

CLS 101/201, *Knowledge and Community*

Syllabus, Spring 2017

Course Description

The purpose of *Knowledge and Community* is to provide an exciting and challenging introduction to college studies that will help you expand your intellectual interests, improve your critical thinking and communication skills, and enjoy conversation in a community of learners. The University Seminar core course considers ideas and texts from the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences to explore the major course themes: knowledge, identity and community.

This course is different from many other MSU courses. It is small and approaches the subject matter from multi-disciplinary perspectives. It gives you an opportunity to work closely with a faculty member and other first-year students. The course is designed to engage you in university life and college-level learning through reading, thinking and dialogue.

This course emphasizes speaking and thinking in classroom discussions. It will help you practice communicating your thinking in a small group setting, and help you develop, maintain, and enhance effective listening skills. It will also give you an opportunity to improve your ability to read critically and communicate effectively in writing. It fulfills the University Seminar (US) CORE curriculum requirement.

This course is not repeatable.

University Seminar Core Rationale

Courses with University Seminar (US) CORE designation are primarily intended for first-year students throughout all curricula to provide a platform for collegiate level discourse. Activities that hone written and oral communication skills are universally incorporated, but the themes represented in individual US CORE courses vary considerably to reflect the department or program from which the course originates. All US CORE courses are small in size and rely heavily on seminar-style teaching where course content is delivered by discussion and interaction rather than by lecture. US CORE courses provide a venue where students can enjoy rigorous academic discussions that promote critical thinking, learning, and understanding in a supportive and truly collegiate manner.

Through completion of the US CORE, students will:

- Demonstrate critical thinking abilities
- Prepare and deliver an effective oral presentation
- Demonstrate analytical, critical, and creative thinking in written communication

CLS Seminar Course Goals

1. Improve your ability to:

- speak effectively about your ideas in class
- take charge of your education by asking and exploring your own questions
- prepare and deliver a thoughtful oral presentation
- listen effectively
- understand diverse points of view
- read critically and interpret texts

- write a thoughtful college paper about your ideas
2. Strengthen habits of critical thinking
 3. Expand your interests in the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences
 4. Come to know a faculty member and other students well
 5. Enjoy the discussion of ideas in a community of learners

Required Books and Readings

At the Bookstore

J. Brockman, *This Will Make You Smarter*
 M. Desmond, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*
 A. Gawande, *Better: A Surgeon's Notes on Performance*
 E. Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*.
 Plato, *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito*. Translated by F.J. Church
 K. Schulz, *Being Wrong*
 L. Tohe, *No Parole Today*

On D2L

C. N. Adichie, “We Should All Be Feminists” (video)
 R. Gay, “Bad Feminist”
 R. Grant, “The Ethics of Talk”
 Martin Luther King, “Letter from Birmingham Jail”
 R. Solnit, “Men Explain Things To Me”

Why are we reading this?

All readings are selected because they relate in some way to the central course questions, and because they provide an approach, methodology, or disciplinary perspective found in the disciplines represented in the College of Letters and Sciences.

Why learn through discussion and not lecture?

Everyone in the course is a learner, including the faculty. Faculty will be reading texts outside their disciplines. They, like you, will be exploring new ideas and unfamiliar readings. Faculty, as expert learners, will model skills such as critical reading, reflection, and organization of information. This is an opportunity for you to explore and develop these skills, approaches, and attitudes by practicing them yourself in class discussion. How can you best process and learn from the views of others? How can you best express and enhance your own views?

Central Course Questions

1. What does it mean “to know”? What does it mean “to be wise”? What is “truth”?
2. What is the nature and function of conversation? How does it relate to our acquisition of knowledge and our understanding of truth?
3. How can we recognize and question our own preconceived notions and develop a better understanding of the world and our place in it? How do preconceived notions influence our actions?

4. What is human nature? What shapes our identity?
5. What is a good life for humans? What is a good way for humans to live?
6. What is a responsible citizen? How should a responsible citizen act?
7. What are the roles and responsibilities of teachers and students in society?
8. What responsibilities do citizens have for thinking critically about their society? What responsibility do we have to act for the good of society?

Course Activities

1. **Seminar Discussions.** Participation in discussions in small seminars is vitally important to this course. Each seminar section will serve as an intellectual community where you can exchange ideas with other people who are reading and thinking about the same subject and who bring their own unique perspectives to class discussions. You will have many opportunities to discuss your own questions and interests in the seminar.
2. **Readings.** The course readings are indispensable and one of the most important components of the course. Your responsibility is to read the course texts, think about them, and prepare to discuss them in class.
3. **Written Assignments and Oral Presentations**
 - a) **Reading Responses/Weekly Writing Assignments.** You will write short essays (about 300-600 words) that respond to ideas in the course readings. The essays will help you prepare for classroom discussions and will often be shared with everyone in the class.
 - b) **Oral Presentations.** You will give short presentations on the first readings, as well as in the middle, and at the end of, the semester. Topics will be assigned by your instructor.
 - c) **Mid-Term Paper.** You will write one paper (typed, double-spaced, 2-3 pages), drawing on at least one of the course readings.
 - d) **Final Paper.** You will write a final paper (typed, double-spaced, 4-5 pages), drawing on at least two of the course readings.
 - e) **Art Viewing Project:** As a class, you will visit an art exhibit and view and analyze the artwork. You will write about the artwork in a 2-page essay or equivalent creative project.
 - f) **Final Discussion.** The final exam is a discussion of the course readings, and your final paper, with your instructor. The 20-minute discussion takes place during exam week and is scheduled individually with your instructor.

Student Responsibilities

1. Attend all classes and meetings. Your instructor may have a specific attendance policy. For example, in some seminars, absences result in a lower final grade.
2. Be courteous, respectful, and civil to faculty and other students. This means, at a minimum, arriving on time, not having side conversations during discussion, turning off your cell phone, and not packing up and getting ready to leave before the end of class.
3. Know the syllabus and course requirements, including assignments, well.
4. Prepare for class by doing the assigned reading in advance.
5. Bring the readings – books and articles – to class. If the reading is online, your instructor may allow you bring an electronic device to access it, but be prepared to use some of your printing funds to print the articles, as you will need to refer to them during discussions.
6. Check D2L at least every 48 hours. Your instructor may post important announcements on D2L, and you are responsible for knowing that information.

7. Complete all the oral and written assignments.
8. Participate actively in class discussions.
9. Let your faculty know if you are having problems in the course.
10. Adhere to the highest standards of academic honesty. At the least, *plagiarism*, deliberately using someone else's language, ideas, or other original material without acknowledging your source, will result in failing an assignment. This policy applies to texts published in print or on-line, to manuscripts, and to the work of other student writers. Depending on the severity of the offense, a person who engages in academic dishonesty may fail the course and/or face further disciplinary action by the university.

Grading Summary

The course grade is comprised of the following:

1. Engaged class participation (including attendance and reading responses)	500
2. Oral Presentations (first, midterm, and final)	175
3. Mid-Term Paper	100
4. Art Viewing Project	50
5. Final Paper	125
6. Final Discussion	50
Total	1000

The final grade will be calculated as follows:

930-1000 = A
 900-929 = A-
 870-899 = B+
 830-869 = B
 800-829 = B-
 770-799 = C+
 730-769 = C
 700-729 = C-
 670-699 = D+
 630-669 = D
 600-629 = D-
 <600 = F

Failure to complete all course assignments or to meet course expectations may result in a failing grade for the course.