

*First Year Humanities Seminar, Fall 2021*

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## **"Knowing Yourself: Becoming A Person from Ancient Greece to Modern Europe"**

### **Course Description**

How do we know what a person is? What does it mean to say "I am me" and "you are you"? How do shifting cultural values and new ideas impact what shapes the way we see ourselves and others and what we believe about the relationship between the individual and their community?

This course looks at the development of ideas of the 'self' and what it means to be human in European thought, starting with early representations in Ancient Greece and moving through Western intellectual history to twentieth-century Deconstruction, Poststructuralism, Critical Feminist, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality, the Indigenous Pluriverse and beyond. While this course is centered around the concept of the 'self' in European thought, it also offers a crucial exploration of the construction of "Europe" and "western" cultures over time through the creation of individual and group identities.

We will start with the exploration of self and society in Homer's *Odyssey* and then move through literary and philosophical reflections on what it means to be a person in what was once called the "western tradition". (To be clear, we will engage in examining the notion of the "western tradition" critically). This course will pay special attention to the way that challenges to 'traditional' notions of personhood and humanity have contributed to dynamic and at times violent debates, focusing especially on social dynamics and constructions like religion, race, ethnicity, colonialism, gender, sexuality, nativism, nationalism, dis/ability, and capitalism.

As a first-year Humanities seminar, this course will also focus on strategies of critical reading and engaging creatively with difficult texts. Each class will center around the discussion of famous and influential passages with the instructors modeling different ways of reading them and engaging in debate over their reception. Brief intellectual historical contexts will be provided for each influential figure and period. Students will be provided with outlines and reading questions for each session. As we move from antiquity to the modern day, our encounters with more difficult texts will be framed by the approaches and knowledge we develop together.

Class periods will alternate between short lectures on the cultural contexts and receptions of readings and student-centered activities including but not limited to reflective writing in response, summary and short-presentations, staged debates or conversations, and explorations of modern responses selected by students.

### **Writing Intensive/UWS**

As part of the first-year experience for Humanities Fellows, this course is writing intensive and fulfills the UWS requirement for the Brandeis Core. We will discuss argumentation, rhetoric, and evidence explicitly in class discussions; significant portions of class meetings will be dedicated to the process of writing including outlining, crafting theses, drafting, and engaging productively in peer review. As part of the humanistic training central to this course, we will have students submit scaffolding assignments for the writing process including notes on readings, short abstracts of articles, and an annotated bibliography. For the short paper and the final paper, students will be required to submit abstracts, outlines, drafts, and final papers for review as part of the final assessment. Each student will additionally be required to meet with an instructor for at least one conference on their writing.

### **Experiential Learning/Critical Conversations**

This class will dovetail with the theme of “Community” explored in the critical conversations for the 2021-2022 Academic Year.. We will also deconstruct the European tradition to speak to contemporary issues of systemic racism, sexism, heterosexism, nationalism, and ableism. The goals of the Critical Conversations are to build first year cohort identity and introduce students to Brandeis’ scholarly discourse and the variety of ways in which our faculty engage with the world and each other. We will attend the Critical Conversation events as a class, write response papers on them, and have class discussions about them. In addition, each student will be expected to attend a non-class event as an experiential learning project: students may go to an art exhibition, a performance of theater or music, a public reading, or an academic lecture and submit a short paper explaining how this experience influences their thinking on the topic of identity.

### **Graded Assessments**

Students will be expected to write a one-page reflection on each week’s readings (10%), attend and participate in class to the best of their abilities (10%); complete one take-home essay exam (20%), a short paper (20%), an experiential project, which may include an in-class presentation (20%) and a final paper or project (20%). Scaffolding assignments will be included in the grading for the papers and projects; these elements may be revised and updated until the submission of the final assignment.

### **Academic Integrity and Support**

Success in a four-credit hour class is contingent upon an average of three-hours of homework (reading, writing, thinking) for each hour of scheduled class time.

You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work to TurnItIn.com software to verify originality. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. Citation and research assistance can be found at LTS - Library guides.

*If you are at all unsure about issues of academic integrity or about course expectations, please contact me at any time.*

## *Accessibility*

Brandeis seeks to welcome and include all students. If you are a student who needs accommodations as outlined in an accommodation letter, please talk with me and present your letter of accommodation as soon as you can. I want to support you. In order to provide test accommodations, I need the letter more than 48 hours in advance. I want to provide your accommodations, but cannot do so retroactively. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Support (SAS) at 781.736.3470 or [access@brandeis.edu](mailto:access@brandeis.edu).

## **Course Texts**

Homer's *Odyssey* (Selections)

Greek Lyric Poetry and Presocratic Philosophy: Selections from Archilochus, Sappho, Corinna, Tyrtaeus, Heraclitus, and Xenophanes

Plato, *Apology of Socrates*

Aristotle's [\*Nicomachean Ethics\*](#). Book VIII (Selections) on Friendship and being-true.

Augustine's [\*The Confessions\*](#), Book X (Selections) 'I have become a question to myself'

John Locke, . [\*Second Treatise on Government - Chapter 2: "The State of Nature" and Chapter 19: "The Dissolution of Government"\*](#)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, [\*The Social Contract\*](#)- Book 4 on the 'general will'-

Mary Wollstonecraft- [\*On the Vindication of the Rights of Woman\*](#)- Chapters 1 to 4 - on rights, duties, 18th century opinions on the differences between the sexes

Soren Kierkegaard's [\*Fear and Trembling\*](#)- Preface, Prelude, Panegyric on Abraham, Problemata, and Problem I-

W.E.B. Dubois, [\*"Chapter 1: Of our Spiritual Strivings."\*](#) *The Souls of Black Folk*- 'veil' and 'double consciousness'

Martin Heidegger, "[\*Letter on Humanism\*](#)" (1949) - decentering the human, the post-human, and other than the human and humanities

Simone de Beauvoir's [\*The Second Sex\*](#)- Part IV- Towards Liberation, Chapter 14- "The Independent Woman"

Michel Foucault, [\*The History of Sexuality, Vol 1\*](#)- Part V- "The Right of Death and Power over Life"

Jacques Derrida, “Aphorism Countertime” in *Acts of Literature*- Derrida’s reading of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*- on time, death, love, relationality

[https://monoskop.org/images/9/9a/Derrida\\_Jacques\\_Acts\\_of\\_Literature\\_1992.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/9/9a/Derrida_Jacques_Acts_of_Literature_1992.pdf)

Edward Said, *Orientalism*- Introduction

[https://sites.evergreen.edu/politicalshakespeares/wp-content/uploads/sites/33/2014/12/Said\\_full.pdf](https://sites.evergreen.edu/politicalshakespeares/wp-content/uploads/sites/33/2014/12/Said_full.pdf)

Judith Butler, “Critically Queer”-

[http://144.214.21.63/CCS/etexts/more/feminist\\_reader/criticallyqueer.html](http://144.214.21.63/CCS/etexts/more/feminist_reader/criticallyqueer.html)

Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House”

[https://collectiveliberation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Lorde\\_The\\_Masters\\_Tools.pdf](https://collectiveliberation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Lorde_The_Masters_Tools.pdf)

Glen Coulthard, “Introduction” to *Red Skin, White Masks*-

<https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/sites.ucsc.edu/dist/3/424/files/2017/03/Coulthard-Red-Skins-White-Masks-2014.pdf>

## Schedule of Readings

<i>Week 1</i>	“The Discovery of the Self”: Greek Prophecy and Poetry
<i>Week 2</i>	The Social Self: Finding Identity in the <i>Odyssey</i>
<i>Week 3</i>	The Poetic Self: Homer To Plato
<i>Week 4</i>	Thinking Selves: Plato and Aristotle
<i>Week 5</i>	Take Home Essay Prompts Distributed Religious Selves in Antiquity (St. Augustine)
<i>Week 6</i>	Political Selves: Locke and Rousseau In-Class writing Workshop: Essays
<i>Week 7</i>	Political Selves: Locke and Rousseau
<i>Week 8</i>	Gendered Selves: Wollstonecraft, de Beauvoir
<i>Week 9</i>	Modern Selves 1: Kierkegaard
<i>Week 10</i>	Topic for Short Paper Distributed Modern Selves 2: Heidegger In-Class Writing workshop: Outlines and Theses
<i>Week 11</i>	Modern Selves 3: Derrida
<i>Week 12</i>	Racialized Selves: Du Bois and Coulthard
<i>Week 13</i>	Sexed Selves: Post-Structuralism (Foucault, Butler, Lorde) Select Final Paper Topic
<i>Week 14</i>	Therapeutic Selves: Modern Psychotherapy and Identity
<i>Week 15</i>	make-Up Week/Presentations Final Paper Workshop: Peer Review