

SCLA 101: Transformative Texts

Critical Thinking & Communication I: Antiquity to Modernity

Theme: Wisdom, Virtue, and the Good Life

Professor

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Office Hours: T/TH (3 – 5 pm) or by appt

Meeting Details

Days: Tuesdays & Thursdays
Time: 12:00 - 1:15 pm
Place: Beering Hall B242
Course: SCLA 10100 – 118

Course Description

This course will introduce you to some of the great works of the Western tradition, emphasizing their conceptions of wisdom, virtue, and the good life. Through sustained engagement with the Homeric, Jewish, Platonic, Aristotelian, Christian, and Stoic traditions, you'll reflect on the kind of life you hope to lead and the habits of mind and action you'll need to do it. Expect to read, think, and write a lot while sharpening your ability to communicate clearly, precisely, and persuasively. If you take this course seriously, it will put you on the path to becoming a reflective and genuinely interesting person—not merely an employable one.

Required Texts (these exact editions)

1. *The Odyssey*, by Homer
2. *The Bible*, NRSV
3. *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, by Plato
4. *The Nicomachean Ethics*, by Aristotle
5. *Anthem*, by Ayn Rand

Requirements

Weight

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| • Participation | 10% |
| • Class Presentation | 10% |
| • Weekly Video Reading Responses | 20% |
| • Exam 1 (Thursday, Feb. 12 Blue Book) | 15% |
| • Exam 2 (Thursday, Mar. 12 Blue Book) | 20% |
| • Final Exam (TBA Blue Book) | 25% |

SCLA 101 Learning Outcomes

Written Communication

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

1. Write with clarity, coherence, and concision across multiple genres, producing 5,000 – 11,000 words of polished writing (or 12,000 – 18,000 words including drafts).
2. Understand and respond effectively to rhetorical situations, making deliberate choices for different audiences and contexts.
3. Demonstrate critical thinking about writing through close reading, analysis, discussion, composition, and revision across genres.

4. Apply a clear understanding of the writing process to organize ideas and communicate effectively.
5. Identify, analyze, and evaluate the claims and arguments of diverse sources.
6. Engage critically with transformative texts, drawing on individual, historical, and contemporary perspectives.

Information Literacy

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

1. Conduct research using effective search strategies to locate relevant sources.
2. Determine the scope and quantity of information needed to address a well-designed research question.
3. Summarize, synthesize, quote, and document sources accurately using an appropriate citation style.
4. Critically evaluate sources for quality, accuracy, bias, authority, and relevance.
5. Understand the historical, ethical, and cultural contexts of both research questions and the sources used to address them.
6. Demonstrate a clear understanding of intellectual property, including fair use, plagiarism, and copyright.

Attendance

Attendance is required. You get three (3) no-questions-asked “freebie” absences for the semester. No need to email or explain (no doctor’s notes, no funeral programs). These are excused absences. Their purpose is to cover unexpected but justified absences (illness, a death in the family) without requiring you to disclose personal details. Any additional absence (unless it’s official University business) reduces your participation grade by two percentage points per class. Use your freebies wisely.

No Technology Policy

SCLA 101 classrooms are device-free zones. Phones, tablets, and laptops are not allowed. If you use a device during class, you will be marked absent for the day.

Participation

Participation begins by carefully reading the assigned text before each class. You’ll then need to contribute to class discussion: ask a question, offer a comment, or take a stab at an idea. If you’re shy, that’s fine. You can earn participation credit later in the semester once you’re more comfortable, or by visiting office hours, chatting after class, or engaging over email. You don’t need to speak up constantly to earn a high participation grade. Quality matters, too. Ideally, you’ll aim for both. Sometimes you’ll say something that doesn’t quite make sense. That’s fine. Philosophy is hard. Struggling out loud is part of the process. Make your best effort even if you’re unsure. That’s how you learn literally anything—trying and failing until you get it.

Weekly Video Reading Responses

For each class meeting, there is an assigned reading. Each week, you’ll select one of them and submit a 1 – 5 minute video response on Brightspace. (Zoom makes this easy, but you can use any recording tool(s) you like, including your phone.) Only I will see your video.

Your response is due *before* the start of the class in which we discuss that reading. (Brightspace locks the assignment the moment class begins.) For example, if you respond to Tuesday’s reading, you must upload your video before 12:00 p.m. on Tuesday. Once you submit a Tuesday response, you’re done for that week. If you choose the Thursday reading, your video is due before 12:00 p.m. on Thursday. **No late submissions.** The point of the assignment is to ensure that you’ve read and thought carefully about the text *before* class so you’re ready to participate *in* class.

Your Brightspace directions say, “In 1 – 5 minutes, respond intelligently to one of this week’s assigned readings.” “Responding intelligently” can take many forms, including: critiquing an author’s argument, raising an objection to an author’s view, defending an author’s argument against a powerful objection, criticizing or defending a character’s actions or moral judgment, criticizing or defending an author’s moral judgment, identifying an interpretive ambiguity, noting a philosophical or narrative inconsistency, intelligently expressing

puzzlement about something in the text, tracing the implications of an author’s view for the present day and assessing its plausibility, or drawing an illuminating comparison or contrast with another text we’ve read. This list is far from exhaustive. See the Reading Response Guide for further guidance.

Outside research is neither required nor desired. Just read the text and respond to it. You’re a college student, not a scholar or literary critic. I’m looking for a thoughtful, college-level response, nothing more.

Crucial: Your response must be **based on the required edition** of the assigned text. Somewhere in your video, you must **cite the exact page number** and clearly indicate the passage that prompted your response. **If you do not do this, you will not receive credit.**

Big Picture: Make it unmistakable that you’ve read and thought carefully about the assigned text.

Chatbots: The Policy

Submitting AI-generated work as your own is academic dishonesty and carries the same penalties as [plagiarism](#). If any part of your assignment is produced by a chatbot (ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Grok, etc.), you will be reported to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities for review of your standing at Purdue.

Chatbots: The Policy’s Justification

Imagine a strength coach tells a client, “Do some deadlifts.” The client replies, “OK, but in the real world, we have forklifts to lift heavy stuff. So, shouldn’t I be allowed to use one?” The strength coach should respond, “You don’t get it. The point of lifting weights isn’t to move heavy stuff from A to B. It’s to build bodily strength—your capacity to move heavy stuff without technology. You build strength by lifting weights yourself, not by outsourcing the work to a machine. So, no forklifts. Get to work.”

Same for this class. I’m your academic coach. My job is to help you strengthen your thinking, writing, and speaking. The assignments are your mental exercises—workouts for your mind. If you ask me, “Why can’t I use AI to complete my assignments? In the real world, AI answers all my questions!” I’ll respond, “You don’t get it. The point of the assignments isn’t to generate a bunch of papers for me to grade. It’s to improve your thinking, writing, and speaking—your capacity to do these things without technology. You build these capacities by completing the assignments yourself, not outsourcing the work to a machine. So, no AI. Get to work.”

Freedom of Inquiry and Expression Policy

Students are encouraged to exercise their right to free inquiry and expression. Any idea relevant to the course content is fair game. You’re responsible for learning the course material, but you’re not required to agree with it. Your grade will reflect the quality of your academic work, not the positions you take. You are free to challenge, question, or withhold judgment on any position we discuss, especially on matters of conscience or controversy. When you encounter ideas you find offensive, immoral, or misguided, you’re encouraged to engage them with reasons, evidence, and argument. However, threats, harassment, or conduct that disrupts the learning environment will not be tolerated and will be reported to the Office of the Dean of Students.

Office Hours & Accessibility

I’m happy to meet during office hours to talk about course assignments, course material, or anything else. My office hours and location are listed at the top of the first page of this syllabus. If those times don’t work, email me to arrange an alternative in-person or Zoom meeting.

I’m committed to making this class fully accessible. If there’s anything I can do to support your access needs, let me know, or (if you prefer) have the Disability Resource Center contact me on your behalf.

Grading Scale

A: 94 – 100	A-: 90 – 93	B+: 87 – 89	B: 84 – 86	B-: 80 – 83	C+: 77 – 79
C: 74 – 76	C-: 70 – 73	D+: 67 – 69	D: 64 – 66	D-: 60 – 63	F: < 60

Course Reading Schedule

Homeric Wisdom and Virtue

Genre: Epic Poem

Week 1	Jan. 13	What's Wisdom? Virtue? The good life? (no assigned reading)
	Jan. 15	Homer, <i>Odyssey</i> (Books 1 – 3)
Week 2	Jan. 20	Homer, <i>Odyssey</i> (Books 5, 6, 9)
	Jan. 22	Homer, <i>Odyssey</i> (Books 10 – 12)
Week 3	Jan. 27	Homer, <i>Odyssey</i> (Books 13, 16, 17, 19)
	Jan. 29	Homer, <i>Odyssey</i> (Books 21 – 24)

Aristotelian Wisdom and Virtue

Genre: Prose Treatise

Week 4	Feb. 3	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (Book 1, skip chapter 6)
	Feb. 5	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (Book 2)
Week 5	Feb. 10	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (Book 3, chapters 6 – 12)
	Feb. 12	Exam 1

Jewish Wisdom and Virtue

Genre: Ancient Wisdom Literature

Week 6	Feb. 17	<i>Proverbs</i> (Chapters 1 – 10)
	Feb. 19	<i>Proverbs</i> (Chapters 11 – 16, 31)
Week 7	Feb. 25	<i>Ecclesiastes</i>
	Feb. 27	<i>Job</i> (Chapters 1 – 9, 38 – 42)

Socratic Wisdom and Virtue

Genre: Dialogue

Week 8	Mar. 3	Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i>
	Mar. 5	Plato, <i>Apology</i>
Week 9	Mar. 10	Plato, <i>Crito</i>
	Mar. 12	Exam 2

Week 10 Mar. 17 Spring Break (no class)
 Mar. 19 Spring Break (no class)

Christian Wisdom and Virtue

Genre: Ancient Biography, Epistle

Week 11 Mar. 24 *The Gospel of John* (Chapters 1 – 10)
 Mar. 26 *The Gospel of John* (Chapters 11 – 21)

Week 12 Mar. 31 *Epistle to the Philippians*
 Apr. 2 *Epistle of James*

Stoic Wisdom and Virtue

Genre: Handbook

Week 13 Apr. 7 Epictetus, *Enchiridion* (Chapters 1 – 29, pp. 1 – 7)
 Apr. 9 Epictetus, *Enchiridion* (Chapters 29 – 52, pp. 7 – 13)

Critics of Western Wisdom and Virtue

Genre: Novella, Political Handbook, Treatise

Week 14 Apr. 14 Ayn Rand, *Anthem* (Parts 1 – 6)
 Apr. 16 Ayn Rand, *Anthem* (Parts 7 – 12)

Week 15 Apr. 21 Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* (pp. 1 – 13)
 Apr. 23 Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* (pp. 14 – 24)

Week 16 Apr. 28 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (pp. 829 – 32)
 Apr. 30 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (pp. 833 – 40)