

**The University of Oklahoma
College of Liberal Studies
LSTD 3233 810
Humanities of the Ancient World
January 15, 22, 29, February 5, 12, 19, 26, March 4, 2008
7:30-9:30 pm
Rose State College, Midwest City
Tom Steed Center – Room 203**

Instructor: Jerry Jerman
325-1254 (office)
329-6152 (home)
jjerman@ou.edu

Course Description

A general survey to help you understand the relevance of the humanities, this hybrid course is a guided study exploring a vast period of time and activity from prehistory through the Middle Ages. We will cover a broad range of topics and, at the same time, engage in deeper explorations of areas of particular value to you as a student and as a human being.

Course Objectives

After completing this course, you will:

1. Gain a historical framework for understanding humanities from ancient times through the Middle Ages.
2. Be able to accomplish a more in-depth analysis of humanities across cultures and eras.
3. Understand how the various areas within the humanities interrelate.
4. Have an opportunity to formulate and express your own ideas about how social values are experienced through the humanities.

Textbooks and Instructional Materials

The following texts have been selected to provide you with a broad view of this complex subject. In addition to reading about art, music, architecture, history, and philosophy, you will be reading two major works of literature, works that I hope will stay with you for many years to come.

Required texts for this course

1. Dennis J. Sporre, *The Creative Impulse: An Introduction to the Arts*, 7th edition. New York: Prentice-Hall, 2005. 0131936808

2. *Gilgamesh: A New English Version* by Stephen Mitchell. New York: Free Press, 2006. 0743261690 (There are other versions available, but you will find this paperback edition one of the most readable.)
3. Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays*, Trans. Robert Fagles. New York: Penguin Books, 1984. 0-14-044425-4 (You will read only *Oedipus the King* from this book.)
4. Creation stories from other cultures. (These stories will be available on the course D2L site in advance of the first class. Print these out for our second class session.)

For additional help with your writing, the Purdue University Writing Center web site is outstanding. Find this web site at: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>. OU has a Writing Center located in the lower level of Bizzell Library on the Norman campus. You can also submit papers to this center online. The center's web site is www.ou.edu/writingcenter.

The Four-Part Structure of the Guided Self-Study

This course will meet eight Tuesday evenings in the Spring 2008 semester. There are four units of study to be completed for the course.

Class—what you can expect

Yes, you do have a life outside the classroom. On Tuesdays, before our class meetings, you probably have worked a full day and may have taken another Liberal Studies hybrid class. Because of this, you may be not particularly excited about exploring literary, religious, historical, artistic, musical, or philosophical ideas and texts. I hope to enliven these class sessions with video, recordings, slides, and other media. We will engage in discussion in class and online—and I will present some information via lecture, both onsite and online. We may take a field trip to a local museum or exhibition. At the end of each unit, you will take an online quiz. The goal is to cover this extremely broad topic as effectively as possible—and to have a good time while we're doing it!

Writing—and Its Importance

I regard writing as critically important and, as course time allows, will present concepts and approaches to help you improve your writing. In terms of writing for this class, you will write two 4-5 page response papers (see details below). I also propose that you keep a journal for this class to record your reaction to *Gilgamesh's* impossible journey, *Oedipus's* dilemma, or something you've noticed about medieval cathedrals or a tenet of Islam. This journal is not required and will not be collected or viewed by me. But it would be a way to practice your writing skills. You improve your writing by writing.

The point: After this class, you may never again be called upon to write about literature or any other art form. That's not the point. In life your opinion will be sought. You will write letters or email messages or give presentations that convey thoughts,

both deep and shallow. You will expect your audience(s) to understand clearly what you are saying. I know of no better way to learn how to organize your thoughts and communicate than to learn and practice the fine art of writing. In business and in personal interactions with others, you will draw upon this skill for the rest of your life—and it will make a difference in the *quality* of your life.

January 15-29, 2008—Part I: Beginnings

We begin with the beginnings of civilization and some well known and not so well known creation “accounts”—not to mention the famous flood story. Very early in civilization’s history, humankind demonstrated many preoccupations and concerns. We will look at the earliest known epic story, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Of particular interest to us will be the epic journey and the role of the hero.

Part I Reading (to be read before class)

Creation stories from other cultures, including the creation account from Genesis (texts provided)

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* (You need only read the epic itself, pp. 67-199, though you might find the Introduction helpful to your understanding.)

The Creative Impulse readings:

Getting Started and Putting the Arts in Context
Chapter One—The Ancient World

February 5-12, 2008—Part II: Ancient Greece

In these sessions, we will explore the world of the ancient Greeks. Sophocles’ tragic tale of Oedipus will help clarify the preoccupations, concerns, stresses, and joys of these people. How are the people of this era unlike and like us? Most important, what can we possibly learn from such a far removed world?

Part II Reading (to be read before class)

Oedipus the King (Again, you need only read the one play, pp. 155-251, but the Introduction might aid in your understanding of this classic story.)

The Creative Impulse readings:

Chapter Two: The Aegean and Archaic Greece
Chapter Three: Greek Classicism and Hellenism

February 19, 2008—Part III: The Early Middle Ages and the Rise of Islam

The Middle Ages is a convenient term for an extremely broad period of time (roughly 500-1500 CE). We will shine a light on this so-called “Dark Age,” when the church redirected everyone’s attention away from the world and toward eternity. Also, we will give some attention to the activities of an individual who played a critical role in the

creation and rise of Islam: Mohammed.

Part III Reading (to be read before class)

The Creative Impulse readings:

Chapter Six: Byzantium and Islam

Chapter Seven: The Early Middle Ages

February 26-March 4, 2008—Part IV: The High and Late Middle Ages

The Gothic cathedral, the Crusades, the works of Chaucer and Dante, and the concept of chivalry often characterize the High Middle Ages. Still, the focus is very much on the transient nature of earthly life. With the Late Middle Ages, we get the rise of secularism and increased interest in the arts and, significantly, particular artists. Very simply, this is the age that ushers in preoccupations that we still have today.

Part IV Reading (to be read before class)

The Creative Impulse readings:

Chapter Eight: The High Middle Ages

Response Papers

You will write two 4-5 page response papers for this course. For each paper, choose ONE of the topics below.

Topics for Response Paper #1 (This paper is due: February 12.)

1. Like many heroic quests, Gilgamesh's search for eternal life mirrors other journeys. In literature, these include *The Odyssey*, *Moby-Dick*, *Heart of Darkness*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, *On the Road*, *Life of Pi*, and many others. In film, we find many examples (dramatic and comic): *The Wizard of Oz*; *High Noon*; *The Matrix*; *O, Brother, Where Art Thou?*; *Sideways*; *Finding Nemo*; and more. Compare Gilgamesh's journey with that of any other hero from literature or film. (Please do not use any of the *Star Wars* films as we will likely discuss those in class.) How are these two heroes' quests similar? How are they different? What do the quests seem to say about the cultures that produced them?
2. Virtually all ancient art (especially before the classical Greeks) is integral to its religious beliefs. Select ONE work of art from the first three chapters of Sporre to illustrate this point. Describe the work and clarify how it relates to religious beliefs and practices. How does this art compare with a specific work of art produced today (Sporre deals with modern art in chapters 16 and 17)?

Topics for Response Paper #2 (This paper is due: February 26.)

1. Discuss how Gothic cathedrals reveal in monumental form the religious ideals of the Middle Ages. Focus on ONE work of sculpture or stained glass from one cathedral and examine its details. How does this artwork reveal Christian

ideology? How does this artwork serve as a teaching tool? In addition to Sporre, you may find it helpful to research online the cathedral you selected to help in your discussion.

2. Today, we often see in the media negative aspects of Islam (e.g., Islamic fundamentalists engaged in terrorism, treatment of women in some Islamic countries), but in reality Muslims have made tremendous contributions to culture. Using Sporre (you may use other sources, including online, if you choose), discuss ONE of these contributions. How specifically is civilization better for this innovation?
3. The setting of Ingmar Bergman's classic film *The Seventh Seal* (1957) is the plague-ridden homeland of a knight returning from the crusades. After viewing this film (available from Netflix and from Blockbuster and other video rental stores), deal with the following: What religious questions are raised in this film? How are these questions similar to or different from concerns of people in the Middle Ages, as outlined by Sporre? Do not summarize the film. Instead, focus on ONE key issue or question raised by Bergman in this film.

Your response papers should be typewritten, double-spaced, properly punctuated, and correctly spelled. Draw your own conclusions and observations and don't just recite what someone else has written about your topic. I am looking for thoughtfulness, originality, clarity, and general writing effectiveness. These papers should be opportunities to react thoughtfully to material you have read, looked at, or listened to. While no library research is necessary for these papers, you may choose to do some Internet research or you may need to view a film. Citations (you must have citations) should conform to *Chicago Manual of Style*, MLA, or APA style guidelines as you prefer (but be consistent). All cited sources should be identified at the end of the paper in a Works Cited section. Also, make sure your paper has a VERY SPECIFIC TITLE.

An Unfortunately Necessary Note on Plagiarism

It is unpleasant to deal with this topic because some students automatically assume that if I bring it up I do not trust them. That is not the case. I assume every student in my class is a trustworthy person of integrity. I will post on D2L and the course web site information about how properly to cite information from other sources in papers. My policy is, simply, any paper discovered to be bought or which includes unattributed material from others will automatically receive an "F." For information about OU's policy on academic integrity, see www.ou.edu/provost/integrity.

Group Presentation

In the last class meeting, you and your team are to create an original mythology. That is, you will make up a creation story, devise heroes and/or heroines, gods and/or goddesses, and embellish this mythology however you choose. You may not use

existing mythologies. I want you to think outside the box and have fun. Keep in mind that this presentation should include/address the following at a minimum:

- **Creation**—how did the universe begin, according to your mythology?
- **Heroes/Heroines**—who are some of the heroes and heroines in your mythological world? What did they do? In what ways were they heroic?
- **Gods/Goddesses**—who are some of the gods and goddesses in your mythological world? Remember, you are creating this out of nothing, so use your imaginations!
- **Relevance**—how is your mythology relevant to our lives in 2008? (VERY IMPORTANT)
- **Context**—what does your mythology say about the culture/civilization out of which it emerged? (This may require the most thought of all.) How did people live, what did they believe, what hopes did they hold, etc.? (VERY IMPORTANT)

The fairest approach is to break down your topic and divide the work among your team. Every member of the team should participate in this project!

The presentation may include music, pictures, etc.—anything to make it more interesting. PowerPoint presentations are fine. I have had groups create game shows, tests, movies, ancient storytelling reenactments, epic poems, songs, and other activities to teach the class. Essentially, your group becomes the instructor of the class during your presentation. Your grade will be based on preparation, creativity, originality, thoughtfulness, information conveyed, how you address the relevance/context issues, and use of the time.

Discussion

Students will be required to respond to seven posted discussion topics. Each student must initiate at least three responses; four responses may be initiated or may be responses initiated by another student.

Course Deadlines

2/12/08	Response paper #1(4-5 pages) due
2/26/08	Response paper #2 (4-5 pages) due
3/4/08	Group presentation delivered in class

Grading

You will receive a letter grade for this class. Grading is based on:

1. four quizzes (40% of grade)
2. two response papers (30%)
3. one group presentation (20%)
4. at least six responses to posted discussion topics (10%)

I do not award credit simply for being in class. I assume, barring some emergency, that you will attend class and that you will turn in assignments. It is not my intention or

wish to “flunk” students. However, grades are required to measure your course progress, and I will issue grades based on my assessment of your course accomplishments. I do not give “A”s for effort.

You may appeal to me any grade you feel is unfair or undeserved. A proper grade appeal will come in the form of a typewritten request. In this request, you must explain why you believe the grade is an inaccurate reflection of your abilities and should be changed. Grade appeals via phone or in person will not be considered. After receiving your grade appeal, I will make a judgment objectively based on the merits of your case. If I decline to change the grade, your next step will be to initiate a formal grade appeal through the Dean of the College.

Team Cooperation

There is only one graded team assignment in this course: the group mythmaking project. Everyone in your group should be in accord about the topic choice. All should be involved in researching/preparing for/presenting the topic. As mentioned above, I am open to all forms of presentations—PowerPoint, overheads, videos, etc.—as long as your technologies are compatible with those available on the Rose State campus.

Part of the purpose of this team assignment is to create opportunities for you to learn and sharpen your team building and team participation skills. Also, this is an opportunity for you to build confidence in your writing and presentation skills.

It is not my place or purpose to oversee your team’s cooperation and development. If you believe a team member is not performing assigned tasks, it is your responsibility as a team to deal with that situation. If your team experience is unfruitful and frustrating for you, and if you feel your grade suffered accordingly, you may do additional work in order to boost your grade. However, since this program revolves around teamwork, you should make every effort to be a cooperative and productive member of your team.

Instructor: Jerry Jerman

I was born and raised in Oklahoma City. I received a B.A. (English) from Oklahoma City University, an M.A. (English) from the University of Iowa, and an M.F.A. (writing) from Bowling Green State University. Currently, I am Director of Development for University Outreach, which includes the Colleges of Continuing Education and Liberal Studies. I have written six published children’s books, edited books on residential continuing education and adult degree programs, and am managing editor of *Confluence: The Journal of Graduate Liberal Studies*. In addition to Liberal Studies courses, I have taught English at Oklahoma City University and Bowling Green State University, workshops about writing and marketing, and film classes for OU.

Each college instructor you encounter has unique strengths and interests. My own background falls in literature rather than other areas of the humanities, though I have some experience with art, film, religion, and history. If you are curious about my

preferences, the following list of literary, historical, musical, and filmed works have particular meaning for me.

Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*
James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*
Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Creators*
Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*
Joseph Campbell (with Bill Moyers), *The Power of Myth*
Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*
Werner Herzog (dir.), *Aguirre, the Wrath of God*
Hermann Hesse, *Siddhartha*
Alfred Hitchcock (dir.), *Rear Window*
Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go, There You Are*
Malcolm X (with Alex Haley), *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*
Wright Morris, *A Life*
Joyce Carol Oates, many of her short stories
Georgia O'Keefe, many of her New Mexico paintings
Roman Polanski (dir.), *Chinatown*
Popular music by Steely Dan, Rolling Stones, Talking Heads, Frank Sinatra
Daniel Quinn, *Ishmael*
Philip Roth, *The Breast*
Leonard Shlain, *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess*
Ben Shahn, many of his paintings of social commentary
Orson Welles (dir.), *Touch of Evil*

For me, the great mystery of life—and its humor—is aptly captured in this remark from author Saul Bellow:

There are many skeptical, rebellious, or simply nervous writers all around us, who, having existed a full twenty or thirty years in this universe, denounce or reject life because it fails to meet their standards as philosophical intellectuals. It seems to me that they can't know enough about it for confident denial. The mystery is too great. So when they knock at the door of mystery with the knuckles of cognition it is quite right that the door should open and some mysterious power should squirt them in the eye.