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S.I. 633, '09: *Coursework and Grading: What are the Requirements and Expectations?*

Class participation: Although occasionally I will deliver some material through lecture, the course is intended to function as a seminar--that is, as a freely-flowing discussion, an exchange of ideas among people bringing both prior experiences and recently-acquired knowledge to bear on the topic of the class meeting. Some of you may find that giving voice to opinions, however informally, in front of twenty-five or thirty others essentially comes down to an exercise in public speaking, which may not be something for which you feel you have a natural proclivity or interest. Others of you may enjoy the experience of thinking aloud in public and be spurred on to do so by the large class size. Still others may find certain styles of verbal interaction worthwhile but others of dubious value or validity.

Here are a few points I would like to make to facilitate the discussion aspect of the course:

► Speaking up in class is just one of several ways to participate. One can participate in exchanges of ideas through one's eyes, through the expression on one's face, through one's body language. If the whole term came and went without your ever having contributed once verbally to a discussion (which would be a shame, of course, but occasionally this happens) you could also still engage with the class discussions by alluding to and taking inspiration from them in your written work like the response papers and your book review(s). Finally, there is the option, of course, of being particularly energetic in the small group work we engage in.

► I try mightily to lead discussion through open-ended questions, or sometimes deliberately provocative stances, that are intended to elicit your heartfelt opinions rather than corral you into a pre-determined "right answer" (exception made for purely factual points, naturally). If on any occasion you feel that I am fishing for a "right answer," please let me know privately, as I would like to know what signals I am sending that give this false impression.

► Article and reading summaries, of which each student will do one, should be prepared with the following question in mind: "if I were the only person present having read this text, and the material in it were deemed of crucial importance to all, how would I summarize and comment on it in a succinct manner?" The summary should proceed at a brisk but not excessive pace through the text, always trying to maintain a degree of evaluative distance rather than descending to a slavish listing of points in sequence. There are essentially two types of readings in this class: primarily argumentative and primarily informative. Each presents a slightly different task to the summarizer; in either case, please try to keep your summary lively. You are allowed and even encouraged to editorialize about the text you are summarizing ("I couldn't follow this part of the argument," "She seemed on shaky ground when she got to X," etc.).

► Response papers are an integral part of class participation, and you are encouraged to use them as such. Their function is to allow you in 200 to 400 words to engage with the ideas presented in one or two of the readings or assignments in order to allow you to do some analytical thinking ahead of the class meeting. The hope is that these insights—or questions for clarification--will inform your remarks in discussion. One of the response papers may be an analytical summary of the piece.

Please note these details for producing response papers: you must prepare at least six of them in toto throughout the term (your choice of dates, but keep reading). Please provide a header for each one conforming to this style: "[Your name], Response Paper 1 of 6," next one to read "... 2 of 6," and so on. Response papers are **required** for Week 12 (27 March, History of Reading), and highly recommended for Week 2 and Week 11 (Milton discussion). Please print them out and hand them in to me at the end of each relevant class session.

► Policy on use of computers, as well as any electronic device with a display screen, in class: A computer, and by extension the classroom's wireless internet connection, has two or three valid uses in this class. First and most obviously, for the taking of notes. This in normal circumstances I anticipate to be done episodically and sporadically, not continuously. Second, to gather information that could usefully supplement the discussion at hand, in the event of a genuine need for such information. Third, to avail yourself of the inherent disruptiveness of the new communications paradigms that are reshaping our print-based pedagogical models as profoundly as the advent of printing reshaped and disrupted the oral models of the fifteenth century in European classrooms. In other words, you are welcome to challenge conventional hierarchies of authority occasionally, should you so wish. **No other uses of computers or electronic-screen devices will be permitted.**

Attendance Policy: You may miss one class session, no questions asked, for whatever reason you deem appropriate. I generally prefer if you can alert me either ahead of time or after the fact, but this is not necessary. You are responsible for taking the initiative of informing yourself about exactly what you may have missed in the session at which you were absent, including announcements. If you need to miss more than one session for a compelling reason, please be in touch with me. If you miss more than one session and I do not hear from you, you should expect your term grade to be affected, since the class meetings are an integral part of the course.

Formal Writing Assignments:

General remarks: I would greatly appreciate it if your formal writing assignments (book reviews and final project) were composed in standard academic prose. Students who have pursued humanities majors (history, literature, film studies, philosophy, and so on) generally need make no adjustments to their writing style. Occasionally students who have taken technical majors find they need some guidance on my expectations. If you habitually write two-sentence paragraphs or cannot conceive of composing without using bullet points, you may want to consult with me. A clear, concise, methodical and reflective style will stand you very well in this course.

Book review(s): The point is to summarize the work cogently and engage critically with several points of its reasoning. The list of works to choose from will be made available early in the term on the course CTools site. See the CTools site also for a formal assignment sheet.

Length: First book review: 2000-2500 words

Second book review: 2500-3000 words

Quality is always preferable to quantity. Turning in a well-written 2200-word essay is much better than submitting a rambling 3000-word one.

Final project: This is a research paper meant to allow you to delve into some aspect of the course in much greater depth. You should plan on putting some specific form or class of material artifact at the center of your analysis, especially if you are pursuing the longer paper (Option A). If you are pursuing Option B, you may, if you wish, treat a theoretical or problem question that does not entail use of primary sources. Again, see the assignment sheet posted to CTools for much more detail and possible topics.

Length: 6000-7000 words (Option A), 3000-3500 words (Option B)