

# ***DNA 122: Ignorance***

*Fall 2018*

Instructor: Prof. Thaddeus (Tad) Robinson

Office: Moyer 307

Phone: x3071

Office hours: Monday and Wednesday 3:30-5:00

Email: trobinson@muhlenberg.edu

Course: Tuesday and Thursday from 12:30-1:45 in Moyer 104

## **Course Materials:**

- *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo* 2nd Edition  
Plato  
ISBN: 0872206335
- A 3-ring binder and access to a three-hole punch. Some of our readings will come in the form of handouts. You will need to collect these handouts in your binder and bring them to class with you.
- Portfolio Binder: this is a 1" three-ring binder. That I will ask you to put various pieces of writing in over the course of the semester. You will ultimately turn this binder into me at the end of the semester.
- A notebook for informal writing activities.

## **Course Overview:**

We have mixed feelings about ignorance. On the one hand, we regard ignorance as something to be eliminated, dispelled, or overcome. On the other hand, sometimes we are happy to remain ignorant, and to willingly put our heads in the sand. Often we simply do not want to know, for example, how much the gift cost, how many calories the cheeseburger has, or where our products come from. In short, we also know that ignorance can be bliss. In this seminar we will take a close look at our attitudes toward information, education, and knowledge. After considering the nature of ignorance and its relationship to education, we will take up a number of related questions including: what motivates us to ignore certain kinds of information, and does this ever make sense? Do some groups, practices, or institutions strive to keep us ignorant? How so, and for what end? Exploring these questions will involve readings from a variety of disciplines including philosophy, psychology, education, communications, and political science. This seminar is writing intensive.

## **Course Goals:**

- Students will understand the fundamentals of analytical writing including thesis formulation and development, appropriate uses of evidence, and processes of revision.
- Students will enhance their critical reading skills.
- Students will understand what makes a liberal arts college distinct from other colleges and universities, and how this is reflected in the college's curriculum.
- Students will understand different senses of ignorance and how these differ from states of knowledge.
- Students will have critically reflected on the value of knowledge and education with special attention to social institutions.

## **Course Unit Instruction:**

- This class is scheduled to meet for 3 hours per week. Additional instructional activities for the course include attendance at various College lectures and events and associated writing activities/workshops distributed across the semester. Participation in these events and completion of associated activities/workshops will add an additional 14 hours of instruction.

## **Course Requirements and Policies:**

- You are expected to be prepared for class. This means not only bringing all your course materials, but also being MENTALLY and PHYSICALLY ready to engage with ideas and your fellow students for 75 minutes straight. So, before class starts make sure that you've done whatever you need to do to make yourself ready.
- Students are expected to be in class every day. Of course life sometimes gets in the way of education, and so each student is granted two absences without penalty. However, a third absence will cost a student 10% of the participation grade. A fourth absence will cost a student and additional 20%, and fifth absence will cost a student and additional 30%, and so forth. In this class there is no distinction between excused and unexcused absences—when you are absent you miss out on crucial classroom discussion—an experience that cannot be made up. This is the case whether you are absent due to illness or because you are just skipping. No student who misses more than 7 class periods will pass the course.
- Completion of the reading and homework by the date for which it was assigned.

- I will post the course syllabus and daily assignments on Canvas. If you have general questions about the course or do not know the assignment for the next class period you should consult this resource.
- I will not accept late work without an acceptable excuse. Acceptable excuses include: illness, family emergency, or some school sponsored activities. Unacceptable excuses include: sleeping in, leaving for break early or returning late, visiting a friend, going home, or going to a concert. Other circumstances will be considered on a case by case basis.
- Students with disabilities requesting classroom or course accommodations must complete a multi-faceted application/approval process through the Office of Disability Services prior to the development and implementation of an Accommodation Plan. Each Accommodation Plan is individually and collaboratively developed with the Directors or staff of the following Departments, as appropriate: Academic Resource Center, Office of Counseling Services, Student Health Services, and the office of Disability Services. If you have not already done so, please contact the director of the appropriate Department to have a dialogue regarding your academic needs and the recommended accommodations, auxiliary aides, and services.
- Students are expected to be respectful of each other and the instructor. Among other things, this means that you should silence your cell phone before class, refrain from texting, and listen when others speak.
- Students may use laptop computers in class only with explicit instructor approval. Furthermore, students for whom laptop use has been approved must sit in the front two rows of class.
- Students are expected to be familiar with the **Academic Integrity Code** and to conduct themselves in a fashion consistent with it. If you are not already familiar with the Academic Integrity Code, it can be found in full in your student handbook. In addition you can consult the Frequently Asked Questions about plagiarism at the Dean for Academic Life's website (<http://www.muhlenberg.edu/main/aboutus/dean-academic/integrity/plagiarism>). Thus, as of the start of the second class period I will presume that you are familiar with the Academic Integrity Code. Consequently, academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. If you are found in violation of the Code, there will be serious consequences and *you will be referred to the Dean for Academic Life*.
- Almost every class period we will do some **group work**. Normally, I will ask you to get together with some other students to briefly discuss a particular issue or to compare journal entries. **This is one of the most important elements of the course.** This is your opportunity to talk about what you find interesting or puzzling, to hear what your friends and colleagues have been thinking about, and more generally, to think and talk about ideas on your terms. Students who take these conversations seriously tend to get a lot out of them. Do not squander this opportunity!

- I intend to follow the timetable outlined here; however I want to be flexible so that we can speed up, slow down, or go an entirely different direction—if we need to. Consequently I will reserve the right to alter the schedule. Of course, any changes to our schedule will be announced beforehand in class.

### **Grading:**

Written work will be graded on a numerical scale, approximately corresponding to the following letter grades:

|    |         |    |        |
|----|---------|----|--------|
| A  | 93-100% | C+ | 77-80% |
| A- | 90-93   | C  | 73-77  |
| B+ | 87-90%  | C- | 70-73  |
| B  | 83-87   | D  | 60-70% |
| B- | 80-83   | F  | 59-0%  |

Final grades will be calculated based upon the following:

- **Writing Portfolio: 40%**

Over the course of the semester I will give you a variety of writing assignments and ask you to bring them to class and then place them in your portfolio. Each item in your portfolio must be titled and dated as assigned. I will collect your portfolios a few times over the course of the semester.

*Please note that portfolio items are due as assigned. Failing to complete portfolio assignments when due, and then rushing to complete them before having to turn in your portfolio counts as a violation of the Academic Integrity Code.*

- **Papers: 40%**

Paper #1: 5%  
Paper #2: 10%  
Paper #3: 10%  
Paper #4: 15%

- **Participation: 20%**

Students who regularly attend and listen attentively but never or very rarely participate will earn a C for participation. Conversing during group work counts as participation. Participation grades go up (or down) from the basic expectation of attentive listening.

Note: In order to achieve a passing grade a student must turn in the writing portfolio and all paper assignments (unless other arrangements have been made).

## Course Schedule

*I have scripted the first month of the course, but have left the rest open. We will be exploring a variety of topics, but I want to leave our schedule open to give ourselves the flexibility to work with the other DNA FYS and to pursue ideas that come up in the course of the class.*

Tues. Aug. 28<sup>th</sup>: Introduction; “Only Connect” by William Cronon

Thurs. Aug. 30<sup>th</sup>: “This is Water” by David Foster Wallace

Tues. Sept. 4<sup>th</sup>: *Euthyphro*

*Wed. Sept. 5<sup>th</sup>: Last day to add or drop a course*

Thurs. Sept. 6<sup>th</sup>: Library Scavenger Hunt

Tues. Sept. 11<sup>th</sup>: *Apology*

Thurs. Sept. 13<sup>th</sup>: *Apology*

Tues. Sept. 18<sup>th</sup>: *Republic* Book 2-3

Thurs. Sept. 20<sup>th</sup>: *Republic* Book 3-4

Tues. Sept. 25<sup>th</sup>: *Republic* Book 7

Thurs. Sept. 27<sup>th</sup>: *Republic* Book 8

Tues. Oct. 2<sup>nd</sup>: Writing Activity

*Over the course of the rest of the semester we will ready from a variety of sources which may include:*

- Immanuel Kant: “What is Enlightenment”
- Benjamin Rush: “Education for Democracy”
- Horace Mann on the Common School: “12<sup>th</sup> Annual Report”
- Carl Schurz: “Present Aspects of the Indian Problem”
- Zitkala-Sa: Selections from “American Indian Stories”
- Richard Pratt: Selections from “Americanizing the American Indians”

- Peter Turchi: “A Wide Landscape of Snows”
- Walter Lippman: Selections from *The Phantom Public*
- John Dewey: “The Challenge of Democracy to Education”
- Ilya Solmin: Selections from *Political Ignorance*
- Margaret Heffernan: Selections from *Willful Blindness*
- Jason Brennan: Selections from *Against Democracy*
- Thomas Henry Huxley: Selection from *A Liberal Education*
- Naomi Oreskes and Eric Conway: “Challenging Knowledge: How Climate Science became a Victim of the Cold War”