

**The Human Situation: Antiquity**  
ENGL 1370 (Lecture) / HON 2301 (Discussion)  
Syllabus

As part of their liberal education, all students in the Honors College at the University of Houston take our two-semester course, “The Human Situation.” We begin the study of our cultural heritage by examining important texts from the cultures of antiquity, including Near Eastern, Greek, Roman, South Asian, East Asian, Christian, and Islamic works. Our modern world is deeply rooted in these cultures, which have their origin and inspiration in the epic poetry, philosophy, classical drama, literature, poetry, politics, and foundational religious texts of the ancient world. These key texts (or “classics”) present us with compelling, if not always harmonious insights into aspects of our “human situation” – the excellences proper to our nature; the character of a soul; ethical dilemmas we confront as human beings; and our embedded obligations to family, friends, lovers, strangers, and the divine. The profound ancient thinkers concerned themselves with the elaboration, criticism, and reconciliation of these powerful insights, and in doing so initiated a dialogue that reflects upon the intriguing question of how we ought to live. This shared conversation concerns essential matters for human beings, and thus for being human.

### **Course Objectives**

This course, comprised of both lecture and discussion, satisfies several university and state Core Objectives and Core Area Option requirements. It demands close reading, critical thinking, and effective writing with respect to assigned readings and thereby promotes **critical thinking skills** in students, through the cultivation of creative thinking, innovative inquiry, sound reasoning, deliberate analysis and evaluation, and coherent synthesis of the course content. This course also requires students to develop their **communication skills** through the expression of our ideas and formulation of interpretations in class discussions, small-group projects, oral examinations, and writing assignments. Successful completion of these requirements strengthens the ability to examine opinions, choices, actions, and consequences within the framework of ethical decision-making, thus enhancing a concept of **personal responsibility**. Finally, because good writing shapes our critical thinking as well as communication skills, the course focuses attention on the academic essay as an invaluable means to study The Human Situation. With the discovery and articulation of interpretive questions and thesis claims, and the construction of textually grounded and well-structured arguments, students learn to write using correct, clear, and concise prose in a style appropriate to the topic, occasion, and audience. This capacity is vital to meeting the challenge, which all of our students face, of effectively and persuasively **writing in their disciplines**.

### **Course Policies**

#### **EXPECTATIONS AND ETIQUETTE**

For both lecture and discussion, students are expected to complete the assigned readings in advance of meetings. In lecture as well as discussion, faculty encourage and welcome appropriate and relevant questions, and students should be prepared to respond to questions directed to them by faculty. The institutional tradition of the course includes conventions designed to reduce distractions during lecture. For purposes of attendance, lecture seating will be assigned. The use of electronic devices (cell phones, computers, tablets, ipads, etc.) is prohibited during lecture; remember to silence devices before the start of class. Lecturers begin and end class sessions on-time, so get to your seat promptly and do not begin packing up until the session has ended. If you arrive late, do not enter at the lower level in front of the lecturer; enter the lecture hall through the rear doors on the upper level, and be sure the heavy doors do not slam shut behind you. Do not record lectures without the explicit permission from the lecturer on that day. In discussion sections, each faculty will provide specific guidelines for classroom etiquette. Class accommodations should be directed to team leaders (for lecture) or to faculty (for discussion).

### **University Policies**

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) help students who have difficulties managing stress, adjusting to college, or feeling sad and hopeless. Students access CAPS details online ([www.uh.edu/caps](http://www.uh.edu/caps)), or by calling (713-743-5454) both during and after business hours, for routine appointments or if you or someone you know is in crisis. “Let’s Talk” provides quick access to informal, confidential consultations with convenient locations around campus, open hours, and no appointments necessary ([www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets\\_talk.html](http://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets_talk.html)).

## Course Assessment

Students receive two grades for their work in this course, corresponding to 3 credit hours for lecture and 3 credit hours for discussion. The lecture grade is mainly based on a cross-graded lecture paper, mid-term exam, lecture attendance, and an oral final exam with a professor other than your own. The discussion grade is based on work done in individual sections, including all written assignments. Faculty discussion leaders assign both grades and will provide a separate Supplement to this syllabus indicating how each grade will be calculated. Any questions or concerns about grades should be directed first to discussion faculty, and thereafter to team leaders.

## **WRITING PROGRAM**

The Human Situation course features a coordinated writing program comprising writing lessons and workshops, and customized materials. In-class writing instruction is provided by faculty and supported by peer tutoring and, in some cases, students will be directed to the university's writing center. This intensive writing program aims to elevate both the stylistic and critical facets of students' writing to the level appropriate for Honors and writing in the disciplines. Students are required to complete substantive writing assignments that total at least 3000 words, or 12 typed pages, including at least one major writing assignment completed outside of class that is graded and returned with written comments from faculty evaluating grammar, style, and content.

## Course Procedures

Due to very high enrollment numbers each semester, this course is divided into 2 teams: "Alpha" and "Omega." Each team has a distinct set of faculty and assigned readings. Lecture meetings for both teams take place in the lecture hall on Monday and Wednesday each week. Alpha meets at 11am, and Omega meets at noon. Discussion sections meet 3 hours each week on different days and times, and in different classrooms on campus.

### **Alpha**

**THEME:** "Reciprocity"

#### **FACULTY**

Richard Armstrong  
 Laura Bland  
 Hayan Charara  
 Ricky Garner  
 Dustin Gish  
 Brandon Lamson  
 Robert Liddell  
 Johanna Luttrell  
 Iain Morrisson (Team Leader)  
 Tamler Sommers  
 David Tucker  
 Danny Wallace

#### **BOOKLIST**

Homer, *The Odyssey*  
 NRSV Bible: Genesis  
 Sophocles, *Elektra*  
 Aristophanes, *Assembly-Women*  
 Plato, *Apology & Crito*  
 Ovid, *Metamorphosis*  
 Seneca, "On Mercy"

#### **STUDENT ASSISTANT**

Thien Nguyen ([alphata@uh.edu](mailto:alphata@uh.edu))

### **Omega**

**THEME:** "In the Beginning"

#### **FACULTY**

Brian Apicella  
 Michael Barnes  
 Carol Cooper  
 Jamie Ferguson  
 Gregory Han  
 Larry Lyke  
 David Rainbow  
 Jesse Rainbow (Team Leader)  
 Max Rayneard  
 Marina Trninic  
 Robert Zaretsky

#### **BOOKLIST**

*Epic of Gilgamesh*  
 Homer, *The Odyssey*  
 NRSV Bible: Genesis & Matthew  
 Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*  
 Plato, *Apology*  
 Livy, *Early History of Rome*

#### **STUDENT ASSISTANT**

Jennifer Koshy ([omegata@uh.edu](mailto:omegata@uh.edu))

For both teams the required books must be purchased in assigned editions; no alternative editions are allowed. Both booklists with precise ISBN numbers are available online ([www.uh.edu/honors/human-situation/book-list](http://www.uh.edu/honors/human-situation/book-list)).