

Syllabus for Freshman Seminar - Topics in PPE

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created: 9/19/22

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We will meet twice a week: Mondays & Wednesdays from 11am-12.20pm in Annenberg G29.

1 Overview

1.1 The freshman seminar in general

First, what the freshman seminar is *not*: it's not a lecture course; it's not a general or introductory survey of a field (for example, this seminar is not an introduction to economics); it does not count toward Weinberg College's distribution requirements or toward most majors' requirements.

So what is it? It's worth lifting the following quote directly from the WCAS website:¹

You will take two different first-year seminars: a College Seminar in the fall and a First-Year Writing Seminar in either the winter or the spring. Both are small, discussion-oriented classes in which you will explore a single topic or theme. The College Seminar, though, will also foreground the differences between high school and college and introduce you to skills such as time management and help-seeking that you need to thrive at Northwestern. College Seminar instructors also serve as their students' first advisers in the College. The First-Year Writing Seminar builds on that base and pays special attention to the process of writing and revision.

To which I'll add the following: the central purpose of the seminar is not really to teach you about politics, philosophy or economics. It is instead to improve your ability to read critically, think logically, speak effectively and write clearly.² These skills will serve you very well in your subsequent career at Northwestern.

Another goal of the seminar is to familiarise you with academic norms regarding citation and plagiarism.³ Many students come to Northwestern ignorant of these norms; this can lead to serious problems, for example if a professor confuses such ignorance with wilful violation of accepted codes of conduct. We will talk about academic integrity in our first meeting.

¹<http://www.weinberg.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/degree/first-year-seminar/>

²I encourage use of the Writing Place, a peer-tutoring center located in the University Library; see <http://www.writing.northwestern.edu/>

³Please find the time to read "How to Avoid Plagiarism" at <https://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies-procedures/academic-integrity/how-to-avoid-plagiarism.html>

1.2 This freshman seminar in particular

In this seminar we will survey disparate topics in politics, philosophy and economics. Exactly what we end up covering will depend a little on what most interests the group, but provisional topics include the morality of markets, Arrow's impossibility theorem, the trolley problem, Rawls' theory of justice, effective altruism, the ethics of nationalism, the economic effects of immigration, how economists and regular people think about risk and uncertainty, prediction markets and the wisdom of crowds, the pros and cons of a basic income policy. The aim is to find interesting things to read, talk and write about.

This is a good time to note that **there are no prerequisites for this seminar, and no prior knowledge of anything will be assumed.**

There are no required books. We'll use sources such as newspaper & magazine articles, academic research papers and podcasts. These will be available on Canvas.

2 Class rules and procedures

Attendance is required at every class; if you have a legitimate excuse for missing a class, email me in advance. Laptops may not be opened in class - if you anticipate the need to refer to some document or other, print it out beforehand. Cellphones are to be turned off.

3 Evaluation

Grades will be based on two shorter papers (20% each), a longer final paper (30%) and participation in class discussion (30%). There will also be occasional small tasks assigned, such as the writing of a haiku or limerick. We'll talk in more detail about these when we first meet. There is no final exam.

What determines the 30% of the grade that covers classroom participation? First and foremost, *participation!* I will be looking for comments, interruptions, arguments and questions from all students. The more you talk, the better, even if it's just to ask what someone else means by his or her statement. Second, the ability to interrupt and argue in a civil manner. It is possible that we will all agree with each other all the time, but unlikely and probably undesirable; the ability to argue without losing your cool or train of thought, along with that to recognise and accept when you're mistaken, is essential in academic life.

For many of the seminars there will be a few designated students who are expected to lead the discussion. This does not mean that these students are expected to do all the talking; *everyone* is expected to contribute to class discussions, *every* time we meet.

Important: your participation grade does not depend on what you say in class, but on how much you contribute and the manner in which you do so. In this seminar it is better to be voluble and nonsensical than to be silent. Your grade will be higher.

3.1 Papers

Each of the two short papers is to be about 1500 words. I'll let you know of topics closer to the due dates, which are: Wednesday October 12th (week 4) and Wednesday November 9th (week 8). For these short papers we'll use a technique known as peer editing, which will involve pairs of you giving feedback on each others' first drafts.

The final paper should be between 3,000 and 4,000 words long. It is due on Monday December 5th, i.e. Monday of exam week.

Topics for the three papers will be discussed in class and posted on Canvas.

4 Various statements

Below are some statements instructors have been asked to include on syllabi in recent quarters.

4.1 Academic Integrity Statement

Students in this course are required to comply with the policies found in the booklet, "Academic Integrity at Northwestern University: A Basic Guide". All papers submitted for credit in this course must be submitted electronically unless otherwise instructed by the professor. Your written work may be tested for plagiarized content. For details regarding academic integrity at Northwestern or to download the guide, visit: <https://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies-procedures/academic-integrity/index.html>

4.2 Accessibility Statement

Northwestern University is committed to providing the most accessible learning environment as possible for students with disabilities. Should you anticipate or experience disability-related barriers in the academic setting, please contact AccessibleNU to move forward with the university's established accommodation process (e: accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; p: 847-467-5530). If you already have established accommodations with AccessibleNU, please let me know as soon as possible, preferably within the first two weeks of the term, so we can work together to implement your disability accommodations. Disability information, including academic accommodations, is confidential under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

4.3 Exceptions to Class Modality

Class sessions for this course will occur in person. Individual students will not be granted permission to attend remotely except as the result of an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accommodation as determined by AccessibleNU.

4.4 Guidance on Class Recordings

This class or portions of this class will be recorded by the instructor for educational purpose and available to the class during the quarter. Your instructor will communicate how you can access the recordings. Portions of the course that contain images, questions or commentary/discussion by students will be edited out of any recordings that are saved beyond the current term.

[Note from RW: I am not currently planning to record anything.]

4.5 Prohibition of Recording of Class Sessions by Students

Unauthorized student recording of classroom or other academic activities (including advising sessions or office hours) is prohibited. Unauthorized recording is unethical and may also be a violation of University policy and state law. Students requesting the use of assistive technology as an accommodation should contact AccessibleNU. Unauthorized use of classroom recordings - including distributing or posting them - is also prohibited. Under the University's Copyright Policy, faculty own the copyright to instructional materials - including those resources created specifically for the purposes of instruction, such as syllabi, lectures and lecture notes, and presentations. Students cannot copy, reproduce, display, or distribute these materials. Students who engage in unauthorized recording, unauthorized use of a recording, or unauthorized distribution of instructional materials will be referred to the appropriate University office for follow-up.

4.6 Support for Wellness and Mental Health

Northwestern University is committed to supporting the wellness of our students. Student Affairs has multiple resources to support student wellness and mental health. If you are feeling distressed or overwhelmed, please reach out for help. Students can access confidential resources through the Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), Religious and Spiritual Life (RSL) and the Center for Awareness, Response and Education (CARE). Additional information on all of the resources mentioned above can be found here:

<https://www.northwestern.edu/counseling/>

<https://www.northwestern.edu/religious-life/>

<https://www.northwestern.edu/care/>