

Course Title	:	Reading Great Social Thinkers
Course Code	:	SOC108/GEA108
Recommended Study Year	:	1 and 2
No. of Credits/ Term	:	3
Category in Major Prog	:	General Education, Social Sciences Elective
Cluster	:	Values, Cultures and Societies
Instructor	:	Dr Annie Chan; office location SO218 Tel:2616-7204 annchan@LN.edu.hk Term time office hours Mon 11:30 – 1:30 Wed. 12:30 – 2:30

Brief Course Description

The ability to read and digest writings from great classic and contemporary thinkers is an invaluable asset for any university career, but reading academic writing can be a daunting and often frustrating task for many university students. It is not uncommon for students to say that they know all the words in a reading but fail to grasp their central meaning. In this course, students will be introduced to a selection of writings from great social thinkers, including economists, philosophers, and social theorists. Using a “guided reading” approach, students will be familiarized with the rhetorical styles and normative conventions of classic and contemporary academic writing of great social thinkers, learn to overcome their fear of long sentences and jargon, and in the process learn how to appreciate and to produce good writing themselves.

Aims

The aim of this course is to introduce students who are unfamiliar with academic writing to the rewards and pleasures of reading original texts by great social thinkers. By guiding students through original texts, this course aims to build students’ confidence and appreciation in reading quality scholarly writing by some of the world’s great thinkers, and at the same time broaden their knowledge by familiarizing themselves with the ideas and values behind some of the great minds of our world.

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Identify the key ideas and values of selected great social thinkers
2. Develop an appreciation for these thinkers’ individual styles
3. Familiarize themselves with the conventions and styles of academic writing
4. Read academic texts confidently and efficiently
5. Improve their own writing styles

Indicative Content:

1. What makes a great social thinker?
 - a. Great ideas and their affinity with, or opposition to, contemporary values
 - b. The ability to communicate great ideas

2. Characteristics of academic writing
 - a. Why are great social thinkers so hard to understand?
 - b. Comparing general writing with academic writing
 - c. Comparing easily accessible academic writing with hard to digest academic writing
 - d. Classic and contemporary styles of academic writing

(Note: Scholars listed below are examples only – the exact readings to be used will be chosen upon the discretion of the instructor(s) concerned)

3. Great Economists
 - a. Adam Smith
 - b. John Stuart Mill
 - c. John Maynard Keynes

4. Great Philosophers
 - a. Friedrich Nietzsche
 - b. Amartya Sen
 - c. John Rawls

5. Great Social Theorists
 - a. Karl Marx
 - b. Max Weber
 - c. Michele Foucault
 - d. Jurgen Habermas

Teaching Method

During weekly classes the instructor will introduce key ideas of selected social thinkers, and then guide students through selected readings by providing plenty of context and elaboration. In class, periodically, students will be encouraged to write short summaries of original writings, from the most accessible to the more difficult, to build up their confidence. In tutorials students will participate in reading, discussions, and presentations.

Measurement of Learning Outcomes

Students will be measured in terms of their progress in continuous assessment, which includes participation in class discussions, presentations, and assignments. Presentations will require students to focus on either a particular style of writing, or on the writing of thinkers of their choice. Assignments will be designed to

- (1) develop students' appreciation for academic writing,
- (2) assess students' knowledge of key ideas of great social thinkers (e.g., précis writing and comparisons between thinkers) and their assumptions regarding human nature, society, and values
- (3) assess students' understanding of the role of values in social thought.

Course rules

1. All written work must be submitted via WebCT which will then be processed through anti-plagiarism software. Plagiarised work will not be marked.

Students should be aware of University regulations about dishonest practice in course work and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations.

Examples of dishonest practice include plagiarism (i.e. presentation of another person's work without proper acknowledgment of the source), copying the work of other students or deliberately allowing other students to copy from you (whether from this or any other institution), submitting the same piece of work for more than one course.

2. You must observe the deadlines for all written work – you will not be able to submit your work after the relevant due dates.
3. Attendance to all classes is compulsory; unjustified absences will result in a deduction in the participation part of your assessment.
4. Participation is very important – always ask what you do not understand, always ask for clarification if anything is unclear, always share what you know, as well as what you don't know! As a community we are here to learn from one another.

Assessment

Participation	20%	In-class participation, preparation prior to coming to class	Weekly
Presentation	20%	Each student will deliver a presentation on a topic of their choice, this will be followed by discussion	Once per student, to be assigned
Assignments	30%	There will be 4 short assignments, 10% each (assignment (1) is a baseline assignment and will not be marked - refer to class schedule below for details)	See schedule below for due dates
Term paper	30%	An essay of no more than 3,000 words	Due on 26 th April

Tentative class schedule

11 Jan Mon	Introduction to the course	
13 Jan Wed	My choice of social thinkers	
18 Jan Mon	Report on social thinkers of your choice [assignment (1)]	This is a 'baseline assignment' Due date: 18 January
20 Jan Wed	Lecture and discussion	
25 Jan Mon	Lecture and discussion	
27 Jan Wed	Presentation 1	
1 Feb Mon	Lecture and discussion	
3 Feb Wed	Presentation 2	
8 Feb Mon	Lecture [assignment (2)]	Due date: 22 Feb
10 Feb Wed	Presentation 3	
22 Feb Mon	Lecture and discussion	
24 Feb Wed	Presentation 4	
1 Mar Mon	Lecture and discussion of assignment (2)	
3 Mar Wed	Presentation 5	
8 Mar Mon	Lecture [assignment (3)]	Due date: 15 Mar
10 Mar Wed	Presentation 6	
15 Mar Mon	Lecture and discussion	
17 Mar Wed	Presentation 7	
22 Mar Mon	Lecture and discussion of assignment (3)	
24 Mar Wed	Presentation 8	
29 Mar Mon	Lecture [assignment (4)]	Due date: 7 April
31 Mar Wed	Presentation 9	
7 April Wed	Presentation 10 – finalizing your term essay topic	
12 April Mon	Lecture and discussion of assignment (4)	
14 April Wed	Presentation 11	
19 April Mon	Lecture and discussion	

21 April Wed	Presentation 12 and term paper consultation	
26 April Mon	Term Paper Due Date	

Description of the Assignments

- (1) This is a baseline assignment; it will be graded but the grade will not count towards your assessment. 5% will be deducted from your overall continuous assessment if you do not submit this work.

For this assignment, you need to do some research on the ideas of any two social thinkers of your choice from any discipline. Their concepts and theories must be relevant to contemporary society. During our 18th January class, you will tell us what you have found out about the thinkers of your choice. You will also need to explain the methods you've used to find out this information (i.e. your sources, and the strategies you used to decide which ones to choose). You need to write this up after class (3 pages maximum) and submit it by 18th January.

- (2) – (4) For these three assignments, we will start by reading selected texts in class, after which you will write a summary and comment of the text, to be submitted on the respective due dates.

Required/ Essential Readings

Culler, Jonathan and Kevin Lamb (eds.) 2003. *Just being Difficult? : Academic writing in the public arena*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

Gardner, Peter S. 2005 (2nd ed.). *New Directions: reading, writing, and critical thinking*. New York: Cambridge University Press

Recommended/ Supplementary Readings

Ansell-Pearson, Keith. 2005. *How to read Nietzsche*. London: Granta Books.

Bodanis, David. 2006. *The Undercover Economist*. London: Little Brown.

Foucault, Michel (Paul Rabino and Nikolas Rose eds.). 2003. *The essential Foucault: selections from The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*. New York: New Press: Distributed by W.W. Norton.

Habermas, Jurgen (translated by Thomas McCarthy). 1985. *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Keynes, John Maynard. 1997. *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Marx, Karl (with an introduction and notes by T.B. Bottomore and Maximilien Rubel, translated by T.B. Bottomore). 1963. *Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Mill, John Stuart. 1992. *On Liberty and Utilitarianism*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. (selected and translated with an introduction by R.J. Hollingdale). 1977. *A Nietzsche reader*. Malden, M.A.: Blackwell.

Rawls, John. 1999 (revised. ed.) *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Sen, Amartya. 1992. *Inequality Reexamined*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation; Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Smith, Adam (C.J. Bullock ed.). 1937. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. New York: P.F. Collier & Son Corp.

Weber, Max (Richard Swedberg ed.). 1999. *Essays in Economic Sociology*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.