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ABSTRACT

The History of Great Ideas is an interdisciplinary seminar course for sophomore honor students at North Arkansas Community Technical College that teaches the intellectual history of western civilization. Each semester, students study 14 ideas from science, philosophy, history, religion, sociology, and economics to discover how philosophical concepts have shaped concrete acts of humanity. The course has three instructors who alternate as session leaders and a coordinator who attends the sessions, reads student papers, and keeps track of reading assignments. The conceptual framework for sessions involves defining the idea, placing it in its historical context, identifying the results of the idea, and suggesting implications and future possibilities. Students are provided with readings and required to write a summary of ideas prior to the seminar. Leaders prepare their sessions to encourage lively discussion, and students are encouraged to participate. Students receive grades for summaries, discussion responses, attendance, and a final project. For the final project, each student or group must synthesize the ideas covered in the course, using audio-visual aids and without reading from a prepared text. Only 15 students may enroll in the class, however seminars are open to all students and community members. By the end of the semester, the line between instructor and student has blurred and students become active, involved handlers of ideas rather than passive receivers of facts. Sample reading assignments are attached. (KP)

History of Great Ideas: An Honors Seminar

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History of Great Ideas

"History of Great Ideas," a seminar course for sophomore honor students, teaches the intellectual history of western civilization. Students study ideas that have woven the cultural, political, scientific, and religious threads into the intricate tapestry of western civilization. Throughout the semester, students read how abstract philosophical concepts have shaped concrete acts of humanity. By synthesizing various ideas, they also examine the interrelationships of the many facets of civilization. The design of the course does not allow them to memorize dates, persons, and events; they must deal with the complicated evolution of western thinking about the world and human existence.

Overview of the Course

The course selects 14 ideas from Science, Philosophy, History, Religion, Sociology, and Economics as themes for three-hour seminars. A professor(s) or practitioner(s) in that particular discipline teaches the seminar. Although each instructor is at liberty to design his/her seminar, all instructors use the same conceptual framework for their sessions:

a) Define the idea.

b) Place the idea in its historical context. (Present ideas and/or events that led to its development)

c) Identify the results of this idea.

d) Suggest the implications and possibilities for the future

At least a week before the session, the leader of the upcoming seminar assigns readings and provides the students with an outline of the seminar and any out-of-class assignments. Prior to the class meeting, the students turn in a written summary of the ideas in the readings. In class the leader and students search for connections between the idea under discussion and other ideas and consequences across the disciplines. After class, each student writes a response to the session, again focusing on ideas. At the end of the semester, each student makes a presentation synthesizing the ideas from the course.

This approach to teaching confronts the criticism that students are asked to memorize rather than analyze. In this class, students learn to distinguish between ideas and facts; they also discover connections among various disciplines. The team-teaching approach further encourages students to see their education as a whole rather than as a series of unrelated courses from disconnected disciplines.

Objectives

"History of Great Ideas" is an interdisciplinary course. Its primary objective is to encourage instructors to teach and students to learn interrelationships among the disciplines.

Other objectives are to develop students into active learners, to expose students to original works of authors, to develop an understanding of the relationships among ideas and actions, to establish connections among real life issues and academics, and to foster critical reading and thinking.

Operation of "History of Great Ideas"

We developed the course for the honors program at North Arkansas Community/Technical College (NACTC) in the fall 1990; NACTC has offered the class each spring since 1991. Three of us teach at least one seminar, and the fourth coordinates the class. The coordinator of the class is responsible for administrative details and student grades. She attends each session, reads the student papers, and keeps track of the reading assignments. Leaders of seminars are responsible only for their particular sessions.

During the fall semester, the coordinator schedules the class and selects the leaders for the seminars. If the leader is new to the class, she explains the course, its objectives, and teaching methods. She provides each leader with a schedule for the semester and a notice of his/her seminar(s) topic and the dates. For example, this schedule was for the spring 1994.

Jan. 13	Overview -- All presenters
Jan. 20	Greek and Roman civilizations -- philosophy -- Horrell
Jan. 27	Greek and Roman civilizations -- history -- Boyd
Feb. 3	Judaism and Christianity -- Muller
Feb. 10	The rise of science -- Hinterthuer
Feb. 17	Development of law -- Muller
Feb. 24	Feudal system to individual rights -- Boyd
March 3	Evolution -- Hinterthuer
March 10	Humanism -- Hall
March 24	Rationalism -- Horrell

March 31	Psychoanalysis -- Hall
April 7	Capitalism -- Brandt
April 14	Nationalism -- Nichols
April 21	Individual Rights -- Nichols
April 28	Bigger is better -- trends -- Hall
May 5	Student presentations

Leaders prepare their sessions to encourage discussion. They limit lecture to a maximum of half the class time, one and a half hours. To encourage participation, we arrange desks in a semi-circle; the leader of the seminar sits among the students. If other instructors or visitors are present, they too sit among the students. At the beginning of the semester, instructors prepare students for discussion by assigning groups of students to consider different questions before class, asking students to bring questions for discussion, asking students to bring something connected to the idea to class, etc. Each instructor constantly enforces the idea that one "right" answer is rare; rather, there are multiple ways of examining the same set of events. Since the course has no tests, students gradually come to believe they can express an opinion, develop a hypothesis, or, in the words of one student, "say something really dumb" and not be penalized. Thus, as the semester evolves, students tend to initiate discussion at the beginning of the sessions, and the leader's role becomes that of guiding their thinking or occasionally refereeing their debating!

The coordinator prepares handouts for the students introducing them to the course, establishing requirements, and describing procedures. Since the class emphasizes discussion and participation,

all the faculty emphasize attendance from the beginning. However, if a student cannot avoid missing, he/she may still write a summary of the readings. To recover up to 90% of the points for the response and attendance, the student may write an extra paper over additional readings related to the topic of the seminar.

Leaders of the seminars place two copies of the reading assignments in a file in the Honor Study Room. Readings tend to change each semester; instructors turn in their reading material a week before their respective seminar. Students may take a copy of the reading out of the study room only to make personal copies. Each student brings the coordinator a three-ring folder to leave in the study room; each week, the student places his/her writings in the file according to the schedule. As a rule, the coordinator reads all the writings; the leader of a particular seminar reads the writings for that session and writes a response. However, the folders are open to all the leaders and to other students in the class. Any instructor or student in the class may read and respond to a student writing.

At the beginning of each semester, the coordinator establishes a schedule for the collection of student papers. For example, in the spring 1994 the class met Thursday afternoons at 3:30. Students had to have their summaries of the readings in their folders by 12:30 Thursday and their responses in by 12:30 Tuesday. The coordinator picked up the folders at 12:30 on those days; if the papers were not in the folder, she counted them late and docked 5 points per day.

The coordinator leads the first seminar of the semester; she asks all the instructors to attend and participate in a general discussion about the class and/or their respective disciplines. During

the second half of this session, we switch to a workshop format to do an exercise in focusing on ideas, rather than events. For this exercise, she chooses an encyclopedia article about a well-known event; the instructors and students read the article and then discuss it. The leader begins the discussion with the open-ended question: "If you were studying for a (psychology, biology, history -- the appropriate discipline) test, what would you need to remember from this article?"

For example, in the spring 1994, we used an article on George Armstrong Custer and the Battle of the Little Bighorn. The students thought they should remember who was involved in the battle, where and when the battle took place, and how many soldiers died with Custer. The instructors gradually steered their thinking to why the battle ever occurred, the attitude of the white people toward the Indians, and the consequences of that thinking then and now. The leaders of the sessions focus on this obvious analysis of the readings until the students are successfully identifying the ideas in their summaries of the readings.

Students receive grades for the summaries, responses, final projects, and attendance. The point distribution is

Summaries (50 points each)	700 points
Responses (50 points each)	700 points
Attendance (50 points/session)	750 points
Final Project	100 points
Make-up papers (max.)	90 points each

To compute the student's final grade, the coordinator totals the points earned by the student and divides by 2250, the total points possible.

We grade writings very liberally; for the summaries we emphasize the students' learning to recognize ideas behind actions and events. We use these guidelines:

Is the focus on ideas?
Are the ideas accurate and complete?
Can I follow the student's thinking?

For the responses we encourage the students to be more creative. At the beginning of the class, we tell students the class will raise questions rather than provide answers. In their responses we ask them to identify questions the discussion brought to mind, to suggest applications of the idea, to clarify new ideas that popped into their heads, etc. Almost anything goes; they write haiku poetry, limericks, songs, essays, fables, etc., capturing their thoughts and feelings about the seminar. We urge students to write their responses while they are still mentally engaged in the seminar. Several students have written one response while they are still hashing over the discussion and another after they have had time to clarify their own ideas. Although we do not count off for spelling, punctuation, or other mechanics, we do mark the papers carefully and explain why we have made the corrections.

Students earn attendance points by showing up for class, 25 points each session, and by participating. For each solicited response, the student earns 2 points; for each unsolicited contribution, he/she earns 5 points, up to a maximum of 25 points per session. Keeping track of student responses is much easier than it sounds! The coordinator has a U-shaped seating chart for each class. For each solicited response, she places a X by the student's name; for each

unsolicited contribution, she places a check. After class, she adds each student's scores. Leaders of the seminars try to involve all students in the discussion and at the same time, prevent one or two students from dominating the class. At the beginning of the semester the problem is getting anyone to talk; at the end the problem is finding time for everyone's ideas.

At the end of the semester, each student or group presents a project that synthesizes the ideas covered in the course. The length of the presentations varies according to the number scheduled for the three-hour session. Students must use audio-visual aids, and they must "speak." They may not read a paper. For example, one student did a presentation combining literature, art, and music to illustrate the effects of the ideas covered in the course. This brief outline of her presentation illustrates her understanding of the ideas.

1. Greek and Roman Civilizations

   Readings: "Oedipus Rex", Sophocles; "Meno", Plato

2. Judaism and Christianity

   Music: Gregorian Chant (monophonic music/monotheism)

3. Feudalism

   Music: Madrigal Chamber music (polyphonic/polytheism)

4. Rise of Science, Rationalism, Humanism

   Music: Bach "Air on the G String"(mathematical structure)

   Readings: Hamlet (reason of man)
   Alexander Pope "Essay on Man" (whatever is, is right

   Art: Blake's portrait of Newton (not spiritual, scientific)

5. Psychoanalysis

Art: Dali's "One second before awakening from a dream caused by the flight of a bee around a pomegranate" (Freudian discovery of dream interpretation)

6. Capitalism

   Reading: "The Unknown Citizen", W.H. Auden (anti-capitalism; anti-individualism)

7. Nationalism

   Music: "Red and Black", Les Miserables (nationalism-French Revolution
   "Ride of the Walkries" Wagner (German nationalism)

8. Current Trends

   Reading: 1984, George Orwell (Big Brother and doublethink)

   Music: REM "Ignoreland" (we ignore things that bother us and breeze through life without questioning)

Another student used the metaphor of a prism and the refraction of light to illustrate components of a single idea; still another used mind-mapping to demonstrate how one idea generates another.

In the spring 1995, we are planning to change the final project somewhat. At the beginning of the semester, we will assign students to groups according to their majors: Humanities, Sciences, Social Sciences, or Business. During the semester, each group will select a specific focus and assess the impact of the ideas on this particular area. Then, each student will develop a final project related to his/her major and the work of the group.

Only 15 students may enroll in the class; however, the seminars are open to students not enrolled in the course and to people in the community. We publish a schedule of the seminars in the local paper and post a schedule on bulletin boards on campus. We invite participants and make the readings available to them. We also take advantage of unique opportunities for speakers. For example, in one session on "Feudalism to Individual Rights," a guest panel of five businessmen from the Ukraine talked with the students about individual rights in their country, and in one session on "Bigger is Better -- Trends," a noted hydrologist addressed water pollution problems in our area. In the spring, 1995, we plan to move the class to 7:00 p.m.; we hope scheduling the class in the evening will enable us to draw more guest speakers from the retired professionals in this area.

We invite all the instructors to all the sessions; however, the college pays them only for the ones they lead. Some of the instructors have voluntarily teamed up to teach their sessions; some attend sessions they do not lead. The students particularly appreciate the participation of the instructors in the beginning and ending sessions.

Response to "History of Great Ideas" has been encouraging. At the end of each semester, we ask the students to write a one-page commentary on the course. Many say this is the most valuable class they have ever taken; each group of students has asked for a second semester of great ideas. The most common student complaints have been the length of the readings and the meeting time. Instructors

complain they do not have enough time for their particular topic and then ask to teach in the class again.

By the end of the semester, the line between instructor and student has blurred; instructors and students have spent a semester on the common ground of "learner," exploring the uncertain world of ideas and their infinite array of connections. In celebration of the camaraderie of learning, we have a reception for everyone who participated in the semester. Since the reception follows the student presentations, we risk one boast and invite administrators to this session.

"History of Great Ideas" is never the same from semester to semester. However, it always adheres to the same philosophy: students are to be active, involved handlers of ideas, not passive receivers of facts.

History of Great Ideas
Psychoanalysis
Bruce Hall

Assignment: Stevenson, Leslie. Seven Theories of Human Nature. Chapt. 6

Seminar Objectives:

1. to understand the historical roots of psychoanalysis

2. to understand the basic psychoanalytic paradigm

3. to contrast the psychoanalytic view of human nature with other views

4. to assess the influence of psychoanalytic thought on Western culture

Outline:

1. Discussion of the historical basis of psychoanalytic thought emphasizing 19th century developments.

2. Discussion of the deterministic assumptions in psychoanalysis.

3. Comparison of psychoanalysis with other psychological models.

4. Consideration of the influence of psychoanalysis on art, literature and law.

5. Discussion of the current status of psychoanalytic thought.

History of Great Ideas March 24, 1994 B. Hall
W. Horrell

HUMANISM

Assignment:

Please read

Briton, Crane. HISTORY OF CIVILIZATION. 289--315.

Severin, Frank T. "A Humanistic Orientation to the Study of Man."

Seminar objectives:

To understand the nature and origin of "humanism"
To survey development of humanistic thought from various time periods with special focus on Renaissance humanism
To sample influences of humanism in art, literature, science, politics, education, and religion
To understand the basic paradigm of humanistic psychology
To contrast the humanistic model with other psychological models
To discuss the relationship between humanistic psychology and historical and philosophical humanism

Seminar outline:

Short write: Define "humanism"
Introduction: perspective
Lecture: Background
- Greek Humanism 800--30 B.C.
- Italian Humanism 1300--1450
- Renaissance Humanism 1450--1600
- Modern Humanism 1900--
- Influences
- Psychological models
  - Determinist
  - Humanist

Break
Discussion: A freewheeling (and possibly disjointed) discussion of the parallels between philosophical and psychological humanism

A few questions for the week:

What meaning do you give to the term "secular humanism"?
How might your attitude about humanity affect your attitude about yourself?
To what extent do you consider yourself free to control and direct your own behavior?

History of Great Ideas MARCH 31, 1994 W. Horrell

RATIONALISM

Assignment:

Please read

CHAPTERS IN WESTERN CIVILIZATION. 530--532; 539--545.

Levi, Albert. PHILOSOPHY AND THE MODERN WORLD. 30--59.

(Recommended)

Locke, John. "Essay Concerning Human Understanding." In INTRODUCTION TO CONTEMPORARY CIVILIZATION, Vol. I: 1055-1069.

Short Write

When does one reach the age of reason?
What are the criteria for deciding on an age?

Seminar objectives:

To understand the principle meaning of "rationalism"
To outline the historical developments of "rationalism"
To investigate 20th century "irrationalism"
To understand how "rationalism" and "irrationalism" affect us as a society and as individuals

Seminar outline:

Lecture/Discussion: Definition
Historical outline
Readings

Break

Discussion:
Sources of knowledge
(Groups--list and prioritize)
Reliability of rationality
Reliability of irrationality

A few questions for the week:

In what ways do we trust what is rational?
In what ways are we confined by what is rational?

EVOLUTION

HONORS PRESENTATION: HISTORY OF GREAT IDEAS

Introduction:

During our upcoming class, we will discuss the concept of evolution and its impact on the world since Darwin. Darwin lacked the necessary tools to determine all the mechanisms which drive evolution, but his theory and his thorough presentation of facts, "shook" man's view of his place in the world, as surely as the theories of Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton.

We will briefly review some basic scientific concepts to gain a better understanding of the Theory of Evolution. Among these will be a discussion of Darwin's proposal of Natural Selection (Survival of the Fittest) as the prime mechanism of the evolutionary process and a discussion of some of genetic variations as modern evolutionary mechanisms.

The primary focus of the seminar will be the impact of the Evolutionary Theory on man and society; now and at the time of Darwin. We will discuss a number of the ways that Darwin's Theory has been misinterpreted and misused (Evolution vs. Creation "Science", Racism, Nazism, Socialism, American "Laissez faire" free enterprise system, etc.).

Seminar Objectives:

- To appreciate the historical and current significance of Darwin's theory of evolution.
- To understand the concept of "Natural Selection" and its misuse and misinterpretation.
- To understand the Theory of Evolution and its basic causal mechanisms.
- To appreciate the multitude of forces which influence scientists in the process of scientific inquiry and interpretation.
- To be able to determine true science from pseudo-science.
- To gain insight into the subtle, but profound, ways in which the great ideas of science effect our societies and our personal lives.

Seminar Format:

Regrettably, we only have three hours. This is just enough time to raise good questions, but not nearly the time to explore the answers. There were many questions we never had a chance to discuss in our "Rise of Science" seminar. Three hours is not enough time to adequately cover the many aspects of a complex topic. Evolution is not only a complex subject, but an emotional one and only a handful of scientists today can successfully

debate the subject with articulate, emotional, "non-believers". An understanding of the mechanisms of evolution often leads to the formation of even more complex questions.

My goal for this seminar is to simply expose you to as many ideas, concepts, and issues regarding evolution as possible. The intent is to raise both your level of understanding and your level of questioning.

I plan to make a short presentation at the onset of the seminar and then combine the showing clips from a couple of videos on evolution with pauses for questions and comments. I normally shy away from videos in class, but I feel that these are so pertinent to the topic that they will best serve the goals of this seminar.

Occasionally I will refer to your assigned readings, but they are assigned primarily to enable you to get the most out of the seminar and to expose you to key ideas regarding evolution.

There are many excellent sources for reading about Darwin and Wallace or current topics in evolution. If you have time, research sources other than the assigned readings. I would recommend the following books for good discussions on Darwin: *Darwin: The Life and Times of a Tormented Naturalist*, (excellent broad study of the times and Darwin), *Chapters in Western Civilization Vol. 1* (especially if you want to read in Darwin,s original words), *The Great Scientists, The Ascent of Man, The Discoverers, Pentagons of Power.* For today's views, I recommend any of these books by Stephen J. Gould: *The Panda's Thumb, Hen's Teeth and Horse's Toes, The Flamingo's Smile, This Mismeasure of Man, Ever Since Darwin, or Wonderful Life.* There are also many articles and books regar' .g Evolution, Creationism, and social Darwinism.

Reading Assignment: Evolution

Please read these in this order:

Background Reading on Darwin: *(readings 1 and 2)*

1. "In The Age of Darwin: Charles Darwin", pp. 813-833. Contemporary Civilizations Staff, Columbia University. (1948). Chapters in Western Civilization, vol. 1. New York: Columbia University Press.

2. "Darwin and 'The Origin of Species' ", Keith, Sir Arthur. pp. 437-452 Harlow, Shapley; Rapport, Samuel; Wright, Helen; Editors. (1958). A Treasury of Science New York: Harper and Brothers.

Modern Perspective on Evolution and its Mechanisms: *(Readings 3 and 4)*

3. "Iconography of an Expectation", pp. 23-52. Gould, Stephen Jay. (1989). Wonderful Life. New York: W.W. Norton and Co.

4. "The Wonderful Mistake", pp. 27-30. Thomas, Lewis. (1979). The Medusa and the Snail. New York: Viking Press.

Evolution vs Creationism Debate: *(Readings 5,6 and 7) (All three of these articles are good. The first one brings it home to Arkansas. I'm interested in your comments regarding this article. How do law, religion, and science get intertwined in this scenario? Why wasn't the 1925 Scopes trial the end of the debate? Why Arkansas? Why the 1980? What rationale (logic) did you find faulty and what rationale did you find particularly insightful and clear? Contrast the Ark Creationism Act with the judges' ruling.*

5. "The Arkansas Creationism Act" (1981) and "The Arkansas Decision" Memorandum Opinion in McLean v. Arkansas Board of Education (Jan. 5, 1982)", pp. 397-429. Peter Zetterberg, Ed. (1983). Evolution versus Creationism: The Public education Controversy. Oryx Press.

6. "Evolution as Fact and Theory", pp. 253-262. Gould, Stephen Jay. (1981). Hen's Teeth and Horse's Toes.

7. "Justice Scalia's Misunderstanding", pp. 14-21. Gould, Stephen Jay. (1987). Natural History. October, 1987.

Readings to Peek your Interest and Raise Questions: *(Readings 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12)*

8. Darwin Revisited: Survival of the Fittest May Mean Survival of the Most Cooperative". p. 30. Marti, James. Utne Reader. March/April 1992.

9. "Essay: Charles Darwin", pp. 347-348. Source Unknown.

10. "Scholars See Fundamentalisms Rending Modern Societies". The Morning News. Friday, April 23, 1993.

11. "Walcott's Vision and the Nature of History", p. 291. Gould, Stephen Jay. (1989). Wonderful Life. New York: W.W. Norton and Co.

12. Excerpts from The Lie: Evolution. pp. 6,7, 15-28, 85, 90-95, 137-140, 148-151. Ham, Kenneth. (1987). The Lie: Evolution. El Cajon, CA: Creation-Life Publishers, Master Books Division.

MODERN CONCEPT OF EVOLUTION

EVOLUTION *Latin=To unroll*

"Descent with modification from prior living things".
1850 CharlesDarwin

"Change in a gene pool (and corresponding phenotype) over time."
1988 Wessell/Hopson

"The gradual development of organisms from pre-existing organisms since the beginning of life."
1982 Henderson's Biology Dictionary

"The process by which organisms tend to differ from generation to generation."
1987 Arms/Comp Bio Text

"Genetic change in a population of organisms; in general, evolution leads to progressive change from simple to complex."
1986 Raven/Johnson

SPECIES-More difficult *Latin=Particular kind*

"A group of interbreeding individuals not interbreeding with another such group, being a taxonomical unit including geographical races and varieties and having two names in binomial nomenclature...." (Commonly added that offspring must be fertile)

Race - A group of individuals within a species forming a permanent variety: a particular breed. Henderson's Dictionary

"A group of organisms sharing similar traits and only reproducing their exact kind." Old college notes

"A group of actually or potentially interbreeding individuals that are reproductively isolated from other such individuals." Wessell/Hopson

"A kind of organism. Species are designated by binomial names written in italics."

We must remember that the concept of species is a human invention applied to the living world. It is artificial and doesn't always fit every situation as nicely as we would like. For instance, coyotes and dogs can breed fertile offspring, but this is not common so they are considered separate species. Cross a donkey and a horse and you get a sterile mule, a separate species.