

California State University, Sacramento

**Honors 3, Section 3**  
**“Great Books and World Civilizations, 1500-present”**  
Spring, 2020

Professor Ted Lascher  
Tahoe Hall, Room 3036  
278-4864 (office)  
tedl@csus.edu

Course meeting time and place: Mondays &  
Wednesdays, 1:30-2:45, Shasta Hall,  
Room 254  
Office hours: Mondays & Wednesdays  
3-4 on campus; Wednesdays 5-6  
Sacramento State Downtown; and by  
appointment

**Catalog Description:** Students read, discuss, and explore some of the most influential works of literature, philosophy, history, and religion from cultures around the world from the 15th century to the present. Students will gain knowledge of different cultural traditions, explore ways to criticize and to learn from different genres of literature, examine their own concepts and ideas, and practice skills of critical thinking in dialogue with challenging works. **Prerequisite:** Open only to students enrolled in the General Education Honors Program who have completed HONR 1 and HONR 2. **Graded:** Graded Student. **Units:** 3.0

**GE Category:** C2 (Humanities)

**Area C2 Learning Outcomes:**

1. Demonstrate knowledge of the conventions and methods of the study of the humanities
2. Investigate, describe, and analyze the roles and effects of human culture and understanding in the development of human societies
3. Compare and analyze various conceptions of humankind
4. Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the historical development of cultures and civilizations, including their animating ideas and values.

**Overview of Course**

This course is the third and final installment in the “Great Books/Great Ideas” component of the Honors program. Continuing with the seminar format of the previous courses, students will explore readings from a variety of perspectives all with the goal of engaging in discussions of major themes and issues that have shaped the human experience. Covering the period roughly from 1500-2000, we will delve into works of literature, philosophy, art, social science, history, and culture in order to discover our own place in human history. Major themes and issues we will explore include: freedom/slavery, race/class/ethnic identity, citizenship/civic engagement, human rights/civil rights, faith/reason, and intercultural conflict/cooperation.

## Big Questions

Two big sets of questions underlie all the topics we will address in the course.

1. *Thinking critically about arguments from the past.* You will likely find many of the readings from the past offering valuable insights about human nature, the state of the world, etc. At the same time, we will encounter readings and observations from the past that you almost certainly will find troublesome in one or more ways. What is reasonable to make of such concerns? That is, what is a fair type of critical thinking given that people were writing in vastly different times and cultures, with divergent norms about what is right and wrong? To what extent can earlier writers be critiqued on their own terms? And what does such thinking imply for how we should view *our own* values and norms?
2. *Reducing human suffering.* Even people who disagree about many things may be able to agree that is generally desirable to reduce human suffering. What do we learn from our readings about how and why suffering occurs? What do the readings and our discussions of them indicate needs to be done...and what needs to be avoided? What does all of this suggest about actions needed to reduce suffering going forward?

## Class Session Expectations

This seminar relies heavily on student participation, which also requires students to be prepared prior to coming to class. Students are expected to complete all reading assignments prior to class and be ready to discuss their understandings of them in class. This seminar is no place to sit silently and attentively listen. Active engagement is critical.

Be prepared to be uncomfortable. Some of the texts and conversations will agree with each other, others will disagree. Students will agree and disagree with the texts and even with each other. The moments of discomfort are where learning happens. While I do not intend or expect to make students unduly uneasy, I do encourage healthy discussion of topics. Consider why the discomfort is happening and ask what it can teach us. Is there anything you can contribute to an agreement or disagreement? Is there anything that you observe as common across different positions? How can we hold all of these moments in conversation with one another? What can we learn from them?

This classroom is to remain a place of respect for each other and the community at large. Disagreement with someone does not necessarily mean we dislike one another. Disagreeing with an opinion should not be an attack on the person, but a way to understand ourselves better by asking ourselves why we disagree and then forming a logical argument around that.

## **Student Learning Outcomes:**

Upon completion of this course, students shall be able to:

- Critically analyze literary works;
- Synthesize ideas from different genres of literature or literary styles;
- Form their own reasoned opinions about major topics considered in the readings and discussed in class; and
- Express ideas clearly in written and oral communication.

## **Readings**

Bernal Diaz, *The Essential Diaz*

Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*

Henry Louis Gates, *The Classic Slave Narratives*

Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*

Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*

Norton's *Little Seagull Handbook*

Other shorter readings may be made available on SacCT

## **Bases for Evaluation**

My evaluation of your work in Honors 3 will be based on the following:

- Class participation.
- Submission of 3 analytical papers based on the readings.
  - Each paper will be 4-5 pages in length and will address a particular reading (other than the Pinker book). These are to be *analytical* papers, not book reports. You will also be expected to draw on at least one outside source. I will provide further guidance for each paper as the semester progresses.
  - For at least your first paper, I expect you to submit an initial draft that I will not grade. You will have an opportunity to revise the paper for a grade in accordance with my comments.
- Completion of a longer argumentative essay (10-12 pages) in which you explore issues across the main texts, chosen issue across the main texts, and including the Pinker book. This paper will be due during finals week. Further instructions will be provided.
- Development of a poster related to your major essay topic, and offering a presentation about the topic. Further instructions to come.

## **Grading Weights**

Your final class grade will be calculated as follows:

Class participation: 20% (includes attendance and in-class discussion contributions)

Journaling: 10%

Three analytical essays: 45% (15% each)

Poster and presentation related to your longer argumentative essay: 10%

Final essay: 25%

## **Attendance**

Since class is a community whose value is dependent on all of its members' participation and contributions, regular attendance is important. Furthermore, class discussions will build on material from previous sessions so failure to attend can lead to greater confusion. Accordingly, I expect you to notify me if for some reason you need to miss a class.

Students will be penalized one full class participation grade for every unexcused absence above three in a semester. Excused absences require documentation from a doctor or similar health provider, police officer, probation officer, or lawyer.

## **Writing**

I place a strong emphasis on effective writing. This is a skill that proves valuable in many contexts. For example, as chair of a department that trains people for careers in public service, I commonly hear from employers that effective writing is one of the main things they are seeking in new employees. I will provide more guidance about what I am seeking from your writing assignments during the course of the semester.

The Honors faculty is aware that students come to a course such as this one with uneven writing instruction. To address this disparity, the Honors Program is adopting Norton's *Little Seagull Handbook* with InQuizitive. This is the most accessible writing guide we have found. I will assign InQuizitive training on an individualized basis to address each of your personal areas of weakness. If you do these exercises and apply the lessons you learn to your essays your writing should improve noticeably.

## **Assessing Class Participation**

Assessing class participation is challenging, and perhaps the most important thing is to have *you* think carefully about what you are offering in class. Accordingly, I will ask you to evaluate your own participation on a weekly basis. Students will score themselves on a scale from 1-10 with a 1 reflecting a failure to participate and a 10 full and respectful participation in seminar. You will need to reflect on the quality as well as quantity of your participation and to set goals for the future—and note people can make significant contributions without being among the more vocal participants in class discussion. As needed I will respond to your evaluations, with an eye toward offering advice appropriate to your situation and comfort level. At the end of the semester I will strongly consider your reflections, the goals you set, and the progress you made toward fulfilling them in making my final overall assessment of your participation.

## **Cheating**

No cheating of any sort will be tolerated in this course. All sources (primary and secondary) in papers must be cited and given appropriate credit. We will follow the university policy on academic honesty, which can be found at <http://www.csus.edu/admbus/umannual/UMA00150.htm>.

### **Students with Disabilities**

If you have a documented disability and require accommodation or assistance with assignments, tests, attendance, note taking, etc., please see me early in the semester so that appropriate arrangements can be made to ensure your full participation in class. Also, you are encouraged to contact the Services for Students with Disabilities (Lassen Hall) for additional information regarding services that might be available to you.

### **Technology Requirements**

This class is supplemented by material and assignments on SacCT. Students must have access to a computer in order to complete the course.

### **Class Schedule Summary (see information on SacCT for more details about reading assignments):**

*Note: this schedule is subject to revision depending on how class discussion progresses, student interests, etc.*

January 22 & 27: Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, chapters 1-2

January 29, February 3, 5, 10: Bernal Diaz, *The Essential Diaz*

February 12, 17, 19, 24, 26: Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

March 2, 4: Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, chapters 3-4

March 9, 11, 16, 18, 23, 25: Henry Louis Gates, *The Classic Slave Narratives*

April 6, 8, 13, 15, 20, 22: Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*

April 27, 29 & May 4, 6: Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, selections