Sophia

Fall 2024

David Kane

Promise

Imagine an educational institution which made this promise to you:

No college does more to increase its students odds of getting the future they want, and to make them think harder about the future they *should* want.

The Sophia Curriculum is part of how we make good on the second part of that promise.

Description

What is the good life? What is a just society? There are no more important questions than these. The Sophia Curriculum leads students to grapple with these issues, to examine the answers from the greatest creators in history and to think for themselves about how to live their lives after graduation.

We read no book published after 1824. It takes at least two centuries to determine if a work of prose is of lasting value.

Although philosophy, both moral and political, is at the heart of a liberal arts education, we believe that literature and art matter just as much.

Sophia I is the first course in the Sophia Curriculum, designed to help students answer the big questions.

Students will complete three projects, all entries in their professional portfolios.

Prerequisites: None. You must have a computer.

Staff

Preceptor David Kane. Please address me as "Preceptor," not "David," nor "Instructor Kane," nor "Brah," nor "Professor Kane," nor "Mr. Kane," nor, worst of all, "Dr. Kane." I respond to e-mail within 24 hours. If I don't, e-mail me again.

Course Philosophy

No Lectures: The worst method for transmitting information from my head to yours is for me to lecture you. There are no lectures. We talk during class. You learn soccer with the ball at your feet. You learn wisdom by discussion and debate.

Cold Calling: I call on students during class. This keeps every student involved, makes for a more lively discussion and helps to prepare students for the real world, in which you can't hide in the back row. Over the course of the semester, every student in the class will participate equally in class discussion.

Engagement: We require you to be engaged with the outside world. For example, you are required to email strangers and seek to meet with them about their careers. Our project presentations are public, and you must invite family and friends to attend.

Millism: We follow John Stuart Mills' advice: "He who knows only his own side of the case, knows little of that. His reasons may be good, and no one may have been able to refute them. But if he is equally unable to refute the reasons on the opposite side; if he does not so much as know what they are, he has no ground for preferring either opinion."

Material

Readings

- *Iliad* by Homer, 8th century BC.

- *Meno* by Plato, 5th century BC.

- *Dhammapada*, 3rd century BC.

- *Phaedo* by Plato.

- *Baghavad Gita* by Vyasa, 1st millenium BC.

- *The Republic* by Plato.

- *Great Learning* by Zengzi, 5th century BC.

- *Analects* by Confucius, 5th century BC.

- *Tao Te Ching*, 4th century BC.

- *Odyssey* by Homer, 8th century BC.

Great Works

Poetry, art, architecture and music are just as important as prose when considering the Good Life. Each month, we will focus on one poem (or play), one work of art, one piece of architecture, and one musical composition. Instructors in the Sophia Courses incorporate these landmarks into their pedagogy as they see fit. In this course, we memorize the poetry and study the art.

September

- Daffodils by William Wordsworth, 1804.

- David by Michelangelo, 1504.

- The Great Pyramid of Giza, 2500 BC.

- Symphony No. 5 by Ludwig van Beethoven, 1808.

October

- Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening by Robert Frost, 1923.

- Terracotta Army, 200 BC.

- Great Wall of China, 1500.

- Ride of the Valkyries by Richard Wagner, 1851.

November

- *If* by Rudyard Kipling, 1895.

- Dance at Bougival by Pierre-Auguste Renoir, 1883.

- Taj Mahal, 1643.

- 1812 Overture by Tchaikovsky, 1880.

December

- *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare, 1601.

- The School of Athens by Raphael, 1511.

- St. Peter's Basilica, 1626.

- Pachelbel's Canon by Johann Pachelbel, 1700.

Course Policies

Workload: The course should take about 8 hours per week, outside of the projects. This is an expected average across the class as a whole. *It is not a maximum.* Some students will end up spending much less time. Others will spend much more.

Missing Class: You expect me to be present for class. I expect the same of you. There is nothing more embarrassing, for both us, than for me to call your name and have you not be there to answer. But, at the same time, conflicts arise. It is never a problem to miss class if, for example, you are out of town or have a health issue. Just email me, explaining the situation. Please do so on the day you will be missing class. I don't need advanced warning.

Discord: All general questions — those not of a personal nature — should be posted to Discord so that all students can benefit from both the question and the answer(s). Please post your question in a sensible channel.

Working with Others: Students are free (and encouraged) to discuss their projects with one another. However, you must hand in your own unique work in all cases. Any copy/paste of another person's work is plagiarism.

Readings: Assignments in a given week cover (approximately) the material that we will use that week. I will not hesitate to cold-call students with questions about the readings. Do them. Note that the week's readings must be done by Monday.

AI: You may use ChatGPT, Bard, Midjourney, Stability AI or any other AI tool. We are preparing you for the real world, where use of AI tools will soon be ubiquitous.

Tardiness: We begin on time and end on time.

Announcements: You are responsible for any assignment/exam/deadline updates/changes which are either announced in class or promulgated via the course e-mail list. The official Preceptor's Notes, posted to the Discord channel #preceptors-notes, are important. You are not responsible for every random post on Discord.

Conclusion

If you had tried to understand/explain/illustrate a question of wisdom before taking this class, you would have done X well. Now that you have taken the class – now that you have read some of the Great Works and tried your own hand at creation – you will do Y well. The success (or failure) of the class can be measured by comparing Y with X.

Schedule

Week 0

Iliad 1-10

Week 1=

Iliad 11-24

Week 2

Meno

    Dhammapada

Week 3

Phaedo

    Baghavad Gita

Week 4, Project I

One goal this week is to complete the first project and then present it to your peers in class. Although your presentation is not, itself, graded, we will take off points for showing up late or otherwise messing up the process. Demo Days are public events. We welcome all who are interested in your work. You, also, must send an e-mail invitation (bcc'ing me) to someone in the local area. Arrive on time. Dress is casual.

    Project I due Friday.

Week 5

Republic: Book I

    The Great Learning

    Analects: Books 1-4

Week 6

Republic: Books II-IV

    Analects: Books 5-8

    Tao Te Ching: Chapters 1-20

Week 7

Republic: Books VII

    Analects: Books 9-12

    Tao Te Ching: Chapters 21-40

Week 8

Republic: Books X

    Analects: Books 13-16

    Tao Te Ching: Chapters 41-60

Week 9

We will finish and present our second project. Presentations will be over Zoom. You must invite your family. (If this is a problem, see me.)

Project II due Friday.

Week 10

Republic: Books V-VI, VIII-IX

Analects: Books 17-20

Tao Te Ching: Chapters 61-81

Week 11

Odyssey 1-12

Week 12

Odyssey 13-24

Week 14

A public portfolio of high quality work will do more for your future than a college degree.

Project III presentations during last class session.

Acknowledgements

Inspiration for aspects of this course comes from the Directed Studies at Yale, Humanities 110 at Reed, Humanities 10 at Harvard, The Core Curriculum at Columbia, Classical Chinese Ethical and Political Theory at Harvard, New Saint Andrews, St. Johns College, Thomas

Acquainas College, Boston College's Perspectives on Western Culture, the Comprehensive Reading List from the University of Dallas, and Baylor's Great Texts.