

General Studies 145ZA: Encounters

Whitman College – Fall 2012

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Mon. 2:30-4:00 & Thu. 1:00-3:00

Course Description

(My Version)

This is a multi-, cross-, and inter-disciplinary course of Great Works about Big Ideas (which does *not* imply that they're the *greatest* works and the *biggest* ideas!). Our material is profound, which means that it's both difficult and rewarding. These are works that are worth examining for their own sake, and also because they have had significant impact on the development of human culture and understanding. They're *that* good. (And note that this course is moving toward geographic and cultural inclusiveness, but isn't all the way there yet. So the majority of our works are still "Western," but that's no longer its sole focus.)

This course is also meant to be an introduction to some (but not all!) of the academic skills that you'll need to succeed in college: close reading, insightful textual analysis, productive discussion, and clear and compelling writing. Its small size and continuity across the semesters should help you make sustained progress on those skills. So in both content and form, this course is intended to be a (not *the!*) foundation or "core" of your work at Whitman.

And actually, the development of the skills can't be separated from the examination of the content: only Great Works about Big Ideas require close reading and insightful analysis through group discussion and writing. And what, exactly, it takes for the reading, analysis, discussion, and writing to be successful will be dictated by the particular ways in which the works are great and the ideas are big. In other words, there are no set formulas for analysis in discussion and writing; they'll need to be tailored to each particular work.

Course Goals

- To develop your skills of close reading and critical analysis of texts which are very difficult and often conceptually distant.
- To create a fun and supportive conversational space in which you are encouraged by both your peers and by me to be intellectually ambitious and vulnerable.
- To create an intellectually stimulating environment that encourages you to discover "the life of the mind" from out of the power of your own insights into these formative texts.
- To retool your high school writing skills by having you work on your writing process, focusing on how to have an idea that you are genuinely intellectually invested in, and how to develop and support that idea through carefully structured analysis and writing.

Class Format

One of the main purposes of Encounters is to help students *personally engage* difficult texts like the ones we read and view. While I will sometimes present background information, alternative interpretations, or so on, those occasions will be rare and brief. The bulk of our class time will be spent actively working with the readings and the larger issues that they suggest, through whole-class and small-group discussions and other activities. More details about expectations for individual participation are provided on a separate handout.

For this class to work, everyone in the room must be *fully mentally present*. Turn off your cell phone, put away your other work, and really focus on the conversation. If you find that you're too distracted by something else or too drowsy to concentrate, you should simply (and unobtrusively) step out of the room. Otherwise, I may interrupt class to ask you to leave.

E-Mail

- I will often distribute important announcements, reminders, and clarifications through e-mail. One of your responsibilities for this course is to *check your Whitman e-mail account every day*.
- We will continue to use the list-server from last semester. Messages sent to gens146zb_12sp@lists.whitman.edu will be forwarded to everyone in our section.

Required Texts

Hacker, Diana. *A Pocket Style Manual*. 5th ed. rev. New York: Bedford / St. Martin's, 2009. Print.

[Note: A new edition is now available. You are welcome to upgrade if you'd like, but aren't required to.]

A good dictionary (You can't understand the readings if you don't know what the words mean!)

The Bhagavad-Gita. Trans. Barbara Stoler Miller. New York: Bantam Classics, 1986. Print.

Euripides. *The Bacchae*. Trans. William Arrowsmith. *Euripides V*. Ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959. Print.

Gandhi, Mohandas. *Selected Political Writings*. Ed. Dennis Dalton. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996. Print.

Homer. *The Odyssey*. Trans. Robert Fagles. New York: Penguin Books, 1996. Print.

Marx, Karl. *Selected Writings*. Ed. Lawrence Simon. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994. Print.

New Revised Standard Version of the Christian New Testament [any edition that you like].

The Qur'an. Trans. M.A.S. Abdel Haleem. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. Print.

Seneca. *Selected Letters*. Trans. Elaine Fantham. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. Print.

Spiegelman, Art. *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1973. Print.

---. *Maus II: A Survivor's Tale: And Here My Troubles Began*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986. Print.

Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985. Print.

Summary of Requirements and Grading

- Preparation & Participation 25 %
- Three Weekly Paragraphs 5 % total
- First One-Text Essay 7½ %
- First Two-Text Essay 15 %
- Second One-Text Essay 12½ %
- Second Two-Text Essay 25 %
- Writer's Statement in Final Portfolio 10 %

(Detailed explanations of each of these components are provided on a separate handout.)

**** NOTE: You *cannot* pass the class if:**

1. You miss 9 or more class meetings *for any reason*.
2. You miss or fail any of the essays *for any reason*.
3. You miss or fail the final portfolio assignment.

Academic Honesty

All of the work that you submit in this course must be entirely your own. You have signed a statement indicating that you understand and will abide by the College policy on academic honesty and plagiarism, and you will be held responsible for it. Of course, you can seek help in a variety of ways as you prepare your paragraphs and essays. But it is not permitted for you to use someone else's words or ideas in your written work without giving proper acknowledgment. Even if it's an accident, it's still plagiarism!

If you are unsure what, exactly, constitutes plagiarism, you should make it your business to find out: (re)read the statement you signed and the relevant part of the Student Handbook, talk with your academic adviser, and/or talk with me. If you are unsure how to include proper citations, you should consult Hacker's *Pocket Style Manual*.

Plagiarism will *not* be tolerated in any form. All cases of plagiarism will be reported to the Office of the Dean of Students. A student with a prior violation of Whitman's policy on academic honesty and plagiarism will have a hearing with the Council on Student Affairs, and may face expulsion from the College. A student without any prior violation of Whitman's policy on academic honesty and plagiarism will receive a zero for the assignment, and will also still need to complete it at a level comparable to her or his other work in order to receive a passing grade for the course.

Schedule of Readings & Assignments

Wed. Aug. 29	<i>Bhagavad-Gita</i> , teachings 1-2
Fri. Aug. 31	<i>Bhagavad-Gita</i> , teachings 3-6
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Mon. Sep. 3	<i>Bhagavad-Gita</i> , teachings 7-12
Wed. Sep. 5	<i>Bhagavad-Gita</i> , teachings 13-18
Fri. Sep. 7	Homer, <i>The Odyssey</i> , books 1-4
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Mon. Sep. 10	Homer, <i>The Odyssey</i> , books 5-8
Wed. Sep. 12	Homer, <i>The Odyssey</i> , books 9-12
Fri. Sep. 14	Homer, <i>The Odyssey</i> , books 13-16
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Mon. Sep. 17	Homer, <i>The Odyssey</i> , books 17-20
Wed. Sep. 19	Homer, <i>The Odyssey</i> , books 21-24
Fri. Sep. 21	Spiegelman, <i>Maus I</i> , chs. 1-3
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Mon. Sep. 24	Spiegelman, <i>Maus I</i> , chs. 4-6
Wed. Sep. 26	Spiegelman, <i>Maus II</i> , chs. 1-2 * first one-text essay due
Fri. Sep. 28	Spiegelman, <i>Maus II</i> , chs. 3-5
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Mon. Oct. 1	<i>Tanakh</i> , Genesis 1-5 * revision of first one-text essay due
Wed. Oct. 3	<i>Tanakh</i> , Genesis 6-16
Fri. Oct. 5	<i>Tanakh</i> , Genesis 17-22
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Mon. Oct. 8	NO CLASS (Fall Break)

- Wed. Oct. 10 *Tanakh*, Exodus 1-24
- Fri. Oct. 12 *Tanakh*, Amos
* participation self-evaluation due
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- Mon. Oct. 15 Euripides, *The Bacchae* 1-911
- Wed. Oct. 17 Euripides, *The Bacchae* 912-1394
- Fri. Oct. 19 Euripides, *The Bacchae*, re-read all
* **first two-text essay due**
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- Mon. Oct. 22 NRSV Bible, Luke 1-12
- Wed. Oct. 24 NRSV Bible, Luke 13-24
* **revision of first two-text essay due**
- Fri. Oct. 26 excerpt of Ibn Ishaq, "The Life of Muhammad" (handout)
The Qur'an 1, 96:1-5, 112, 113, 114, 2:255, and 24:35
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- Mon. Oct. 29 *The Qur'an* 11, 14, 29, 37, and 54
- Wed. Oct. 31 *The Qur'an* 35 (all), 2:29-39, 2:117, 7:10-36, 7:54, 7:189, 20:116-123, 23:12-14, and
79:27-33
- Fri. Nov. 2 *The Qur'an* 2
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- Mon. Nov. 5 Seneca, *Selected Letters*, 16, 18, 21, 27, 77, 84, and 90
- Wed. Nov. 7 Seneca, *Selected Letters*, 8, 9, 48, and 63
"On the Private Life" (handout)
- Fri. Nov. 9 Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, pp. 56-79
* **second one-text essay due**
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- Mon. Nov. 12 *Preface to a Contribution on the Critique of Political Economy*, pp. 209-13
Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, secs. I-II and IV (pp. 158-76 and 185-6)
- Wed. Nov. 14 Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, cont.
* **revision of second one-text essay due**

Fri. Nov. 16 NO CLASS (Mitch in prison)

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Mon. Nov. 26 Gandhi, *Selected Political Writings*, pp. 35-7, 41-2, 44-5, 51-7, and 69-71

Wed. Nov. 28 Gandhi, *Selected Political Writings*, pp. 32-4, 86-8, 98-100, 103-7, 121-2, 135-7, 148-50

Fri. Nov. 30 Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (available on-line)

** Sun. Dec. 2 @ 7:00 – screening of *The Battle of Algiers* in Library 317 (Center for Teaching & Learning)

Mon. Dec. 3 *The Battle of Algiers*
* participation self-evaluation due

** Tue. Dec. 4 @ 7:00 – screening of *The Battle of Algiers* in Library 317 (Center for Teaching & Learning)

Wed. Dec. 5 *The Battle of Algiers*, re-watch all

Fri. Dec. 7 *The Battle of Algiers*, cont.

*** Wed. Dec. 12 @ NOON – FINAL PORTFOLIO DUE**

(= second two-text essay + writer's statement + supporting materials)

Assignments & Expectations

One of the guiding principles of the design of Encounters as a whole is that the deepest engagement and insight about these very challenging texts and issues come about through **dialog**: each of us articulating ideas and questions about the texts in relation to the ideas and questions of others. This begins orally through the discussions and other activities in class, and continues in writing through your essays and the feedback on them. Improving our understanding of the texts goes hand-in-hand with improving our skills of discussion and writing. Thus, this course focuses on **discussion and writing as vehicles for textual analysis**. The different components of your grade, and the criteria for determining them, are designed to foster and evaluate that linkage.

PREPARATION & CLASS PARTICIPATION (25% of your final grade)

Last semester's handout stated: "A successful conversation is one that generates new ideas, which are more sophisticated, provocative, and insightful than the ideas that any one person had beforehand. This will require openness and good will from the entire group, and thoughtful contributions by as many people as possible. It will also require different kinds of contributions: proposing interpretations, offering links to the text, making connections to others' ideas, posing questions about what is still vague or unclear, presenting potential complications or counterevidence, playing devil's advocate in order to bring in overlooked points of view, and taking intellectual risks by voicing ideas that may still seem questionable."

I think that our experiences last semester confirmed those points, and I hope that we'll all work on building from the collective progress that we made. **Don't fall back into old patterns!** Every one of us can improve her or his involvement in class, and contribute more effectively to the conversational goals just reiterated. If you were quieter last semester, you can work on ways of getting more actively involved more regularly. (And this semester, I really will just call on people we haven't heard from in a while!) If you were more vocal last semester, you can work on ways of being more selective in your contributions and bringing others more fully into the conversations.

And of course, there's always room for everyone's contributions to be even more thought-provoking and insightful. That will require thorough and careful preparation before class, to begin identifying and developing your own genuine insights about the texts. For the first few weeks, the paragraph-assignments will naturally help you do that. But for the remainder of the semester, you'll need to find the practice(s) that are most effective for you, and then commit to following them. I'll continue to provide focal questions in advance of our discussions; it will then be your responsibility to put in the effort to use them productively so that your participation can help advance our collective understanding as much as possible.

The grading standards for class participation are again provided below. As before, your participation grade will be determined in part by a process of *self*-evaluation. I continue to believe that conscious attention to your involvement in class, and my feedback about it, should help you, and the class as a whole, improve as the year goes on. I will also be happy to meet with anyone at any point to talk about strategies for improving your participation.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS – OVERVIEW

As explained in the “Assignments & Expectations” sheet distributed at the beginning of last semester, the assignments for this section have been designed based on the acceptance of several fundamental principles:

1. Outstanding writing requires a conscious understanding of writing itself.
2. There are different aspects of academic writing that can be worked on separately.
3. Significant improvement requires risk-taking and experimentation.
4. Evaluation should recognize a process of development.

Those principles continue to guide my approach to the course, and this semester’s assignments have also been designed with them in mind.

In addition, there are several more specific goals that this semester’s assignments are designed to promote:

- **Students should work on longer, multi-text papers...**
That kind of work is fundamental to this course as well: we’re not just interested in understanding each particular text on its own, but also want to bring them into contact with each other.
- **...but without falling into shallow comparisons...**
There’s a real danger that a comparison of two (or more) texts will be no more than a list of superficial similarities and/or differences, with little real interpretive insight. To be blunt: an obvious claim about one text and an obvious claim about another text don’t magically become interesting when they’re combined. What’s need, then, is to find something interesting about *each* text on its own, which then becomes *more* interesting through their interrelations. To help that happen, the two-text essays this semester will be developed out of shorter essays you’ve already written about a single text.
- **...and with some help to build up to them.**
Writing a good multi-text essay is significantly more complicated than writing a good single-text essay, and so I don’t think it’s something that can reasonably just be dropped in your lap without adequate preparation. That’s another reason why the two-text essays will be built from shorter one-text essays that you’ve already written and gotten my feedback on.
- **Students should continue to work on editing and rewriting.**
A third goal in having you expand two of your single-text essays into longer multi-text essays is to help you take material that you’ve already worked with in one way, and to see it again (the literal meaning of re-vision) and rework it accordingly. As well, for all of the essays during the semester you will go through (at least) two complete drafts, with a process of peer-editing in between to help you identify key changes that you should (or shouldn’t) make.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS – DETAILS

Three Polished Paragraphs (5% of your final grade)

As I mentioned at the beginning of last semester, the paragraph is the basic intellectual unit of academic writing. A paragraph should make and support a single main point, whether it's standing alone or part of a larger essay.

While there was general improvement in the weekly paragraphs over the course of last semester, the key aspects didn't become quite as habitual as they need to be. Even at the end of the semester, there were occasional problems with focusing on a single main point, stating that point explicitly in the topic sentence, and providing careful textual and argumentative support for that main point.

So, you will begin the semester by going back to the basics of passage-based freewriting (or, with my permission, some other pre-writing technique) to generate your own insight about the text, and composing a polished paragraph to express and support that insight. You should pay very close attention to the features just mentioned, so that they become automatic, almost second-nature in all of your writing.

The paragraphs will be graded on the same 10-point scale as last semester. It is necessary for you to complete both parts to receive a passing grade for that week, but the grade itself will depend only on the quality of the polished paragraph. The three scores will be averaged to yield your grade for this component.

Two One-Text Essays (7½ % and 12½ % of your final grade)

Two Two-Text Essays (15 % and 25 % of your final grade)

For the reasons explained earlier, the essay-assignments will work as pairs: you will first compose a complete essay of about 1000 words focusing on any one of the recent texts, and then after we have read several additional texts you will revise and expand the earlier essay to address a second text. That process will be repeated in the second half of the semester.

As before, I'll distribute some prompts at least a week before each one-text essay is due. But to make sure that your essay will be able to be expanded to address a second text, your specific topics will need to be approved by me in advance. For the two-text essays, it won't be possible for me to distribute prompts; you'll need to identify your starting-point coming out of the previous essay.

For both of the one-text essays and the first two-text essay, there will also be a required process of editing and revision, based on feedback from two of your peers. I will set up the groups and provide guidance for the editing process, to try to make it as effective as possible.

With each essay you will again be asked to submit an "Author's Note," discussing your perception of the essay's specific strengths and weaknesses in relation to your previous work. That note, and my feedback on it, will help you continue to develop the self-awareness that's a necessary foundation for exemplary academic writing, and for the "Writer's Statement" at the end of the semester.

The essays will be evaluated according to the features and goals identified in the course's Standards for Exemplary Writing (included below).

Writer's Statement and Final Portfolio (10% of your final grade)

As in the spring, your final assignment will be to compose a detailed statement about your understanding of what exemplary writing is, and to analyze your continued progress toward that goal. All of the claims that you make about your writing will again need to be illustrated with analysis of specific passages from your work. You may draw on the full range of writing that you've done: paragraphs, pre-writing, drafts, and the one- and two-text essays.

More details will be distributed toward the end of the semester.

EXTENSION POLICIES

If you find yourself in an extraordinary circumstance, such as a prolonged illness or family emergency, you should first talk with one of Whitman's Powers That Be (Dean of Students, Counseling Center, etc.). In that case, I will be willing to make any reasonable accommodation to help you get back on track.

Under normal circumstances, these are the policies that will govern the course:

- (a) Weekly Paragraphs** – Students who will miss class or be unable to complete an assignment for any reason should talk with me *in advance* to make other arrangements to complete that assignment. Accommodations will *not* be made after the fact.
- (b) First Versions of Mid-Semester Essays** (both one-text essays and the first two-text essay) – Because of the peer-editing process (see above), extensions won't generally be possible on the initial drafts of the essays. If you find yourself in a real bind, you should talk with me as far in advance as possible, and I might (or might not!) be able to work out a way for you to have a little extra time.
- (c) Revisions of Mid-Semester Essays and Final Portfolio** – Each student will begin the semester with a "bank" of **7 late-days**, which can be used throughout the semester for any reason or no reason at all. There is no need to let me know in advance when you plan on using them – you may simply hand in one or more of the revised essays late, up to a total of seven days. **Note** that the final portfolio absolutely cannot be submitted later than 4:00 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 14, even if you have additional late-days in your bank.
A 'late-day' is a 24-hour period, starting from the moment the essay is due. Using any part of a late-day removes it from your bank; fractions aren't saved. So, for example, a paper submitted immediately after the class when it's due and a paper submitted at 9:59 a.m. the next day both use up one late-day from the bank.
Once the bank is used up, late assignments will not be accepted for credit. You would still have to complete the assignment in order to pass the course, but it would count as a zero in your overall grade. So, I urge you to *use your bank very carefully!* So, I recommend that you *use your bank very carefully!*

Class Participation Standards

As with any conversation, you can't usefully participate in class if you don't have anything to contribute. So it is essential that you come to our meetings prepared:

- Read (and often re-read) the assigned text carefully before class.
- Use the weekly paragraph prompts and other questions posed as opportunities to pursue some of the interpretive challenges and possibilities of the texts. Take time to identify key ideas and passages in response. And above all: *don't settle for easy answers!*
- Identify further questions, themes, and ideas to discuss that stem from your own interests and insights.

With eighteen of us in the room, no one person needs to talk all of the time. As long as you are regularly involved in the discussion, the *quality* of your contribution is much more important than the *quantity* of time that you're speaking. There are many different ways of contributing, all of which are very important. You should work to find the forms of participation that are most effective for you. At the same time, I hope that you don't settle into a rut, but rather try different forms of participation on different occasions.

I understand that everyone has good days and not-so-good days; some of the readings and conversation topics will engage you more than others. Your participation grade will be based on your overall involvement throughout the semester. These are the grading criteria that will be used:

An **OUTSTANDING** participant (A-level) typically:

- Displays genuine enthusiasm and engagement with the texts.
- Plays a leadership role and advances the conversation to new levels.
- Contributes complex insights into the texts and issues.
- Draws connections among the different texts and issues.
- Raises provocative new questions, issues, and ideas.
- Enhances the participation of others by questioning, actively listening, and sharing time.

A **GOOD** participant (B-level) typically:

- Shows interest and effort.
- Actively listens and volunteers.
- Stays on-topic and furthers the conversation.
- Expresses substantial, text-based ideas.
- Asks good questions about the texts and issues.
- Engages other students, not just me.

An **ADEQUATE** participant (C-level) typically:

- Listens but does not volunteer.
- Shows acquaintance with the texts and some signs of preparation if called on.
- Offers opinions on the text, but without specific textual references or other support.

UNACCEPTABLE (failing) behavior includes any of the following:

- No evidence of preparation.
- Dozing off in class. (If you're that sleepy, you should simply go home and take a nap!)
- Other signs of total disengagement: doodling, working for another class, etc.
- "Toxic" or hostile behavior that undermines our intellectual community.

Standards for Exemplary Writing in Encounters

Exemplary analytical writing is clear, smooth, provocative, and compelling. Those are the results of the essay as an effective unity. Even so, as mentioned above, there are different aspects of an essay that can be identified and worked on (somewhat) separately.

Here is a list of the main components of an analytical essay, along with the features of each component that would make it truly exemplary. This is the ideal you should strive to meet, and against which your writing will be evaluated. (The percentages in parentheses are the weightings that will be used in determining your essay grades.)

Insight (20%)

- The essay begins from a careful and accurate understanding of the text(s).
- The essay presents an intellectually demanding analysis that is both controversial and significant in an academic context.
- The scope and framing of the analysis are appropriate for the course and the assignment.
- The different points of the analysis are unified into a single, coherent viewpoint.
- The analysis is fully developed: complexities of the text are acknowledged and addressed, and implications are worked out.

Organization and Structure (30%)

- The overall argument of the essay is divided into clear, logical steps, which match the paragraph divisions.
- The major steps of the argument build in a systematic order, based on the inherent logic of the thesis.
- The introduction prepares readers for the essay's topic and approach, and clearly identifies the thesis.
- There are clear and accurate "signposts" that identify and link the main steps of the argument.
- The discussion within each paragraph flows smoothly and logically.
- The title of the essay is engaging and informative.
- The conclusion brings closure to the analysis and situates it in a broader context.

Evidence and Argument (30%)

- The argument is appropriately thorough and comprehensive.
- The textual evidence presented is specific and directly relevant.
- The impact of all textual evidence is effectively supported through interpretive argument.
- The textual evidence and interpretive argument are strategically chosen, and deployed where and how they're needed.
- Quotations are used when, and only when, they're truly needed. They are well-controlled and smoothly integrated into the discussion.
- Paraphrases are clear, accurate, and focused.

Expression (10%)

- The essay is written in an appropriate academic voice.
- Choices in language and phrasing are correct and precise.
- Sentences and paragraphs show command of language and variation in rhythm and structure.
- The personal voice of the writing enhances the development of the argument and the experience of the reader.

Mechanics (10%)

- The essay fully matches the formatting directions of the assignment.
- The essay conforms to accepted conventions of grammar, punctuation, spelling, and capitalization.
- Quotations, in-text citations, and the list of works cited conform to MLA conventions as described in *Hacker's Pocket Style Manual*.
- The essay is carefully proofread.