HONORS 2110A
INTELLECTUAL TRADITIONS OF THE WEST IN THE CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL ERAS:
THE MEANING OF LIFE

Fall Semester 2020 Dr. Katie Nelson (History) and Marc Nelson (Philosophy)
TR 1:30-2:45 pm katenelson2@weber.edu
Stewart Library 325 marcnelson@weber.edu

Course Description: Since the dawn of civilization humans have approached the question of the meaning of life in many different ways. This interdisciplinary course surveys the ideas, literature and events that characterize antiquity and the middle ages in the Western world. Students will read ancient and medieval philosophical works, epic poems, and religious texts alongside modern scholarship on mythology, exploring the West’s diverse interpretations of the meaning of life.

Big Questions: This course is part of the revitalized WSU General Education program. GE courses introduce students to academic disciplines through important “big questions” (BQ). At their core, “big questions” provide students the opportunity to integrate and apply their knowledge of the discipline to address a significant personal, social, or professional issue. GE courses also introduce students to underlying foundational knowledge and intellectual tools that run through all academic areas and are part of the ongoing preparation to address real world problems. This course asks the big question, “What is the meaning of life, and why are there so many different answers?”

Required Texts:
Danny P. Jackson, The Epic of Gilgamesh, A Verse Rendition (Bolchazy-Carducci, 1997)
Joseph Campbell, Myths to Live By (Penguin, 1993)
David Eagleman, Sum, Forty Tales from the Afterlives (any edition)
Plus primary source readings available online or in class, as scheduled below

Course Objectives:
This interdisciplinary course aims to help students better understand the intersection of ancient and medieval western civilizations and their philosophies. At the end of this course students should be able to demonstrate an increased ability to:

• understand the interactions between individuals and their socio-cultural environments, and examine one’s own perspective in this broader context
• appreciate the interrelationship of history and ideas, and the multiple perspectives from which the meaning of life can be addressed
• comprehend abstract arguments and be able to move between the general and the particular
• think critically in an open-minded and objective way, as free as possible from prejudice and presupposition
• demonstrate knowledge of diverse philosophical, linguistic and literary traditions, as well as of key themes, concepts, issues, terminology, and ethical standards in human cultures
• analyze cultural artifacts across disciplines, time periods, and cultures
• effectively communicate all of the above in written, oral, and graphic forms

Assignments:
**No late assignments will be accepted**; you are always welcome to turn assignments in early. One extra credit assignment may be completed at the end of the term to replace your two lowest scores. Your grade will be determined by the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points each</th>
<th>Subtotal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly academic analyses and peer-reviews</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Signature Assignment</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Three quizzes</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>150</td>
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<tr>
<td>One optional extra credit project</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>(50)</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
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<td><strong>575 points</strong></td>
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**Academic Analyses**: To help you read deeper and think harder, each week you’ll be given a question about the week’s reading on which to write an analysis. These are due on Canvas every Tuesday by class time (1:30 pm), with the exception of the last week of class (see schedule). Your analysis should demonstrate your critical evaluation of the assigned readings (not a summary of the text). There is no strict length requirement, but as a general guide, aim for about 400 words per essay. **Missed analyses cannot be made up for any reason.** (15 points each)

**Peer Reviews**: Research shows we learn best from each other. So, each week you’ll be randomly assigned two fellow classmates’ analyses to peer review. Read the analyses by Thursday class time (1:30 pm), and leave constructive comments. What ideas did you find insightful? How eloquently were the ideas presented; how clearly was their argument structured? Did they use examples from the reading to support their argument? Do you have any positive suggestions for future analyses? (10 points each)

**Extra Credit**: at the end of the semester, one optional extra credit project may be completed to replace your two lowest analysis scores. More details in class.

**Quizzes**: Three quizzes throughout the semester measure your absorption and synthesis of the content discussed in the preceding weeks. These will be taken in any campus testing center on designated days, instead of coming to class. Expect multiple choice, matching, fill-in-the-blank, and short essay questions. The third quiz will be taken during Finals Week, but is no more significant than the previous quizzes.
Signature Assignment: All WSU General Education courses have “signature assignments” (SA) that require you to integrate and apply course content to address a big question. Near the end of the semester you will read a collection of short stories that symbolically illustrate a different meaning of life. Write your own short story in the same vein that symbolically illustrate a meaning of life for you. More details and parameters TBA.

Meanings of life Chart: Throughout the semester, the class will work as a team to create an infographic which presents all the Western world’s various “meanings of life” in a vivid and interesting way. The aim is two-fold: to synthesize all we have learned and discovered all semester; and to inspire average folks to engage with these big ideas we’ve charted. The infographic will be printed on posters or t-shirts for students to display.

Grading Scale:

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<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94-100%</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>80-82.99%</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>66-69.99%</td>
<td>D+</td>
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<tr>
<td>90-92.99%</td>
<td>A-</td>
<td>76-79.99%</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>63-65.99%</td>
<td>D</td>
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<tr>
<td>86-89.99%</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>73-75.99%</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>60-62.99%</td>
<td>D-</td>
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<tr>
<td>83-85.99%</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>70-72.99%</td>
<td>C-</td>
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CLASS SCHEDULE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug 25</td>
<td>Introductions</td>
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<td>Syllabus</td>
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<td>Aug 27</td>
<td>“Pre-test” essay</td>
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<td>Class discussion: What is the meaning of “What is the meaning of life?”</td>
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<td>Sep 1</td>
<td>Analysis due by 1:30:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Campbell Chapter 1</td>
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<td>Class discussion</td>
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<td>Sep 3</td>
<td>Peer Review test run by 1:30</td>
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<td>Early Humans</td>
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<td>Sep 8</td>
<td>Analysis due by 1:30:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Campbell Chapter 2</td>
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<td>Class Discussion</td>
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<td>Sep 10</td>
<td>Peer Review due by 1:30</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mesopotamia</td>
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<td>Sep 15</td>
<td>Analysis due by 1:30:</td>
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<td>Epic of Gilgamesh</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Class Discussion</td>
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<td>Sep 17</td>
<td>Peer Review due by 1:30</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Gilgamesh discussion, cont’d</td>
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<td>Sep 22</td>
<td>Analysis due by 1:30:</td>
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<td>Sep 24</td>
<td>Peer Review due by 1:30</td>
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<td><strong>QUIZ 1 in testing centers</strong></td>
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| **Gilgamesh**  
Class Discussion, cont’d | **Ancient Egypt** |
|---|---|
| **Sep 29**  
Analysis due by 1:30:  
Book of the Dead  
Class Discussion | **Oct 1**  
Peer Review due by 1:30  
Ancient Hebrews |
| **Oct 6**  
Analysis due by 1:30:  
Genesis  
Class Discussion | **Oct 8**  
Peer Review due by 1:30  
Ancient and Classical Greece |
| **Oct 13** UNOFFICIAL FALL BREAK | **Oct 15** UNOFFICIAL FALL BREAK |
| **Oct 20**  
Analysis due by 1:30:  
Diogenes and Epicurus  
Class discussion | **Oct 22**  
Peer Review due by 1:30  
Ancient Rome |
| **Oct 27**  
Analysis due by 1:30:  
Epicure, The Art of Living  
Class discussion | **Oct 29**  
Peer Review due by 1:30  
Versions of Jesus: Early Christianity  
**Quiz 2 in testing centers** |
| **Nov 3**  
Analysis due by 1:30:  
Apocryphal gospels  
Class discussion | **Nov 5**  
Peer Review due by 1:30  
The “Dark Ages”  
Anglo-Saxons and Vikings |
| **Nov 10**  
Analysis due by 1:30:  
Beowulf (or other saga)  
Class Discussion | **Nov 12**  
Peer Review due by 1:30  
The High Middle Ages:  
monks, the church, and power |
| **Nov 17**  
Analysis due by 1:30:  
Aquinas’ First Cause Argument  
Class Discussion | **Nov 19**  
Peer Review due by 1:30  
The Age of Chivalry  
Begin reading *Sum* |
| **Nov 24**  
(No analysis due)  
(continue reading *Sum*)  
Black death and the Crusades  
Finalize Chart Structure | **Nov 26** THANKSGIVING: NO CLASS |
Dec 1
Signature Assignment due by 1:30: Write your own “Sum Story”

Dec 3
Analysis due by 1:30: Campbell Chapter 12: No More Horizons
Class Discussion: finding common ground
Extra Credit Presentations

Dec 7-10 (finals week)
QUIZ 3 in testing centers

Please Note:

Any form of cheating or plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students engaging in unethical behavior will be prosecuted to the full extent of the statues of the university. Blatant plagiarism will result in automatic failure of the course!

Any student requiring accommodations or services due to a disability must contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) in Room 181 of the Student Services Center, or by phoning 801-626-6413. SSD can also arrange to provide materials in alternative formats if necessary.

Emergency Closure: If for any reason the university is forced to close for an extended period of time, we will conduct our class via Canvas. Look for announcements on Weber e-mail and/or the Canvas Notification board. Code Purple is a good way to be alerted to campus closures.

WSU subscribes to Turnitin.com, an electronic service that verifies the originality of student work. Enrollment in this course may require that some or all of your assignments be submitted to Turnitin this semester. Documents submitted to Turnitin are retained, anonymously, in the company’s databases.