1.1 Classical Cultures
3 hours; 3 credits

Introductory study of ancient cultures through close reading of a variety of texts; most sections will focus on Greece and Rome, but some may explore other classical traditions such as those of India, Mesopotamia or China. Attention to such questions as literary genre, material and performance contexts, gender, political institutions, religion, philosophy, models of culture and the creation of a classical tradition. Practice in close reading and communication by means of critical writing, class discussion and other methods, such as collaborative group work. (Not open to students who have completed Core Studies 1, 1.1, or 1.2.)

Prerequisite: None.

Core Curriculum goals addressed by this course

To develop the ability to think critically and creatively, to reason logically, and to express one’s thoughts orally and in writing with clarity and precision.

To understand the arts, histories and cultures of the past as a foundation for those of the present.

To be capable of integrating knowledge from different sources.

Course objectives

1. Students will be able to use with accuracy and precision basic terms of literary analysis relevant to the texts read in class, and to describe differences among the literary genres represented by the class readings.

2. Students will be able to read literary texts critically.

3. Students will be able to identify traditions and practices specific to ancient cultures and describe how they help shape the texts produced within those cultures.

4. Students will be able to write interpretive prose which is clear and cogent.

5. Students will be able to make articulate contributions to classroom discussion of texts.
Course outcomes

1. Students correctly identify terms of literary analysis relevant to the texts read in class, make appropriate use of these tools in writing assignments and classroom discussion, and accurately describe specific characteristics of the various literary genres represented by the class readings.

2. Students describe and analyze structural, thematic, rhetorical and other characteristic elements of the various literary texts read in the class, demonstrating an awareness of the possibilities of ambiguity or multiple perspectives.

3. Students describe with precision traditions and practices of the ancient cultures studied in the class (e.g. beliefs regarding the gods; political institutions; gender roles; philosophical discourses), and describe the ways in which they influence the texts produced by those cultures.

4. Students write clear and cogent essays which build arguments based on specific textual detail.

5. Students make focused, articulate contributions to classroom discussion of assigned texts.

Sample syllabus focused on Greece and Rome
(This is to be understood as a representative sample. Similar outlines will eventually be developed for sections on ancient cultures other than Greece and Rome, after review and approval by the Classics Department and the Core Curriculum Committee.)

Week 1: Defining classical cultures
Topics: Definitions and competing models of culture and of classical traditions
Readings: Selections from Sappho, Herodotus, Catullus, Homer’s Iliad and Virgil’s Aeneid

Week 2: Gods and honor
Topics: Techniques of oral poetry (e.g. meter, epithets and formulae, similes); Homeric value systems; concepts of divinity and mortality
Readings: Homer, Iliad 1-3

Week 3: Personal relationships
Topics: Homeric men and women; traditions of hospitality; the workings of honor and fate
Readings: Homer, Iliad 6, 9, 16

Week 4: Final acts
Topics: Reflections on mortality; poetic endings; compositional patterns of Homeric epic
Readings: Homer, Iliad 22-24

Week 5: Self-knowledge in the community
Topics: Civic ritual; dramatic performance and the uses of myth; narrative structures; suffering, fate and reversals of fortune
Readings: Sophocles, Oedipus the King
Week 6: Barbarians and the Other
Topics: Women as the Other; foreignness and exile; the conflict of reason and rage
Readings: Euripides, Medea

Week 7: Consolidation and assessment
Topics: The values of literature; reflections on a classical canon; the workings of tragedy
Readings: Selections from Aristotle, Poetics
Midterm exam

Week 8: Constructions of civic identity
Topics: Perceptions of the enemy; competing models; democracy and imperialism; aims and methods of history
Readings: Selections from Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War

Week 9: Laughing at the old and the new
Topics: Divergent educational theory and practice; the threat of rhetoric; the role of comedy in the community; sexual stereotypes
Readings: Aristophanes, Clouds

Week 10: Death of a radical
Topics: Conflicting perspectives on Socrates; the individual and the community; self-sacrifice
Readings: Plato, Apology of Socrates

Week 11: Tradition and innovation
Topics: The quarrel between philosophy and poetry; conflicting views on justice, gods and the afterlife, family and society
Readings: Selections from Plato, Republic

Week 12: Rome remolds culture: literary epic
Topics: Roman appropriations of Greek culture; literary reworkings of oral epic; poetic responses to contemporary ideologies
Readings: Virgil, Aeneid 1, 2

Week 13: Rome remolds culture: passion, death and political mythologies
Topics: Tragic conflicts between passion and duty; construction of a political mythology; Romanization of Platonic views on the afterlife
Readings: Virgil, Aeneid 4, 6

Week 14: Playing with classical traditions
Topics: Parodies of epic tradition and philosophy; further debates on rhetoric; literature and social commentary
Readings: Selections from Petronius’ Satyricon
Methods of evaluation: Students are required to write two papers of approximately 1000 words each, to take written midterm and final exams, and to complete in-class written exercises (e.g. quizzes, outline exercises, diagnostic writing assignments).

Methods of assessment

1. Writing assignments and exams (including identification questions, short answers and brief essays) require students to describe and make appropriate use of the terms of literary analysis discussed in class, and to compare and contrast two or more texts belonging to different literary genres.

2. Exams and papers require students to describe and analyze structural, thematic, rhetorical and other characteristic elements of the various literary texts read in the class, and to demonstrate an awareness of the possibilities of ambiguity or multiple perspectives.

3. Exams and papers require students to describe specific cultural traditions and practices which inform and influence the texts read in class.

4. Exams and papers require students to construct arguments about texts which are based on specific detail.

5. In classroom discussion, students will be expected to make contributions which are based on specific textual details.

Bibliography

(This is to be understood as a representative bibliography. Similar bibliographies will be provided for sections on ancient cultures other than Greece and Rome after approval by the Department.)

Homer, *Iliad* or *Odyssey*
Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* or *Antigone*
Euripides, *Medea* or *Bacchae*
Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*; or Herodotus, *Histories*
Aristophanes, *Clouds* or *Lysistrata*
Plato, *Apology of Socrates* and selections from the *Republic*
Virgil, *Aeneid*
Petronius, *Satyricon*