

First Year Seminar: The Republic Revisited

Fall 2024

When: M W 11:50am-1:10pm

Where: Olin 310

Instructor: Dr. Jess Feldman (Hannah Arendt Center for Politics and the Humanities)

Email: jfeldman@bard.edu

Office: Albee 305

Drop-in Hours: By appointment at <https://calendar.app.google/cHSwENyuPf4kXaCu9>, or email me if you don't see something there that works for you!

Writing Fellow: Weston Kropf (ek7913@bard.edu)

First Year Seminar aims to educate you about the intellectual traditions that have shaped many of the societies we live in, and to give you tools that can help transform these societies. The Fall semester takes Plato's *Republic* as an anchoring text to focus on the idea of the state as a commitment to organizing society, and to political life as a shared endeavor. The Spring semester will build from the constitutional documents of the United States and elsewhere to address the obligations and possibilities that arise for individuals as a consequence of membership of such a community.

Over the year you will read texts from the classical period up to today. These texts present an enormous diversity of theories about the human being as creature, as self, and as citizen. Through exploring different explanations of how individuals come together to form a civic body, we will bring the contingency of our contemporary practices into view. We will track the power struggles between political, religious, and scientific authorities through the centuries that can help explain those of the present day. We will consider how definitions of "self" and "other" contribute to structures of power, oppression, and liberation. We will trace changing conceptions of human nature: of our differences from non-human animals, of our capacities to care for each other, of the boundaries of our rights and freedoms.

In order to address these problems of living in political community, we will also cultivate the skills needed to participate in a democracy: the capacities to question authority, to disable ideology, and to think critically and creatively about the challenge of living among others. Rather than remembering names or dates, your task is to analyze the arguments, stories, and poetics put before you and to relate them to each other, and, ultimately, to come to your own conclusions about the questions at hand. We will work together on your reading, writing, and argumentative skills through assignments and in-class tutorials. FYSem requires consistent and substantial effort, both in your reading and in your writing—resist the twin temptations of procrastination and perfectionism! I am always happy to meet with you one-on-one to discuss strategies for reading more productively, writing more efficiently, and managing your workload.

By the end of this course you will be able to:

- Read, analyze, and discuss complex texts
- Use writing as a process for thinking
- Craft compelling questions that can serve as the basis of group discussions

- Write clear and convincing arguments that address contemporary problems in a variety of spheres (intellectual, aesthetic, political, ethical etc.)
- Demonstrate familiarity with arguments and aesthetic achievements of selected canonical writers and thinkers

Readings

You are responsible for purchasing the following books available at the College Bookstore. Please get the editions given so that we are all on the same page. These books are also available on reserve at the library. (For info about reserves see [this webpage!](#))

- Aeschylus, *Oresteia*, translated by R. Lattimore, Chicago (978-0226311470)
- Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World*, Penguin (978-0140433722)
- Ibn Tufayl, *Ibn Tufayl's Hayy Ibn Yaqzan: A Philosophical Tale*, Chicago (978-0226303109)
- Vladimir Nabokov, *Bend Sinister*, Vintage (978-0679727279)
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings: Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts, Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, Discourse on Political Economy, ... Contract, The State of War*, Hackett (978-1603846738) – note that while we are only reading a short selection from this text, we'll use it again in the spring.

In addition, students will all be given a copy of Plato's *Republic* and the First Year Seminar Course Reader. Any student for whom acquiring these texts is a significant financial burden should email fysem@bard.edu with a request to use the First-Year Seminar Book Fund to acquire books.

Course Notebook

I highly recommend you purchase a dedicated notebook—like [this kind of thing](#)—for your in-class freewrites as well as for your QQTP assignments.

Technology In Class

Unless you are granted an accommodation from Disability Access Services, there is no great reason to use an electronic device in this particular class. FYSEM benefits from your active attention and participation in complex discussion. Most note-taking you do will be quick jots to support thinking “in the moment”, not for later study; free-writes are best done by hand to prevent the word-processor temptation to edit as you write instead of just writing. The temptation of distraction is also very great when a device connected to internet is in front of you. Distracted students distract other students.

All that said: Phones should be off and out of sight (unless there is some emergent exception, about which you should please speak to me beforehand.) Laptops are not banned. If you choose to use a laptop, you should be on task, have your internet/WiFi turned off, and should avoid excessive typing while others are speaking.

Evaluation/Grading

In this course, your grade will be determined by your own commitment of how much work you produce for the class, as articulated in a contract you will write and submit to me by Monday September 9th. All the work you submit will have to meet a high standard and be on time (with 48 hours of “wiggle room” for selected assignments) in order to receive credit. If I write to tell you your initial submission doesn’t meet the requirements for a “satisfactory” submission, you’ll have 5 days from receiving that message to revise it so that it does meet the requirements. Please see the document “Contract Grading for FYSEM Fall 2024” for more details about this policy.

Class Participation and Attendance

As you’ll note, **participation** is required to pass this class. This class will be the most fun and rewarding for all of us if we can achieve intense and rich discussions each week, so I ask you to come having done the reading, ready to focus and engage throughout class. Keeping our discussions lively and rewarding – and *surprising* – will be a collective effort. While I encourage everyone to contribute to discussion, I recognize for some this is difficult and I offer office hours as an alternative way to participate.

Regular **attendance** is necessary to receive a participation grade for each class. You are allowed two unexcused, no-questions-asked absences over the semester. After that, any unexcused absence will cause a 1% drop in your grade (a 3% drop is the equivalent of the loss of a third of a grade, e.g., A- => B+). **Students with more than five absences ordinarily cannot pass this course. This policy extends to your meetings with the Writing Fellow and to the additional FYSem programming, held on occasional Mondays from 5-6:30pm.**

Quotation, Question, Talking Point (QQTP) posts

Depending on which contract you choose, you are expected to submit for selected classes a reading response that incorporates two out of the three following components: a quotation from the text, a question for class discussion, and a “talking point” related to your personal reaction to the reading. You will then post your QQTP to Brightspace so others can read them. I recommend you write these by hand in your class notebook and post a photo to the Brightspace discussion threads. I will use these contributions to structure discussion, and will often read or summarize somebody’s reaction in class or ask them to elaborate. If you have concerns about sharing your writing on a discussion board, we can talk about alternatives.

QQTPs should be submitted by 8 am the day of class. Submissions received at 8:01am or later will not receive credit (but will still shape discussion!)

Writing Assignments

There are two written assignments for this course, each with multiple components:

1)The Portfolios

The portfolios will consist in a collection of items drawn from our class work, curated by you. You will hand in a midway portfolio and then a final portfolio. The midway portfolio will consist in a cover letter and 3 items, and the final portfolio will comprise a (new) cover

letter, the 3 items from the midway portfolio, and additional items (the precise number varies based on the contract you have selected). You should have 3 new portfolio items and a cover letter draft available for discussion with our writing fellow during your meeting (see dates below). You will meet twice with our writing fellow to get feedback on your portfolio; once for the midway and once for the final version.

- Each cover letter should be around 750-1000 words and should include:
 - A reflection on your experience writing in the class – what has been most challenging and what most rewarding? What is your goal for your writing for the remainder of FYSem?
 - A reflection on your reading in the class – which texts have resonated most, and which least, and why? Is there anything you want to change about *how* you read?
 - A reflection on your citizenship in the class – what kind of presence have you been? What aspects of the class are you most and least drawn to? What are your goals for your role in the classroom for the remainder of FYSem?
 - Are you on track to fulfill your contract?
- Your portfolios can include items from any of the following categories, with no more than 1 item from each category for the midway portfolio, and no more than 3 from each category for the final portfolio:
 - An image of a free-write from class, with a developed version of that free-write
 - An image of a free-write from class that you think showcases a moment where your thinking changed, or where you registered that your thinking had changed, with a paragraph or two of reflection
 - A thing of beauty: a piece of artwork (visual, written, or performative), a website, a game, or any other creation of your own that ties into the themes of the class or one or more of our readings, with a paragraph-long artist's statement
 - A discussion question suite: the original discussion question, a revised version of the discussion question, and an answer to the discussion question of around 200 words.
 - An image of one annotated passage from your books or your Reader, with a 3 paragraph “close reading”: 1st para. – describe the language in detail; 2nd para. – explain the effects of language used; 3rd para. – how your reading of the language in this passage affects your overall interpretation of the whole text)
 - An application of a concept from one of our readings to a contemporary phenomenon or event (250 to 500 words)
 - A revised version of the syllabus for this course with a 500-word explanation of your changes.

2)The Paper

There will be one paper for this course, which should be 1600-1800 words (about 4-6 double-spaced, 12-point pages). The paper will be written in several stages:

- You will generate your own topic during an in-class writing workshop
- You will hand in a précis for your paper during a meeting with me
- You will hand in a first draft of your paper
- You will hand in a second draft of your paper after meeting with our writing

fellow

More details about the paper will be circulated in the lead-up to the in-class workshop.

Assignments are due before midnight (11:59pm) on the deadline given on the syllabus. You have 48 hours of “wiggle room” if you for whatever reason can’t turn in your assignment by that deadline. Please email me if you are planning to use your “wiggle room” for any assignment. Beyond those 48 hours, you will not receive credit for late work, except in exceptional circumstances. This means that late work may result in a lower grade than contracted. If you get behind in your work **tell me sooner rather than later** as I will be more flexible if we’re in communication about the situation.

Drop-in Hours

You can make an appointment with me for office hours at the link provided above (here it is again: <https://calendar.app.google/cHSwENyuPf4kXaCu9>). If none of my available times work for you, just send me an email and we can work something else out.

Office hours can be used to talk over assignments, reading, or class performance, or to have a more freewheeling discussion about any of the topics we’ve discussed in class. I’m also always happy to discuss broader academic matters with you if/when it’s helpful. If you are struggling in the course, or with school more broadly, the best thing you can do is come in and explain the situation to me as soon as possible so we can work out a solution together.

Accessibility

I recognize that there are multiple ways to learn, and I encourage you to discuss your learning style and comprehension requirements with me during my office hours or by appointment. I am always happy to discuss study habits, homework management methods, etc., and to work with you to assure you get the most possible out of our class. If you find yourself struggling with accessibility and have not yet contacted Disability Access Services, I encourage you to do so; once you register with them, they can provide various forms of support, and liaise between you and your professors. Here’s their website: <https://www.bard.edu/accessibility/students/> Finally, if you are struggling psychologically during our time together, I can help connect you with services on campus that can help — just ask.

Academic Integrity

Just like you, I am committed to Bard’s policies regarding cheating and plagiarism. This means that I must report any instances of academic dishonesty. To avoid this unpleasant outcome, please get in touch with me immediately if you are tempted to cheat or plagiarize so we can find another way forward for you (I don’t believe in thought crimes!). Unfortunately, many cases of academic dishonesty are inadvertent; but they cannot be excused for that reason. Be sure to educate yourself about proper citation practices (we will also go over these together) and consult with me or the Learning Commons if there is any risk of improper citation. **Any student who plagiarizes all or part of a paper (including passing off work from another class as a First Year Seminar paper) will receive a failing grade for this course.** The use of any sources, including Large Language Models like ChatGPT, at any stage of an assignment should be documented, cited, and described in a separate cover letter. The presence of any artificially

generated text in an assignment that is not cited as such will be treated as a case of plagiarism.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS
(all readings and dates subject to change)

Part 1 – The Problems of Justice

M Sept 2: Edict of Caracalla (212 CE); Preamble of the U.S. Constitution (1789 CE); Preamble of the South African Constitution (1996 CE); Preamble of Bolivian Constitution (2009 CE)

W Sept 4: Plato, *Republic* 1 (about 375 BCE)

*****M Sept 9: Semester Goals and Grade Contract Due*****

M Sept 9: Plato, *Republic* 2 and 3

W Sept. 11: Anzaldua, *Borderlands*, Chapters 1, 2, and 7

M Sept 16: Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* (458 BCE), lines 1–809

W Sept 18: Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, lines 810-end

M Sept 23: Aeschylus, *Eumenides* (458 BCE)

M Sept 23 @ 5:00 pm: First Plenary Session

W Sept 25: NO CLASS: Midterm Portfolio prep

Part 2 – Justice and the Social Order

*****M Sept. 23 -M. October 7: Midway Portfolio – Writing Fellow Meetings*****

M Sept. 30: Plato, *Republic* 4 and 5 (up to 471a)

W Oct. 2: Plato, *Republic* 5 (from 471a to end) and 6 (up to 504a)

M Oct. 7: Phyllis Wheatley, *Poems*

- “To the KING’S Most Excellent Majesty” (1768 CE)
- “On being brought from AFRICA to AMERICA” (1773 CE)
- “To the Right Honourable WILLIAM, Earl of DARTMOUTH, His Majesty’s Principal Secretary of State for North-America, &c.” (1772 CE)
- “A farewell to AMERICA. To Mrs. S.W.” (1773 CE)

M Oct. 7 @5:00 pm: Library Research session

W Oct. 8: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men*, Preface and Part I

*****F Oct. 11: Midway Portfolio Due*****

M Oct. 14: FALL BREAK

W Oct. 16: Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men*, Part II

Part 3 – Education, Knowledge and Leadership

M Oct. 21: Paper Writing Workshop

W Oct. 23: Plato, *Republic* 6 (from 504a to end) and 7

*****M. Oct. 28-W. November 6: Paper topic meetings with me – Bring précis*****

M Oct. 28: Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World* (1666 CE), pp. 123-180

M Oct. 28 @ 5:00 pm: Second Plenary Session

W Oct. 30: Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World*, pp. 180-225

M Nov. 4: W.E.B. Du Bois “Of the Training of Black Men” and “On our Spiritual Strivings” (1903 CE)

W Nov. 6: Vine Deloria Jr., “Bicentennial” and Audre Lorde, “Transformation of Silence into Language and Action”

Part 4 – Citizenship and the World

M Nov. 11: Plato, *Republic* 8-9

W Nov. 13: Nabokov, *Bend Sinister*, Chapters 1-5

*****M Nov. 11- Friday Nov. 22: Paper Writing Fellow Meetings*****

M Nov. 18: Nabokov, *Bend Sinister*, Chapters 6 -12

W Nov. 20: Nabokov, *Bend Sinister*, Chapters 13-18

M Nov. 25: Plato, *Republic* 10

W Nov. 27: Zoom Paper-Writing Session

*****W Nov. 27 Paper Due*****

M Dec. 2: Ibn Tufayl, *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* (early twelfth century CE), pp. 95-130

W Dec. 4: Ibn Tufayl, *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, pp. 130-166

*****F Dec. 6- W Dec. 18: Final Portfolio Writing Fellow Meetings*****

M Dec. 9: Woolf, *Three Guineas* excerpt (**no class, but you can submit QQTPs**)

M Dec. 9 @ 5:00 pm: Third Plenary Session

W Dec 11: NO CLASS: Advising Day

M Dec 16: Wrap-up discussion with snacks (Optional)

*****F Dec 20: Final Portfolio due*****