

Core 104: Literature, Philosophy & The Examined Life



Course Description

This course fulfills one of RWU's five interdisciplinary course requirements and as such, it is situated in an expansive and interrelated intellectual context. In Core 104 students develop their awareness of the history of ideas and can recognize at least some of the ways those ideas are experienced by each of us in our daily lives. We explore and analyze the writings of philosophers, playwrights, poets, and novelists as they contemplate ethical action, knowledge, and being itself.

The structure of the course emphasizes philosophical and literary connections. We read four pairs of texts. In the pre-classical world at the founding of western democratic traditions, Gilgamesh and Homer show us what it means to be human, i.e. "Who am I?" Classical Greece gives us our next pair, Plato and Aristotle. "What can I know," is the focus of their texts. During the Renaissance (the rebirth of Platonic and Aristotelian texts, and the birth of our modern era marked by the scientific method and Europe's consequential expansion around the globe), William Shakespeare and Rene Descartes further develop that question, "What can we know," bringing it into the modern world. Bridging the ancient and modern world for the the last question, "With what I know, how should I act," St. Augustine and Thoreau offer both a philosophical and literary explanation through their personal experiences.

Core 104 seeks to answer the same questions, *who am I, what can I know, with what I know, how should I act*, from two different perspectives, the philosophical and the literary. Sometimes the answers are strikingly similar; sometimes vastly different. The 20th century, German philosopher Martin Heidegger described these two disciplines the following way:

Between these two [philosophy and poetry] there exists a secret kinship because in the service of language both intercede in behalf of language and give lavishly of themselves. Between both there is, however, at the same time an abyss for they 'dwell on the most widely separated mountains.'

Course Type: Lecture

Course Time: TTh 08:00 9:20

Location: GHH 208

Instructor: Dr. Anthony Hollingsworth

Office: GHH 112

Office Hours: T 1PM - 2PM; W 2PM - 3PM (online at skype: Magisterlatinae); Th 2:30PM - 3:30PM

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Course Goals

1. Read the texts and authors scheduled for the class
2. Recognize and explain how literature and philosophy can approach the same topics
3. Understand the difference between the particular and the universal
4. Identify the roots of philosophy in Socrates, Plato and Aristotle
5. Explain in detail the Platonic phrase, "The unexamined life is not worth living"

Grading

Homework/Participation	20%
Quizzes	30%
Tests and Paper	30% (6% each)
Final Examination	20%

Course Material

Augustine, The Confessions. Translated by R. S. Pine-Coffin. Penguin Books, 1993
Biffle, Christopher. A Guided Tour of Five Works of Plato. Mayfield Publishing, 2001
Descartes, René. Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy. Hackett Publishing, 1998.
Shakespeare, William. Hamlet. Signet Classics, 1998.
Thoreau, Henry David. Walden: Lessons for the New Millennium. Beacon Press, 1998
The Epic of Gilgamesh. Translated by Danny Jackson. Bolchazy-Carducci Publishing, 1997. Homer, The Odyssey: Translated by Richmond Lattimore. HarperCollins Press, 1999.
Selected handouts provided by instructor

Schedule:

Lectures 1-5: Gilgamesh

Lectures 6-10: Odyssey

Test I

Lectures 11-15 Plato

Lectures 16-20 Aristotle

Test II

Lectures 21-23 Shakespeare

Lectures 24-26 Descartes

Test III

Lectures 27-31 Thoreau

Lectures 32-36 Augustine

Lectures 37 Lewis (article)

Test IV

Review

Final Examination - Submission of Paper

Incentive Program/Absences

I offer an incentive program for students. The student(s) with the fewest absences will have the option of not taking the final examination. An absence is defined as not being present in class (excused or unexcused) or being more than 15 minutes late for class.

Absences

Absences hinder the progress, not only of the individual student, but often of the entire class. For this reason, three unexcused absences per semester will be allowed (one full week); subsequent unexcused absences will necessitate a conference with the instructor and will result in lowering the final course grade.

Plagiarism/Cheating

You are encouraged to work and study with your classmates, both in and out of the classroom. Plagiarism of a fellow student or other source and cheating on testing materials is expressly forbidden (see the University Statement on Plagiarism in the Roger Williams University Undergraduate Catalogue).

Disabilities

Students who wish to receive academic accommodations for this course must first register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS) in order to begin the accommodation process. The SAS office will provide registered students with the specific information they will need to share with each instructor. SAS is located on the second floor of the Main University Library and is open from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm Monday through Friday. Please note Student Accessibility Services was previously known as Disability Support Services. Website: <http://rwu.edu/academics/academic-services/sas/current-students>