class examination; argument analysis paper, active class discussion.
- Analyze and evaluate specific accounts of the pursuit of the ideals of wisdom and heroism, across diverse texts and works from a specific historical period, using close reading, critical analysis and group discussion, and personal reflection. (Quest 1, H). **Assessments:** In-class examination, analytic essay, reading questions, active class discussion, experiential learning component.

Communication: *Students communicate knowledge, ideas and reasoning clearly and effectively in written and oral forms appropriate to the discipline(s).*

- Develop and present clear and effective written and oral work that demonstrates critical engagement with course texts, visual and auditory media, and experiential learning activities. (Quest 1, H). **Assessments:** analytic essay, experiential learning component, active class discussion, self-reflection essays.
- Communicate well-supported ideas and arguments effectively within class discussion and debates, with clear oral presentation and written work articulating students' personal experiences and reflections on ideals of heroism and wisdom in the quest for the examined life. (Quest 1, H). **Assessments:** In-class examination, active class discussion, analytic essay, experiential learning component, self-reflection essays.

Connection: *Students connect course content with meaningful critical reflection on their intellectual, personal, and professional development at UF and beyond.*

- Connect course content with students' intellectual, personal, and professional lives at UF and beyond. (Quest 1). **Assessments:** experiential learning component, active class discussion, self-reflection essays.
- Reflect on students' own and others' experience with the pursuit of the examined life in active class discussion and argument analysis papers. (Quest 1). **Assessments:** *Song of Roland* experiential learning component, argument analysis paper, paper draft workshop, active class discussion.

VI. Quest Learning Experiences

1. Details of Experiential Learning Component

The class will visit the Harold & Mary Jean Hanson Rare Book Collection in the UF Smathers Library to examine a range of medieval manuscripts and early printed books from the collection of texts that we are reading in this class. Students will experience handling these rare materials with their own hands and inspecting them directly. Students will complete a short assignment about the books they are handling.

2. Details of Self-Reflection Component

Self-reflection is built into many of the assignments, primarily through class discussion, the multiple Self-Reflection Essays, and the Analytic Essay assignment. In these opportunities for self-reflection offered by specific activities throughout the course, students will reflect on the broader implications of the themes of the course, considering the impact to themselves and/or to a wider community.

VII. Required Policies

Attendance Policy

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found [here](#).

Students Requiring Accommodation

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect 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.

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 [here](#). 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 [this link](#). Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at [GatorEvals Public Data](#).

Grading Policies

To facilitate impartial grading, I have enabled anonymous grading on Canvas. Please do not include your name anywhere on the assignments you submit. I will ask you to write only your UFID on the quiz.