

Departments of English and HPRSS

Choate Rosemary Hall

Wallingford, Connecticut

A Consumer's Guide to the Course

Rev. Dr. Ned Gallagher

LORD OF OLGRINMORE

e-mail: ngallagher@choate.edu
voice: 203-350-9612

office: Paul Mellon Humanities Center #205
campus residence: 53 Hillhouse Way



Illustration of a philosophy lesson, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, by Chretien Legouis, France, 14th c. (Bibliotheque Municipale, Rouen)

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."

- Aristotle

First Principles

This course proceeds under the following assumptions:

1. Academic success is rooted in **getting work done**. Assigned reading should be completed before class. Papers and projects should be submitted on time. Making these habits part of your routine is a pretty simple strategy that will pay rich dividends.
2. Attainment of **excellence comes from extra effort**. Perfunctory completion of assignments is rarely impressive. Good essays, for example, are the product of multiple revisions, not first drafts. The best students I've ever taught have distinguished themselves by exceeding expectations.
3. High school students need to cultivate an appreciation for **close reading of texts**. Salvation through reading!
4. Good classroom discussion requires an **atmosphere of civil discourse**. Respect for others and for diverse points of view is essential in facilitating a meaningful educational experience. The founders of this country considered republican (small "r") virtues as essential to good citizenship.
5. My goal as a teacher is pretty simple: to encourage the **development of extraordinary human beings**. By that, I mean people who are **champions in life**. The defining qualities of extraordinary human beings are being **principled, courageous, disciplined, curious, contemplative, humble, compassionate, and dedicated to self-improvement**. (The details of these qualities can be found at <http://www.nedgallagher.com/courses/extraordinary.pdf>; I'd be happy to discuss in more detail if you desire.)

Academic Honesty

Scholastic integrity is expected and required. It is an essential part of academic life at Choate and beyond. All work submitted for this class must be your own. Copying or misrepresenting the work of anyone else as your own is cheating. This includes the unacknowledged word-for-word use and/or paraphrasing of another person's work, and/or the inappropriate unacknowledged use of another person's ideas. Similarly, work that depends on artificial intelligence rather than old-fashioned research and composition may run afoul of the Honor Code. Such choices are unacceptable in this class and prohibited by the school. Any case of suspected plagiarism or other forms of cheating, in accordance with school rules, will be reported to the Department Head, who may refer it to the Deans Office.

Decorum

Mutual respect and cooperation, both during the time we spend together in the classroom and in the time you work together on assignments outside class, are the basis for our shared efforts in this course. A successful class depends on civil discourse and thoughtful communication among us all. Honest disagreement is encouraged; incivility is not. Neither are constant sidebar conversations nor distracting behavior in class.

Students are expected to arrive in class on time, well prepared for each day's work, having completed the assigned reading and/or assessments, and ready to participate in the exchange of ideas.

Electronic Etiquette

Technology is a wonderful thing. I am hardly a Luddite when it comes to the benefits technology offers learners and teachers alike. But, as your generation consists of what we call "digital natives," I find too many of you have trouble cutting yourselves off from your devices for any length of time. So I strive to make my classroom a device-free zone as much as possible.

Please silence (or better yet, turn off) all mobile phones, tablets, and other electronic devices. While you should have your tablet or laptop with you when you come to class—I may ask you to take a quiz or test on Canvas, for example—I expect you put away your screens during discussion. I would be happy to explain why you are better off taking notes by hand. If you have a burning desire to look up something related to our conversation, please ask. But keeping devices turned on during class too often leads to distraction: surfing the internet or checking your e-mail or social media accounts or chatting with friends.

An Invitation

A boarding school education offers opportunities for students to get to know their teachers outside of the classroom. In that context, then, I hope that you—or a few of you collectively—will screw up your courage and endure the taunts of your friends in asking your teacher to share a meal in the dining hall (or perhaps off campus) at some point this term.

Class Participation

Daily Preparation & Assigned Reading:

This is the main input of factual material, as well as various interpretations and analyses of that material. Clearly you cannot learn much in the classroom without doing the reading first. Much of our discussion will be conducted in a Socratic fashion; that is, you will complete certain assignments and will be expected to answer questions based on them and exchange ideas with your classmates and teacher. It is therefore important that you learn how to understand the material **before** you come to class. Looking at it another way, we will not have enough time in class to cover all the things that might appear on tests, so you had better learn them by yourself.

course credo:

I hear, and I forget;
I see, and I remember;
I do, and I understand.
- Chinese proverb

Like athletes in training, young scholars must be sure they are properly nourished. As the reading you do for this course will be your primary "food for thought," you should pay close attention to how this nourishment is being ingested. You may find—like the decathlete weaned on junk food—that easy shortcuts will undermine your efforts when the moment of truth arrives. Assigned reading will provide focal points for daily discussion. I will try

to give you pointers in advance of what to look for in the reading to enable you to get more out of it. Get into the habit of reading the syllabus carefully each night before you begin the assignment.

Discussions:

The core of the course consists of the Socratic discussions in class, in which we will explore the reading and the topics at hand. Productive discussions are frequently contradictory and ambiguous, producing different perspectives to chew on rather than kernels of truth to swallow whole. Asking seemingly stupid questions may well be a way of overcoming confusion and beginning to understand. Each person will be expected to come to his or her own understanding of the processes involved. Such activity is not without a considerable degree of intellectual risk, but it is hoped that in the discussions you will be willing to take such risks for the very real intellectual gains which will accrue both to you and to the group as a whole.

And while I will do my best to provide illumination where appropriate and perhaps keep a discussion roughly on track (though digressions are often worthy pursuits), I hope you come to appreciate that you have plenty to learn from your classmates, and that the teacher should not be seen as the source of “the right answer.” I hope that our conversations will be truly collaborative in nature.

Since the main learning in the course comes from the reading and discussions, you should attend class and be prepared to discuss the reading. If you do neither, do not be surprised to feel you are learning little, wasting your time, or receiving a poor or failing grade, for you are not—in any meaningful sense—taking the course. You cannot learn much simply by writing the papers and taking the exams.

Lectures:

This method will be used sparingly, as generally it removes the burden of active learning from the student, emphasizing a more passive role instead. Because, however, some of the information in the course will be new to you, I will provide background information when relevant to highlight material and to fill in gaps in the reading. For the most part, however, I will “lecture” only in the sense of guiding class discussion.

Assessments and Grading

It is in your written work that you have the opportunity to work out your ideas most rigorously and to communicate them to others. I encourage students who would like to work on their prose to confer with me before submitting final drafts of their papers and consider revising their work after the fact. In the meantime, what follows are some general guidelines regarding assessments in the course.

Tests and Exams:

These are reflective and integrative, designed to help you pull together main themes in the course. Depending on length, exams generally include objective questions, separate short definition or identification questions, and longer interpretive essays. All tests will demand not only that you know what has been studied recently, but that you be able to connect that material in a general thematic way with what was studied earlier in the course. Each test will be an important opportunity for me to assess your mastery of the knowledge and the skills the course seeks to develop. More importantly, an exam should be considered a worthwhile educational experience in its own right.

In the event of an excused absence on the day of a scheduled exam, a mutually convenient date for a make-up test will be determined by the teacher and the student. It is the student's responsibility to reschedule and take the make-up exam as soon as possible.

Oral Presentations:

There will be regular opportunities in this course to share your ideas about the subject matter with the rest of the class on a more formal basis. While academia emphasizes the written word, most “real world” situations are centered on oral/aural interaction; hence the emphasis on developing skills in face-to-face communication. Presentations and reports, debates, role-playing simulations, and other such activities will be evaluated in a manner similar to the grading of written work.

Reading Quizzes:

These serve two primary purposes. They are, of course, an insurance policy of sorts, whereby I, the teacher, can better expect you to have put in the requisite effort on assigned reading. More importantly, however, they are also a channel of feedback on how well you understand the material presented in the reading and in class. You can expect quizzes frequently, usually unannounced.

Short Papers:

Papers on set topics keyed to assigned reading are designed to encourage you to work out your understanding of a given problem. As such, there are no “right” answers, only how well you think your way

through the problem as evidenced by the clarity and logic of your analysis, argumentation, and writing. All papers should include footnotes and bibliography when appropriate.

Formatting Papers:

All work that is turned in for evaluation should be typed, double-spaced, with margins of no more than one inch on all sides; printed in 10- or 12-point font in a legible typeface. Follow page or word limits and meet deadlines. Your name and the course number should appear at the top of the first page. Number the pages. Give your paper a title (which should *not* be underlined). Employ footnotes and endnotes as necessary and use them with consistent formatting. Proofread carefully and use a spelling and/or grammar checking program. Your writing should be clear and to the point. If you have a problem, see me, if at all possible, in advance of due dates. Unacceptable work will be returned, ungraded.

Submission of Papers:

Due dates for all major written assignments are announced in the syllabus at the outset of the term; time is allowed for working on these assessments whenever possible and you should program your time accordingly (e.g., writing a paper before it is due if necessary to avoid conflicts with other work). Papers are due at the start of the class period indicated on the syllabus. Late work will be accepted, but, in the interest of fairness to all, it will be penalized one notch (“A-” to “B+”) for the first 24-hour period it is overdue, two notches for the second, and so on. School policy dictates that late work accepted after the last day of classes in the term can receive a grade of no more than 50%.

I prefer all submissions to be electronic. Thus the **ONLY** acceptable way to submit a paper in this course is as a PDF email attachment. (Please spare me the barbarism of Google Docs links!). And don’t ever leave a printed copy of your paper in one of my mailboxes or slip it under the door of my office or my house.

Position Papers:

Each term, some students express an interest in “extra credit” work. While I generally discourage this—I would prefer you to focus on doing your best work on the scheduled tests and papers—I will accept brief position papers, dealing with anything related to the course, in consideration for “brownie points.” I will not put a firm grade or value on such work, which will be returned to you with my comments, but I can assure you that submission of position papers only can help in the determination of your final term grade.

Grading and Criticism:

Grading of papers and exams will be based on the quality and thoroughness of your research (where appropriate), the originality and coherence of your analysis and argumentation, and the clarity of your writing. While all written work should be your own, in accord with the school expectations regarding academic honesty, you are encouraged to discuss your work with me and with each other if you wish. And while I am happy to read, say, a draft of your introductory paragraph to give you feedback, please don’t ask me to “pre-read” a draft of your entire paper before it’s due. Again, I’m happy to talk you through your thinking on the topic at hand, though. You are also encouraged to respond to my criticisms of your work and to discuss ways in which you might improve your writing with me, including rewriting and resubmitting papers where appropriate.

More important than the actual grade you receive is my written commentary on your paper. I hope you will pay close attention to the comments made on the evaluation sheet and in the body of the text; they are written in hopes of improving both your writing and your thinking. These comments can refer to your specific strengths and weaknesses as a historian and as a writer in ways that a simple number or letter grade cannot.

I hope you will feel free to share with me any questions or concerns about any particular grade; I also hope, however, that you are genuinely concerned with what you learn in the course rather than the mark (or other such superficial feedback) you get.

For the sake of uniformity, the school has established a guide to converting scores on a 100-point scale to grades ranging from A+ to F:

A+: 97–100, A: 93–96, A-: 90–92
B+: 87–89, B: 83–86, B-: 80–82
C+: 77–79, C: 73–76, C-: 70–72
D+: 67–69, D: 63–66, D-: 60–62
F: 0–59

