

## Freshman Seminars Program

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Wednesday 12:45–2:45 pm, Harvard Hall 102

[Office hours: Monday 2:00-4:00 pm, via Zoom](#)

### ADVICE TO YOUNG LEADERS (FS 40j)

During the current global crisis, questions of leadership have become especially urgent. What qualities do people demand in their leaders? What can leaders do to reassure, to warn, or to direct in such extraordinary and unsettling times? What are the conditions for successful leadership in an emergency like this? Why have some leaders flourished, while others have so spectacularly failed? These questions about leaders, and leadership, may not be quite eternal but they are recurrent.

In this Freshman Seminar, we will trace one tradition of leadership by working our way from ancient Rome to the summer of 2021. Along the way, we will engage with some of the great works of Western thought, a surprising number of which were directed to people, like you, in their late teens or early twenties, particularly those planning (also like you?) to enter public service or to take up positions of authority and leadership. We will read these works with an eye both to the past and to the present: that is to say, we will examine them historically, in their own terms and their own contexts, and we will also apply their wisdom to current concerns and ongoing dilemmas for leaders, young and old.

The goal of the class is to urge you to think rigorously about your own imminent responsibilities—as citizens and as leaders—by reflecting on arguments addressed to similar rising generations in the past, in ancient Rome, early modern Europe, and in the modern period, from the nineteenth century right up to the present.

#### REQUIREMENTS

The main requirements will be attendance at all meetings of the seminar, keeping up with the reading, and participating fully in each discussion. Participation will also include a brief presentation during one class.

The writing requirements will comprise four (*out of five*) response-papers (2–3 pages), and one long paper (10 pages). For each of the response papers, you should compose a concise comparison of a pair of authors we have read. The final paper will be a longer version of the same exercise, but written in the form of a dialogue between *any two* of our authors debating the best advice to give a young person embarking on their vocation. The choice of authors, subjects, and career-path will be up to you. The papers do not demand any further research beyond the texts we read for class. For the final paper you may, of course, bring in any other material you find relevant for your dialogue.

Participation and presentation: 40%

Response papers: 30%

Long paper: 30%

All written work should be submitted electronically via the course site on Canvas, by midnight (EST) on the date specified. Please tell me if this presents any difficulty at any point.

Final grades for the course will be Pass/Fail, though I will give you letter grades for each piece of work to help you assess your progress during the semester.

## Statement on Collaboration

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work. For assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics and to share sources. You may find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with your peers, particularly if you are working on the same topic as a classmate. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own original approach to the subject. You must also adhere to standard citation practices in this discipline and properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that have helped you with your work. If you received any help with your writing (feedback on drafts, etc.), you must also acknowledge this assistance. For further information, please see the Academic Integrity Policy.

## SET BOOKS

All these books are available online via HOLLIS or as PDFs (see the links below). If you prefer to read the books themselves in hard copy, most should be available new or secondhand via the [Harvard Book Store](#) or from sites such as [Bookfinder.com](#), [Alibris.com](#), [Abebooks.com](#), [Amazon.com](#).

Cicero, *On Duties*, ed. M. T. Griffin and E. M. Atkins (Cambridge University Press) 978-0521348355

Seneca, *Moral and Political Essays*, ed. John M. Cooper and J. F. Procop<sup>Å</sup>© (Cambridge University Press) 978-0521348188

Niccol<sup>Å</sup>2 Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ed. Quentin Skinner and Russell Price (Cambridge UP) 978-1316509265

Desiderius Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince*, ed. Lisa Jardine (Cambridge UP) 978-0521588119

William James, *The Heart of William James*, ed. Robert Richardson (Harvard UP) 978-0674055612

Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, trans. Charlie Louth (Penguin) 978-0141192321

Max Weber, *Political Writings*, trans. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge) 978-0521397193

W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Education of Black People: Ten Critiques, 1906â€™1960* (Monthly Review) 978-1583670439

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of Oneâ€™s Own*, ed. Susan Gubar (Harvest) 978-0156030410

Maya Angelou, *Letter to My Daughter* (Random House) 978-0812980035

## CLASS SCHEDULE

8 September: INTRODUCTION

15 September: [Cicero, On Duties](#) (44 BCE), Books I, III (pp. 1â€™62, 101â€™47).[\[1\]](#)

22 September: [Seneca, On Mercy](#) (55â€™56 CE), in *Moral and Political Essays*, pp. 117â€™64.[\[2\]](#)

29 September: Niccol<sup>Å</sup>2 Machiavelli, *The Prince* (1513).[\[3\]](#)

**Response paper due (Cicero and Seneca)**

6 October: Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince* (1516).[\[4\]](#)

13 October: William James, *Talks to Students* (1895–98), “The Gospel of Relaxation”; “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings”; “What Makes a Life Significant,” in James, *The Heart of William James*, pp. 130–44, 146–63, 165–82. [\[5\]](#)

### **Response paper due (Machiavelli and Erasmus)**

20 October: Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet* (1902–08).[\[6\]](#)

### **VISIT TO HOUGHTON LIBRARY**

27 October: Max Weber, “[Politics as a Vocation](#)” (1919), in Weber, *Political Writings*, pp. 309–69. [\[7\]](#)

### **Response paper due (James and Rilke)**

3 November: W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Education of Black People* (1906–41), pp. 21–84, 111–33, 169–79.[\[8\]](#)

10 November: Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929).[\[9\]](#)

“[Craftsmanship](#),” read by Virginia Woolf (1937).

“[Shakespeare’s Sister](#),” read by Fiona Shaw, from *A Room of One’s Own*.

### **Response paper due (Weber and Du Bois)**

17 November: Maya Angelou, *Letter to My Daughter* (2009).[\[10\]](#)

24 November: NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)

### **Response paper due (Woolf and Angelou)**

1 December: Harvard Commencement Addresses (online): George C. Marshall [\[text\]](#) [\[recording\]](#) (1947); [Madeleine Albright](#) (1997); [J. K. Rowling](#) [\[text\]](#) (2008); [John Lewis](#) (2018); [Angela Merkel](#) [\[text\]](#) (2019); [Ruth Simmons](#) (2021).

### **8 December: Final paper due (5 pm EST)**

[\[1\]](#) Addressed to Cicero’s son, *Marcus Tullius Cicero Minor* (65–? BCE), aged 19.

[\[2\]](#) Addressed to the emperor Nero (37–68), aged 18.

[\[3\]](#) Dedicated to Lorenzo di Piero de’ Medici (1492–1519), aged 21.

[\[4\]](#) Addressed to Prince Charles, later emperor Charles V (1500–58), aged 16.

[\[5\]](#) Based on lectures at women’s colleges, 1895–98.

[\[6\]](#) Letters addressed to Frank Xaver Kappus (1883–1966), aged 19–25.

[\[7\]](#) Lecture to Freistudentische Bund, University of Munich, 28 January 1919.

[\[8\]](#) Lectures given at Atlanta, Fisk, Hampton and Lincoln Universities, 1906–41.

[\[9\]](#) Lectures to students at Girton College and Newnham College, University of Cambridge, October 1928.

[\[10\]](#) Angelou (1928–2014) in fact had no daughter—she had a son—but imagined “thousands of daughters” as the recipients of her wisdom.