

Honors 2130A (HU)

Great Ideas of the East: The Meaning of Life

T/Th 10:30-11:45

Zoom Tuesdays, in person Thursdays (Library 325)

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Course Description: The question of the meaning of life has meant many different things to different people throughout the history of humanity. This interdisciplinary course surveys the ideas, literature and events that characterize the various approaches to this question in East Asia and India from the beginning of human civilization through the 21st century.

Post-COVID times are wild, right?!

Our class will be held on Zoom on Tuesdays, and in person on Thursdays. Attending class on Tuesdays will require you to use a computer or smartphone with a camera and microphone to participate. If you don't have one, you can check one out at WSU.

You can find Weber State's updated guide to all related campus policies and technology requirements [HERE](#).

And [HERE](#) is a summary of WSU's policies regarding recording, inclusivity, disability accommodations, plagiarism, etc.

Big Questions: This course asks the big question, "What is the meaning of life?" General Education courses introduce students to academic disciplines through important "big questions." 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.

Required Texts:

The Bhagavad Gita, a Walkthrough for Westerners. Translated by Jack Hawley, 2011 (important to get this translation)

Herman Hesse, *Siddhartha*, 1957 (any edition is fine, including audiobook)

Lao Tzu, *Tao Teh Ching*, translated by Charles Muller. 2005 (important to get this translation)

(Other primary source readings available online or in class)

Optional Text:

Patricia Monaghan & Eleanor Viereck, *Meditation, the Complete Guide*, 1999 (revised edition)

Course Objectives:

This interdisciplinary course aims to help students better understand the intersection of Eastern history, culture, ideas and intellectual movements, and relate them to our own lives, communities and modes of thought. 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

Honors Program Learning Outcomes:

- practice clear and compelling written and/or creative expression;
- engage in critical thinking that is open-minded, objective, and as free as possible from prejudice and presupposition;
- undertake the comprehension of abstract arguments and the ability to move between the general and the particular;
- encounter a variety of human experience, exploring both its universality and its diversity.

Humanities General Education Learning Outcomes:

- demonstrate knowledge of diverse philosophical, communicative, linguistic, or literary traditions, as well as of key themes, concepts, issues, terminology, and ethical standards in humanities disciplines.
- analyze cultural artifacts within a given discipline, and, when appropriate, across disciplines, time periods, and cultures.
- demonstrate the ability to effectively communicate their understanding of humanities materials in written, oral, or graphic forms.

Grading

Ready Player 1!

In this class we are using a **gaming model** to measure your growing knowledge and experiences over the semester. There will be many ways to earn XP (experience points) this semester, and the number of XP you accrue will determine your final grade (see charts below). Once XP are earned, they can never be lost; your total only goes up. You can choose which activities you want to undertake to earn XP, giving you the freedom to learn and express your knowledge in a way that best suits you.

The one assignment that is **required** is the end of semester Signature Assignment: Gangnam Style!

Opportunity

Ave. XP each Approx. Subtotal

Reading Notes/Infographics (12)	5	60
Analyses (10)	10	100
Evaluations/Reflections (12)	5	60
Daily Meditation (98)	2	196
Mini Study Abroad (~12)	varies	~120
Memes (12)	5	60
Maps (12)	5	60
Unit Quizzes based on class material (3)	50	150
Signature Assignment: Gangnam Style	100	100
TOTAL XP POSSIBLE		906

Here's how your XP translates to grades at the end of the semester.

- A 500 XP +
- A- 480-499 XP
- B+ 460-479 XP
- B 440-459 XP
- B- 420-439 XP
- C+ 400-419 XP
- C 380-399 XP
- C- 360-379 XP
- D+ 340-359 XP
- D 320-339 XP
- D- 300-319 XP
- E 299 XP and below

Most XP Opportunities have an expiration date; late submissions are not accepted; you are always welcome to submit them early.

UNDERSTANDING EACH TYPE OF XP OPPORTUNITY

Reading Notes/Infographics: Studies show that if you take notes by hand and make them artistic, you'll be more likely to remember what you read! For each reading, you can create hand-written notes involving some method of making them aesthetically pleasing. Draw pictures, use different colors and organization. At the very least, you can use boxes, circles, arrows, brackets, etc. to make it more than just words. Alternatively, you can choose to create an infographic that visually portrays the most important information from the reading.

Analyses: To analyze an artifact is essentially to figure out what that thing is about, or what it's trying to say. For each reading (or podcast episode or video) that you have the opportunity to read, you'll have the opportunity to analyze it. This will help you read deeper and think harder. Be sure to read each specific analysis opportunity description. Often you'll be asked to write a short analytical essay, but sometimes you'll be asked to create something different like a letter, a script or a chart. Creativity in those instances is encouraged. Submission for these XP opportunities are due at class time on the day we discuss that source.

Evaluations/Reflections: We want you to personally engage with the readings as much as possible, and often that means disagreeing with them. We haven't chosen the particular readings we assign because we necessarily agree with them. We chose them because they are engaging, thought-provoking and significant in the history of Eastern thought. When evaluating ideas, you should, of course, discuss your own personal thoughts on the subject, but also attempt to remain as objective as possible. Attempt to assess your own reactions as scrupulously as you assess the ideas in the readings. The process of evaluating a source should be as much an exploration of yourself and your beliefs as an exploration of historical ideas.

Meditation: To the Eastern mind, intellectual understanding will only take you so far. To fully understand the truth of Reality (and ideally become unified with that Reality) you also need to cultivate some kind of intuitive, non-conceptual understanding. In English we refer to these practices collectively as meditation. You are strongly encouraged to meditate for at least 15 minutes every day for the duration of this course. Collectively, meditation is the biggest source of XP. However, this is not only a great opportunity to earn lots of XP but a great opportunity to benefit yourself physically and mentally, and perhaps spiritually! A regular meditation practice has been scientifically proven to result in all kinds of physical and mental benefits including reducing stress, improving sleep, improving concentration, decreasing blood pressure and so on.

Each day that you meditate you earn 2 XP. You'll snap a quick selfie for proof and keep a meditation journal where you'll write down some thoughts afterward. Ponder things like whether the session helped calm you or center you. Were your thoughts relatively rampant? Or slow? (Neither is bad or wrong; the important thing is simply to notice.) What were some of your thoughts like? Did you notice any physical or mental effects?

Every week you will learn a new type of meditation to work with. Post your "selfies and sentences" to the relevant assignment once a week.

Mini Study Abroad: Learning about something in a classroom is one thing, but experiencing it for yourself out there in the world will have a deeper and longer-lasting impact. Most weeks you'll have the chance to earn 10-20 XP by going on a field trip or other type of experience. These will range from visiting Ogden's Buddhist temple to visiting the Hindu temple in Spanish Fork to baking a historical dish at home. Due dates vary since some of these trips take time to plan.

Memes: Once a week you can create an original meme (i.e. one you invented and created yourself, not one you found) that is relevant to the week's subject. Up to 5 XP each. Have fun with this one!

Maps: Each week you'll have the opportunity to draw and label a map related to the week's material. Be sure to read the specific requirements for each individual map assignment. Up to 5 XP each.

Quizzes: Big XP Opportunities. Three quizzes throughout the semester will measure your absorption and synthesis of the content from class lectures and discussions in the preceding weeks. These will be taken at a testing center on designated days. They are not cumulative and

there will be no time limit. Expect multiple choice, matching, fill-in-the-blank, and short essay questions.

Gangnam Style! (Signature Assignment): All WSU General Education courses have “signature assignments” that require you to integrate course content and apply it to a big question. Near the end of the semester you will create a "sacred text" in the style of one of the primary sources we examined that conveys in a creative way your answer to the Meaning of Life. **Audience:** Imagine that your Sacred Text will influence millions to come. You are addressing the masses. **Intellectual Tools:** Creativity and abstract philosophical thinking will be explored and learned over the course of the semester. Draw on these two intellectual tools as you write your Sacred Text.

More details and parameters of the Signature Assignment will be found in the assignment on Canvas.

Meanings of life Chart: Not an XP opportunity. Just fun! Throughout the semester, the class will work as a team to create an infographic which presents the Eastern 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 have charted. In the past the infographic has been printed on t-shirts or sweatshirts for all of us.

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 statutes of the university.

Plagiarism in this course will result in an automatic zero for the assignment. Blatant plagiarism may result in automatic failure of the course. If you're unsure what constitutes plagiarism, check out [this](#) website for an explanation of plagiarism and the technology Canvas uses to detect it. Note that even if only a part of a submission is plagiarized, and even if you weren't aware it is plagiarism, the consequences are the same.

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 Copyleaks, an electronic plagiarism and AI detector that verifies the originality of student work. Enrollment in this course may require that some or all of your assignments be submitted to Copyleaks this semester. Documents submitted to Copyleaks are retained, anonymously, in the company’s databases.