

# First-Year Writing Seminar

## Marx, Nietzsche, Freud

GERST 1170 • Spring 2017 • Tu/Th 11:40-12:55 • GSH 348

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Office: White Hall B11

Hours: Thursdays 10:00-11:30, and by appt.

### Course Description:

A basic understanding of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud is essential for participating in academic debates in the humanities and social sciences. This seminar will help you master the concepts you need to participate by engaging with each thinker's innovative critical method: historical materialism (Marx), post-metaphysical epistemology (Nietzsche), and psychoanalysis (Freud). It will challenge you to articulate points of contrast, as well as convergence.

As much as their methods vary, they meet in a shared critique of human culture for frustrating the natural (i.e., biologically-determined) instincts that shape our humanity. Where they diverge is in their analyses of which instinct is decisive: the drive to collaborate with others in building a better world (Marx), the drive to achieve subjective freedom (Nietzsche), or the drive to love and to be loved (Freud).

Our method will proceed from the premise that critical reading, critical thinking, and critical writing are inseparable moments in one operation of critique. The question that guides that method will be: Do alternative ways of thinking exist in opposition to those we view as natural, inevitable, or universal?

### Required Texts:

Karl Marx, *The Portable Karl Marx*, Viking/Penguin, ISBN 978-0-140150964

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, Modern Library, ISBN 978-0-679783398

Sigmund Freud, *A Case of Hysteria (Dora)*, Oxford, ISBN 978-0-199639861

Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Norton, ISBN 978-0-393304510

### Course Objectives:

This First-Year Writing Seminar will encourage you to develop and demonstrate competency in the following areas:

- *Constructing Persuasive Arguments* including forming strong thesis statements and organizing and employing evidence to support your arguments.
- *Using Sources* including the ability to locate, clearly summarize the central argument of, and appropriately cite a text.
- *Writing with Style* including using proper mechanics, writing with clarity and concision, and employing the appropriate writing style for different academic and professional pieces.
- *Preparatory Writing Strategies* such as drafting, revision, and peer review.

In addition to improving your writing, mastery of the class material will prepare you to:

- Master the basic conceptual framework developed by each critical thinker.
- Develop strategies to read, write, and think critically about culture.
- Navigate the unwritten rules of academic culture and succeed at Cornell.

### **Course Requirements:**

To help you achieve these goals, we will ...

... read, discuss, and analyze representative works by each thinker.

... practice writing rhetorically effective responses to those texts:

... develop transferrable skills in revising and editing your own writing.

Over the course of the semester, you will create 5 polished essays, 25-30 pages of formal writing. Included in this will be a final essay, due during final exams week, in lieu of a final exam.

### **Grading Policy:**

#### *Assignments and Grading:*

As per the requirements of the Knight Institute this course will have five major writing assignments, and several of them will go through multiple stages of development including outlining, drafting, and peer review. The assignments will require you to cultivate both academic and professional styles of writing commensurate with the products that might be required of a scholar and an engaged citizen.

The course is broken down into units composed of two-week sections. Units will focus on a single work (with the exception of the first and last) with two units dedicated to each author. The first unit for each author will have an assigned draft while the second unit will require the submission of the final paper. Drafts will receive critical commentary from myself, as well as other students in the class, while only the final draft will be graded. In addition to prose, each unit will incorporate writing exercises that focus on different elements of essay construction that will contribute to your participation grade. The assignment list including due dates can be found on the course outline within this syllabus

Unless otherwise notified, all final assignments should be handed in as a hard copy and via Cornell's Turn-It-In software through blackboard. If you are submitting an assignment via email it must be in Microsoft Word or PDF format. **Do not consider an emailed assignment turned in until you have received written confirmation from me.** Late assignments will be docked one third of a letter grade for each 24 hours or portion thereof after the deadline. If you feel that you will not be able to submit an assignment on time due to illness, emergency, or a conflict with work required for other courses please let me know as early as possible. I

understand that your first year can be an incredibly stressful time and I am happy to work with you to make reasonable accommodations when necessary.

In order to facilitate peer editing and review, as well as to learn from and about each other's academic interests, writing styles, and techniques, all writing assignments done for this class may be shared with and read by all members of the class.

*Instructor Conferences:*

The final course requirement is your participation in two one-on-one meetings with the instructor about your progress. While I hope you will take advantage of my office hours more frequently, these two meetings are mandated by the Knight Institute and will contribute to your participation grade. The first conference will occur shortly after you submit your first essay. During this conference we will discuss my comments on your first essay and your goals for improving your writing. The second conference will take place after essay 3.

*Attendance and Participation:*

The Knight Institute, First Year Writing program, requires attendance in this class for all classes. However, I recognize that issues may arise during the semester that may cause you to miss class. If you are ill or have an issue that will cause you to miss class, please email me to notify me. You are required to make up all missed work for missed classes. Attendance for each class will count equally for your participation grade. If you miss more than 2 unexcused classes during the semester, I reserve the right to give you a 0 for your participation grade.

*Grade Distribution:*

The goals of this class are to teach you the material and encourage you to develop and improve your ability to communicate through writing. As such, the grades for this class will reflect progress toward both goals. The breakdown will be as follows:

**Unit 1, Essay #1: Ungraded**

**Unit 2-3, Marx, Essay #2: 25%**

**Unit 4-5, Nietzsche, Essay #3: 25%**

**Unit 6-7, Freud, Essay #4: 25%**

**Unit 8, Essay #5: 15%**

**Participation (Attendance and Participation-5% and Conferences-5%): 10%**

**Other Course Information:**

*Email Policy:*

Please feel free to email me with quick questions or to set up a meeting. Longer discussions and all discussions about grades must take place in person. Cornell policy prohibits providing specific information about grades via email. I will guarantee a response to emails within 24

hours during the school week and will check my email more frequently the day before assignments are due. However, please do not wait until the last minute. There is no guarantee that I will receive, read, and be able to respond to last minute requests or questions.

*Technology Policy:*

I encourage using technology in the classroom and many classroom activities will be done using Google-Docs to facilitate group work. I encourage students to bring laptops to class for strictly classroom purposes, though they are not required and not bringing one will not hamper your ability to participate. If technology becomes a distraction from discussing the material of the course, I reserve the right to alter this policy.

**Campus Resources for Students:**

*Knight Institute's Walk-in Service:* The Writing Walk-In Service (WWIS) provides support for individuals at any stage of the writing process. It is a free resource designed for undergraduates working on nearly any kind of writing project: applications, presentations, lab reports, essays, papers, and more. Tutors (trained undergraduate and graduate students) serve as responsive listeners and readers who can address questions about the writing process or about particular pieces of writing. They can also consider questions of confidence, critical reading, analytic thought, and imagination. Many writing tutors also have experience working with non-native speakers of English.

The WWIS operates out of several campus locations. During the academic year, the WWIS is open Sunday through Thursday from 3:30 – 5:30pm and from 7:00 – 10:00pm. Writers can schedule appointments or drop in at a convenient time. For more information or to schedule an appointment: <http://www.arts.cornell.edu/writing>.

*Cornell University Learning Strategies Center:* The Learning Strategies Center offers students a variety of resources for improving basic study skills, learning time management strategies, and managing the academic experience at Cornell. You can find more information online at <http://lsc.cornell.edu/aboutLSC.html>.

*Student Disability Services:* Students with disabilities may contact Student Disability Services, Cornell University, 420 CCC, 254-4545. Cornell University is committed to assisting those persons with disabilities who have special needs. You can find more information online at <http://sds.cornell.edu/>.

**Statement of Nondiscrimination:**

It is the policy of Cornell University to actively support equality of educational and employment opportunity. No person shall be denied admission to any educational program or activity or be denied employment on the basis of any legally prohibited discrimination involving, but not limited to, such factors as race, color, creed, religion, national or ethnic origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, or disability. The University is committed to the maintenance of affirmative-

action programs that will assure the continuation of such equality of opportunity. Sexual harassment is an act of discrimination and, as such, will not be tolerated.

### **Academic Integrity:**

A Cornell student assumes responsibility for the content and integrity of her or his academic work in any course or lab. Students are guilty of violating the Cornell Code of Academic Integrity and are subject to proceedings under it if, for example, they:

1. Knowingly represent the work of others as their own.
2. Use, obtain, or provide unauthorized assistance in any academic work.
3. Fabricate data in support of laboratory or field work.
4. Forge a signature to certify completion of a course assignment or recommendation to graduate school.
5. Unfairly advance their academic position by hoarding or damaging library materials.
6. Misrepresent their academic accomplishments.

To learn more about Cornell's Code of Academic Integrity, please see:

<http://cuinfo.cornell.edu/aic.cfm>

### **Semester Overview:**

**\*\*\*\*A note on all readings. Readings beginning in Unit 2 should be completed by the start of the unit. This will help facilitate discussion and get you thinking about the texts required for your paper.**

#### Unit 1: Weeks 1-2

Religion as cultural matrix: compare each thinker's thumbnail critique.

Readings: Marx 115, Nietzsche 497, Freud, *Civilization* 39 (total 3 pp-Handout in Class).

**Final Assignment 1 Due: Tuesday, January 31**

#### Unit 2: Weeks 3-4

Does our culture determine our definition of nature?

Readings: Marx, *The German Ideology* in *The Portable Marx* 162-173 (12 pp).

Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* in *The Portable Marx* 203-217, 242-243 (16 pp).

Draft Assignment 2 Due: Thursday, February 16

#### Unit 3: Weeks 5-6

Why do we treat our cultural environment as if it were natural?

Readings: Marx, *The German Ideology* in *The Portable Marx* 173-183 (11 pp).

Marx, *On Alienation* in *The Portable Marx* 132-142 (10pp).

## **Final Assignment 2 Due: Thursday, March 2**

### Unit 4: Weeks 7-8

Is there anything natural about morality? What would a natural morality look like?

Readings: Nietzsche, Essay One, *Genealogy of Morals* in *Basic Writings* 460-492 (33 pp).

Draft Assignment 3 Due: Thursday March 16

### Unit 5: Weeks 9-10

If morality domesticates rather than ennobling, shouldn't we chuck it and live free?

Readings: Nietzsche, Essay Two, *Genealogy of Morals* in *Basic Writings* 493-532 (40 pp).

**Final Assignment 3 Due: Thursday March 30**

### Unit 6: Weeks 11-12

Does culture – humanity's highest achievement – make happiness unattainable?

Reading: Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* 3-8 (93 pp).

Draft Assignment 4 Due: Thursday April 20

### Unit 7: Weeks 13-14

Is neurosis the price we pay for an unnatural moral order?

Reading: Freud, *A Case of Hysteria* (103 pp)

**Final Assignment 4 Due: Tuesday May 4**

### Unit 8: Week 15

Putting it all together.

Draft Assignment 5 Due: Tuesday, May 9

**Final Assignment 5 Due: Exam Week**

## **Classroom Etiquette:**

In contrast to the competitive model of collegiate debate, our class discussions will follow the Socratic method of collaborative inquiry, in which each new idea offered for consideration is subjected to respectful criticism. For this method to work, each new intervention should begin by acknowledging what is valuable in the idea on the table, before identifying a weak link in its reasoning that we can tweak to arrive at a new insight into the problem at hand.

No handheld devices during the 75 minutes of our seminar. If you must respond to an urgent call or text, please do what you would do if you had any other urgent need: excuse yourself (no need to explain why) and leave the room before addressing that need.

## **University Policies and Regulations:**

This instructor is committed to honoring all University policies pertaining to observance of religious holidays, accommodation of disabilities, and regulations pertaining to harassment or discrimination. If you have a disability-related need, please show me your letter from Disability Services, so I can immediately begin facilitating your success in this course.

## **Requirements for All Formal Writing Exercises:**

All assignments must be formatted according to the parameters below to be assessed 'satisfactory'.

- Change default margins to 1" on all sides.
- Change default font to Times New Roman (12 pt).
- Double-space throughout.
- Begin document with name (line 1), assignment (line 2), and date (line 3).
- Number pages in right header with last name (check different first page).

***Please compare your formatting with the model provided on the following two pages!***

Davey Jones

Essay 4, Draft 2

Nov. 20, 2012

### Hazed and Confused: How Young Törless Came of Age and Lived to Forget It

The protagonist of Robert Musil's novel *The Confusions of Young Törless* is introduced as an earnest boy looking for answers to life's big questions. But a brief glimpse of the young man's later life inserted near the end of the narrative suggests that his failure to find answers during a harrowing year in a military boarding school—the actual time frame of the novel—turned the tireless seeker into a jaded sycophant. The omniscient and emotionally-detached narrator describes the older and wiser Törless as

one of those aesthetic and intellectual characters upon whom respect for the law and [...] public morals, has a calming effect, relieving them of the need to think about anything coarse [...]; but who, when asked to declare more personal interest in the objects of morality and the law, bring to their grandiose outward show of correctness, with its hint of irony, a certain bored insensitivity. (126)

And so it seems that all the critical inquisitiveness that initially places Törless in conflict with the prejudices of his day eventually comes to naught. Perhaps class is determining, as Marx argues, and Törless ends up becoming yet another example of the comfortable dissenter whose hypocritical scorn for the bourgeois morality of the day only serves to affirm its legitimacy (Marx 65). Or one could opt for Nietzsche's explanation, that Törless has chosen to abandon the pursuits of the herd and has withdrawn into his own sphere of personal freedom, one in which he can fully realize his uniquely sovereign potential (Nietzsche 41-42). Or one could turn to Freud, who helps us understand how humans developed the ability to deflect painful emotions and find



and maintains a calm silence during the long walk to the train station, she finally asks what is on his mind. “Nothing, Mama,” is his response. “I was just thinking about something” (Musil 160).

What Törless has clearly learned by this point is the impossibility of communicating his thoughts to another human being, even one as sympathetic as his mother. So he decides to keep such thoughts to himself. But the thoughts we find too disturbing to verbalize never go away, even if we seem to have forgotten them, Freud would say. Sooner or later they return: in the form of a psychosomatic symptom, a slip of the tongue, a dream, or the kind of fetishistic obsession that seems to characterize the infantilized emotional life of the older Törless (Freud 33-34). As futile as communication often seems, it is only by verbalizing such thoughts that we become the masters of our lives, the authors of our own biographies.

#### Works Cited

Freud, Sigmund. *A Case of Hysteria (Dora)*. Trans. Anthea Bell. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013.

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Penguin, 1983. Print.

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Modern Library, 2000. Print.

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Tischer, Fred Dietz, and Barbara Steele. 1966. Criterion, 2005. DVD.