Honors Core, HNRC 101 Unit A Syllabus

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Unit A: What do we know? What do we believe? What is the difference? What,

therefore, should we do?

Course Description: This course introduces you to important works of literature (a memoir, a novel, and two books of poetry) from a variety of cultures and perspectives. For the first half of the unit, we will focus on systems of knowledge and belief (as well as systems of not knowing and not believing) in relation to political, moral, and aesthetic conflicts. Using Asking the Right Questions, Heda Margolius Kovaly's Under a Cruel Star: A Life in Prague. 1941-1968, a complex memoir about Czechoslovakia's relationship to Soviet communism, and Chimamanda Adichie's Half of a Yellow Sun, a recent novel that explores the brief history of the nation of Biafra during the Biafran/Nigerian civil war from 1967-70. As we consider the relationship between literature and history, we will explore the ways in which knowledge and belief shift and turn during times of conflict. This half of Unit A will prepare you for Unit H of HNRC 201 (Must the need for social order conflict with the need for individual liberty? What, therefore, should we do?) a course of study you will pursue in your junior year. The second half of the semester will be devoted to poetry and metaphoric transformations. We will read *Poems from Arab Andalusia* (a collection of poems written in Arabic in Spain from the 9th to 13th centuries, then translated into Spanish and English during the 20th century) in order to approach knowledge and beliefs about beauty, power, and helplessness. We will conclude with Ranier Maria Rilke's Sonnets to Orpheus (in a German/English dual language edition), a sonnet sequence written after the First World War that considers knowledge and beliefs about death and love. This half of Unit A will prepare you for Unit G of HNRC 201 (How do we understand the sacred? What, therefore, should we do?) a course of study you will pursue in your junior year. Knowledge and belief are never finite and absolute; they are always fluid, shifting as time shifts. This does not mean, however, that the difference between knowledge and belief is relative to particular circumstances. There may be no absolutes when it comes to knowledge and belief, but there are some important principles that cannot be explained away by shifting one's perspective. We will see how the movement between uncertainty and certainty affects peoples' lives as time and circumstance intervene in the way they imagine themselves, what they know, and what they believe. What, therefore, should we do? A starting place might begin with the importance of being able to transform, record, and perhaps even resist the worlds that others impose on us. This is a literature course, so although politics, history, and religion will be important aspects of this course we will be paying careful attention to literary composition, literary genres. and literary language as we read a memoir, a novel, and two books of poetry.

Course Objectives: Upon completion of this course with a passing grade, students should be able to:

- 1. Think critically, demonstrating mastery application of concepts from *Asking the Right Questions*, including the application of those concepts, the redefinition of those concepts, and the questioning of the categories of analysis in *ARQ*
- 2. Develop higher order reasoning skills by synthesizing ideas from several points of view and from multiple texts higher order reasoning skills must be derived from the selection and organization of specific examples, specifically the development of patterns of thought that emerge from extensive and thoughtful quotations from course texts
- 3. Develop oral and written communication skills that cross the normal boundaries between disciplines with an understanding that any norm is a construction and a fiction
- 4. Function effectively as a working member of a learning community by applying conflict/resolution models and other models of negotiation and leadership besides those constructed by binary oppositions
- 5. Participate effectively in active learning by being fully prepared for each class full preparation includes thoughtful and comprehensive reading of texts, marking passages in texts, coming to class with clear questions about texts, and demonstrating a sense of curiosity about texts that goes beyond conventional interpretations

Required Readings: You must purchase your own copy of each book, and you must have your own copy of each book BEFORE we begin our course readings.

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi Half of a Yellow Sun

Browne and Keely Asking the Right Questions (ARQ)

Franzen, Cola. Poems from Arab Andalusia

Kovaly, Heda Margolius

Rilke, Ranier Maria

Under a Cruel Star: A Life in Prague, 1941-1968

Sonnets to Orpheus (David Young translator,
Wesleyan University Press – you **must** have this

dition

edition

Common Readings:

Clifford, W.K. "The Ethics of Belief"
Plato "The Allegory of the Cave"

Daily Readings from *The New York Times* – you should be able to find, present, and discuss relevant articles at a moment's notice!

Bring the texts to class every class. You may need more than one text per class, so have all four of the required texts handy.

Course Requirements and Grading:

1) A critical essay (45%) of your grade – 450 points. This essay should be 5-8 carefully and thoughtfully revised pages. Additional quotations from the texts supporting your thesis should be provided in an appendix to your essay. This paper will draw from course readings, course discussion (in class and on D2L), and from your journal entries. Discussions and journal entries can help you begin the process of thinking about your essay, but this essay must represent a refinement of your thoughts. Essays that merely

reproduce discussion and journal material will not be passing essays. No additional research is required.

A polished draft of this essay is due on Friday, 10/5. A full draft of this essay is due for swapping with classmates for peer editing on Monday, 10/8. A revised draft is due on Friday, 10/12.

Failure to bring a full essay on this "swap day" OR to me when revisions are due will result in an F for the essay. When turning in your revisions, please include the draft with my comments and your responses to those comments.

- 2) Peer responses (10%) of your grade 100 points. You will swap drafts of your critical essays with three classmates. Each of you will provide extensive feedback, following your instructor's comments, on each essay. Detailed, specific comments regarding content and organization are required and form the basis for your grade. You will also give your essay to a sophomore Honors College student for comments that student's comments will be graded by his or her professor. This assignment can make the difference between one letter grade and another.
- 3) Reading Journals and other writing assignments (30%) of your grade 300 points. I will provide prompts for many of these assignments. **Two short papers** (3+ pages), **eight reading journals** (2+ pages), and **three New York Times responses** (1-2 pages) will be assigned at various points. We will use these assignments to work on various aspects of writing, reading, and revision. These are not loose free writings; they are serious, thoughtful pieces of writing that demonstrate your engagement with the texts we have read. Some of these assignments will be posted on the course D2L page under "Discussions." I expect strong, specific, and textually engaged journal responses from you all, so keep up with the reading and make sure you have time to organize your thoughts when you write. You will work with a variety of texts (including ARQ and The New York Times) for these journal assignments.
- 4) Participation (15%) of your grade 150 points. Excellent in-class participation and excellent participation on the D2L discussion board are expected from you. We will use online posts to get class discussion started, so please make sure you post by the deadlines I establish. I expect you to demonstrate online leadership as well as leadership in class. Shy people can lead in different ways from outgoing people!

I cannot stress the importance of participation in all facets of this course enough. We are a community of learners, and if people are unprepared, over garrulous, or simply sullen, the community fall apart. We all know the difference between comments that are substantive and lead to further discussion and comments that shut discussion down, so let's make sure to avoid the usual mistakes people make in the first year of college. Prepare, carefully and thoughtfully, on your own. Take time to read carefully and intently so that you enter into the world of the text fully. Group learning can too easily produce facile and reductive group thinking, so beware of formulaic responses and corner cutting "advice." It is usually cheap and counter productive.

We all (professors, administrators, and of course your student colleagues) expect you to work diligently and with intellectual integrity. With that in mind, consider the following components to your participation grade.

- Attendance This is a requirement, needless to say! The Honors College attendance policy states that "more than one unexcused absence from class will result in an F grade for the course." This policy, viewed one way, puts a great deal of pressure on professors to "excuse" absences. Viewed another way, the policy encourages good, honest communication between the professor and students. The best way to avoid the consequences of this policy is to look after yourself and to attend every class. If you are ill, you should inform all of your professors that day. I will excuse one absence, regardless of the reasons you are absent. I will not promise to excuse any more absences than that. Make life simple. Do your work and come to class. Do not be late, since the Honors College counts two latenesses as one absence.
- Class participation The Honors College is a community of learners, and the
 community of learners falls apart if you do not participate with integrity. Short
 cuts to class preparation are damaging to us all, as are attempts to "get around"
 assignments and readings. I expect you to be able to synthesize feedback you
 receive from me and from others in class, to engage in discussions intently and
 purposefully, and to revise your initial ideas into more complex and nuanced
 ideas. In class.
- Small group work Much of this work will be done through D2L, but we will also engage in revision workshops and quotation finding workshops using small groups in class.
- Fine Arts you will be expected to attend four Fine Arts events during Unit A.
 One event will be an opera. The other two events should be professor-led
 events. Within a week of the event, please submit at least a page response,
 demonstrating that you were not only present, but that you were engaged and
 actively drawing meaning from the event.

Grading: A (1000-899 points), B (898-799 points), C (798-700 points), D (699-650 points), F (below 650 points).

Your shorter essays will receive comments and grades, since they are part of your preparation for your longer final essay. I will also grade and comment on your *New York Times* assignments and on your first few reading journals. After that, you should have internalized a standard to meet. I will not comment extensively on your journals (after the first few), although if I see things getting off track I will let you know, especially when it comes to applying and revising concepts from *ARQ*. We should be able to establish criteria for good journal writing together. You should expect to revise your work. None of us are perfect! I will grade your Fine Arts assignments with a grade of check plus, check, or check minus.

It is important for you to establish a sense of what constitutes high quality work, and you should remember that you are learning how to do new things in this course. Strategies that have worked in the past may no longer work now that you are in a new environment. I will provide you with the basic building blocks for effective writing (strong thesis statements derived from a combination of strong topic sentences, transitional sentences, and signal sentences introducing quotations), and I expect you to use them. I also expect you to take the feedback I offer you seriously. If I say you need to work on transitional sentences, for example, I expect you to do so and to understand how that helps your writing. Good writing also emerges from good rereading, so I may ask you to revisit the texts we are reading to improve your writing. Developing your writing and reading skills is time-consuming and often painstaking work. Be patient, diligent, and try to keep your frustration to a minimum – remember, you can always turn to the texts for help when you are in trouble, and you can develop your ideas by linking quotations from the text together.

Syllabus/Schedule of Work (Readings should be done FOR the dates they are assigned)

- M 8/27 Introductory lecture in the Great Hall
- T 8/28 Read Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" (available on the HC website) for today. Bring a printed copy of this reading to class. We will discuss the consequences of Neo-Platonism and will consider some alternatives to Neo-Platonism.
- TH 8/30 ARQ, Chapters 1-5 Understanding Critical Thinking in an Advertising Culture
 Kovaly, 5-51 Creating a New Context for Critical Thinking.
 Reading Journal (RJ) #1 due. Reading journals should be submitted to the course Dropbox on D2L before the Dropbox deadline.
- F 8/31 Clifford's "The Ethics of Belief" (available on HC website). Bring a printed copy of this reading to class.

 Kovaly, 52-92. "Reasoning" and the Rhetoric of Renewal.

 In class writing assignment (required).
- M 9/3 Labour Day (no classes)
- T 9/4 Kovaly, 93-137. Review ARQ Chapters 1-5. ARQ Chapter 6. RJ #2 due. Questioning our own assumptions and interpretative positions. Learning to listen to a text.
- TH 9/6 Kovaly, 138-192 (Finish)

 RJ #3 due. Contrastive thinking, contrasting examples. Reading the Structure of a memoir.

F 9/7 Review of the First Two Weeks. New York Times exercise due. Begin discussion of Half of a Yellow Sun. ARQ Chapter 2 from 2011 edition ("Critical Thinking as a Social Activity) – PDF file e-mailed to students. 9/10 Half of a Yellow Sun -- Part One (The Early Sixties) - to Chapter 5 Μ RJ #4 due. Т 9/11 Half of a Yellow Sun – Finish Part One. Part Two (The Late Sixties) Group discussions through D2L and in class. TH 9/13 Half of a Yellow Sun – Part Two (The Late Sixties) Group discussions through D2L and in class. RJ #5 due. F Half of a Yellow Sun -- Part Three (The Early Sixties) In class writing (required) Μ Half of a Yellow Sun -- Part Four (The Late Sixties) - finish the novel. Short Essay #1 due. Submit to D2L Dropbox by the specified time. Т Poems from Arab Andalusia -- "Translators's Note," "Introduction" 1-29 9/18 Metaphoric Transformations - Love, War, and Drinking TH 9/20 Poems from Arab Andalusia – 30-81 Metaphoric Transformations and Critical Thinking – Love, War, Drinking, Nature, Theology, and Normative Thinking RJ #6 due F Poems from Arab Andalusia – 82-91 (King Al-Mu'tamid) – selection of 9/21 poems involving motion. Read Susan Bordo, "Hunger as Ideology" (PDF file). Μ 9/24 Poems from Arab Andalusia – grouping poems by category, considering the consequences of your grouping. Read Shanfara "Arabian Ode in L" (PDF file). Short Essay #2 due. Submit to D2L Dropbox by the specified time. Т Sonnets to Orpheus – Love and Death and the Making of Personifications. 9/25 "Introduction" + First Part, Sonnets 1-11. Group discussion on connections with Poems from Arab Andalusia. TH Sonnets to Orpheus – First Part, Sonnets 12-26. RJ #7 due 9/27 F 9/28 Sonnets to Orpheus -- Second Part, Sonnets 1-14

M	10/1	Sonnets to Orpheus – Second Part, Sonnets 15-28 RJ#8 due.
Т	10/2	Sonnets to Orpheus review and discussion.
TH	10/4	Review of narrative, poetry, metaphor, and critical thinking.
F	10/5	Unit A Paper Swap "Polished" Rough Draft of Final Essay Due. Bring 3 printed copies to class.
M	10/8	Unit A Group Revision Workshops in Class.
Т	10/9	2 Presentations in the Great Hall
TH	10/11	2 Presentations in the Great Hall
F	10/12	1 Presentation in the Great Hall. Essays for Unit A to Professors.
M	10/15	Conferences with Unit A Professors

10/16 Conferences with Unit A Professors

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