

# CLS 101/201US, *Knowledge and Community*

## Syllabus, Fall 2014

Instructor \_\_\_\_\_

Office \_\_\_\_\_

Office Hours \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Info \_\_\_\_\_

### **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. The course 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 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. This learning environment promotes vibrant interactions between first-year students, a faculty member, and in many courses, a more experienced student fellow. 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. Know a faculty member and other students well
5. Enjoy the discussion of ideas in a community of learners

## **Required Books and Readings:**

1. Plato, *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito*  
Translated by F. J. Church
2. Yousafzai, *I am Malala*
3. Tohe, *No Parole Today*
4. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*
5. Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect*
6. Sacks, *Hallucinations*
7. Pang, *The Distraction Addiction*
8. Gawande. *Better: A Surgeon's Notes on Performance*
9. King "Letter from Birmingham Jail"  
(on reserve)
10. Grant, "The Ethics of Talk" (on reserve)
11. Finch "The Wilderness Experience"
12. Turkle "The Tethered Self" (on reserve)
13. Leonhardt "The College Dropout Boom" (on reserve)
14. Abbey, "The Serpents of Paradise"  
(on reserve)
15. Rick Bass "The Silent Language"
16. Popova "Art as Therapy" (on reserve)
17. Ramachandran & Hirstein "The Science of Art" (on reserve)

## **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 of 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 meta-cognition, reflection, organization of information, and positive, effective development of successful strategies to maximize learning in themselves and others. 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, students, and the academy 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 350-600 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 in the 5<sup>th</sup> week of class, as well as in week 11 and in the final week of classes. Topics will be assigned by your instructor.
  - C) **Mid-Term Paper:** You will write one paper (typed, double-spaced, 3-4 pages), drawing on at least two of the course readings.
  - D) **Final Paper:** You will write a final paper (typed, double-spaced, 3-4 pages), drawing on at least three 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 your final paper and course readings 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 conferences. Your instructor may have a specific attendance policy. For example, in some seminars, absences result in a lower final grade.
2. Be courteous 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. Treat all members of the seminar with respect and civility.
4. Prepare for class by doing the assigned reading in advance.
5. Complete all the oral and written assignments.
6. Participate actively in class discussions.
7. Let your faculty know if you are having problems in the course.
8. 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 (attendance, reading responses, listening, preparation, discussion)	500
2. Oral Presentations (e.g., first presentation, mid-term and final presentation)	175
3. Mid-Term Paper	100
4. Final Paper	125
5. Art Viewing Project	50
6. Final Discussion	50
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Total:	1000 points

The final grade will be calculated as follows:

A	930-1000	B-	800-829	D+	670-699
A-	900-929	C+	770-799	D	600-669
B+	870-899	C	730-769	F	0-599
B	830-869	C-	700-729		

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

If you have a documented disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation(s), you are encouraged to contact your instructor and the Office of Disability, Re-entry and Veteran Services.