

Western Philosophy & Pre-Rhetoric II Syllabus
2019-2020
Dr. Buhler / Mr. Johnson
kbuhler@trinityclassicalacademy.com

Requirements:

1. Plato, *Republic*
2. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*
3. The Holy Bible, *ESV Study Bible*
4. A three ring binder devoted exclusively to this class with appropriate dividers

Course Description:

This course is intended to cultivate students' ability to argue well in conversation and in writing. More deeply, this course is intended to invite students into intellectual maturity by stoking their love of truth and fostering the joy of dialogue.

Students will gain an appreciation and understanding of the vocabulary, concepts, problems, and relevance of a subset of the Great Ideas in the history of western philosophy.

Students will acquire and practice this knowledge through close readings of Plato, Aristotle, and other primary sources. Students will form their own thoughts by arguing in conversation and in writing.

This course also reviews all prior stages of the Progymnasmata and covers the last stage: Thesis and Law. Students will learn to state a thesis/law clearly, provide arguments in its support, and state objections or counterarguments, and then respond to reasonable objections to their own thesis.

Humanities is a discipline based upon the manipulation of abstract ideas as much as on the learning of concrete facts. As a result, humanities coursework and homework consists primarily in in-class discussion, or assigned reading and writing.

Learning Goals:

- To become familiar with the basic vocabulary of western philosophy (metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, cosmology, etc.)
- To understand Plato, Aristotle, and other seminal philosophers in their historical context and as thinkers relevant for us today

- To review the Progymnasmata stages of fable, narrative, chreia/maxim, refutation/confirmation, and encomium/invective.
- To introduce the final stage of the Progymnasmata: Thesis/Law
- To identify arguments for and against major positions in ethics, politics, metaphysics, and epistemology
- To practice conversational inquiry (dialectic) into abstract topics as well as one's own life
- To understand, test, and defend the Christian worldview applied to God, man, the universe, right and wrong, and human communities
- To become more virtuous and wise by pursuing truth and goodness

Scope, Sequence:

This course is divided into two semesters – one on Aristotle and one on Plato. Each semester is framed with discussions about the challenge and privilege of being Christians who are called to live the life of the mind.

Grades:

Student work in each unit consists of reading, discussion, and assessments. Therefore, the best way to earn an 'A' is to read carefully, participate, and write.

You will be graded primarily on reading, participation, and tests.

Assessment category	%
Participation	30%
Papers	30%
Note checks	15%
Quizzes	15%
Symposium	10%

Participation:

Trinity Classical Academy offers a challenging education grounded in the Christian faith and the classical tradition to produce young men and women of virtue, wisdom, purpose, and courage.

Inculcating virtue requires that teachers invite and allow students to take an active part in their own learning. Many of the activities of self-responsible students fall under the grading category of 'participation.' This rubric is designed to create clear expectations between teachers and students as to how to excel in participation and to develop the virtues needed to do so.

We want students to take responsibility for themselves and for their own learning. In so doing, students learn leadership, initiative, self-knowledge, diligence, and wisdom.

Especially in humanities courses, one of the primary goals is to improve in the skill of intellectual dialog in a group. Such discussion is necessary because (1) You must take responsibility for your own learning, (2) discussion helps us to get to know each other, and (3) most people learn and retain material better in discussion.

With these truths in mind, the participation expectations for this course are as follows:

1. Does not cause a problem (5 points per week)
2. Is a contributor (5 points per week)

“How do I get an A in participation?” An “A” in participation is neither automatic nor easy. Excellent students may still need to work to refine their participation before they earn a perfect score.

Everyone starts out at an 8 out of 10 (80%) for the week. Students who cause no problems whatsoever will rise to a 9 or 10. Students who cause a problem sometimes will remain at an 8; those who cause more problems will drop to a 7, 6, 5, or even less.

Reading tips:

Read for understanding, not just completion. Read each book or chapter slowly and actively, pausing to ask yourself: What is the main thesis? Is it true? Take notes summarizing the story or argument of the text and your questions or opinions on that story. Read as slowly as you must in order to read for understanding; you will get faster over time! Also, talk with each other before class: What was the main point of the reading? What was especially confusing? What especially interesting? Come to class with objections, questions, and arguments.

Quizzes:

Short reading quizzes or “pull questions” may be assigned. These assess that you read the assigned text. These are “easy points” if you are diligent in reading. Some days may not have reading quizzes, and some quizzes may not be announced. So always be prepared for a quiz!

Tests/Papers:

Tests and exams will assess how well you have mastered the core material of the class. Tests may consist of short to medium-length papers covering assigned topics or term papers covering a breadth of topics.

Symposium

At the end of each semester, students will be given a question for consideration and exploration. Having recollected and refined concepts from throughout the semester, they will participate in a discussion amongst peers as they attempt to answer the question. Students will be assessed on the basis of their activity in contributing insights and their ability to invite others into the communal pursuit of the true, the good, and the beautiful.

Quality Work Guidelines:

Only quality work from students will be accepted. Quality work is clean, clear, properly titled, formatted, and stapled according to the assignment’s specifications. Unless otherwise stated, electronic assignments are to be turned in online and paper assignments are to be hand-written and completed in pencil. When the use of pens is allowed, only black ink will be acceptable.

Late Work Policy:

Assignments are due at the beginning of class unless otherwise stated. *Late work will not be accepted.* Late assignments are inputted in the gradebook as a zero.

That said, any student may request an extension (of 1-7 days) on any assignment at any time. That request may be denied. In general, it is advised to work ahead, and plan carefully, to avoid turning assignments in late or requesting extensions.

Invalid excuses for late work include printer failure, internet failure, forgetting, being busy, being tardy to class, and more. Diligent and proactive students will find a way to overcome these common problems and get the assignment in on time. When in doubt, print and email the assignment in order to prevent a zero.

Valid exceptions to the “no late work” policy are: 1. Illness: missed assignments due to excused absences resulting from illness are automatically extended, then due the first day the student returns, unless a further extension is granted. (It is the student’s responsibility to find out from the teacher or fellow students what is due.) 2. Planned absences: missed deadlines resulting from vacations, sports games, college trips, etc., are extended then due the day a student returns, unless a further extension is granted. (A good practice is to turn in assignments *before* the planned absence.) 3. Teacher discretion: the teacher may choose to offer a retroactive extension out of courtesy if it seems appropriate, though a point deduction of 10%-50% may be applied. It is not advised that students be optimistic about their chances of receiving such an extension.

In sum, students should foster the habit of turning in completed assignments by the beginning of class on the day they are due.

Parent / Student Signature (please return this page only)

I have read and understand the above rules and responsibilities. By signing this document, I agree to abide by the expectations above and to make a positive contribution to this class.

Signatures (STUDENT) / (PARENT) / DATE