

# Great Books

The Great Books Program is an interdisciplinary liberal arts program. It is designed to provide students with the opportunity to explore some of the perennial questions of human existence through the reading and discussion of original works by men and women from across the ages. All courses are team-taught by a minimum of two instructors to ensure an interdisciplinary perspective. All students planning on completing the Major or Honours program in Great Books are required to complete a second Major.

## Honours

An Honours Bachelor of Arts in Great Books requires 54 credit hours, including GRBK 2006, one of 2106 or 2206, four of 3106, 3206, 3306, 3406, 3506 or 3606, 3706, 3706, 3903, 4903, 4906, 4913; and an approved 3 credit-hour course at the 3000/4000 level in another discipline. Students interested in an Honours degree in Great Books should apply to the Great Books Steering Committee by the beginning of their third year. Students should indicate when applying for the Honours BA in Great Books which courses they propose to count for these credits. Students are also strongly encouraged to take 6 credit hours of a language, particularly one that will be connected to their thesis. Students must take GRBK 3903 in their third year. Application forms are available from the Director of Great Books. Entrance to the Great Books Honours Program requires a 3.7 GPA in Great Books courses and a 3.3 GPA in all other courses.

## Major

To complete the Great Books Major, students are required to complete the following thematic courses:

- Second year: 12 credit hours (GRBK 2006 and one other 2000 level course)
- Third year: 12 credit hours in upper-level Great Books courses (GRBK 3106, 3206, 3306, 3406, 3506, 3606, 3706)
- Fourth year: 12 credit hours in upper-level Great Books courses (GRBK 3106, 3206, 3306, 3406, 3506, 3606, 3706)

### Great Books Courses Cross-listed in Other Departments

- GRBK 2006 Quest for the Good Life is cross-listed with Political Science (3 credits only)
- GRBK 3106 Love and Friendship is cross-listed with both English and Philosophy
- GRBK 3306 Justice is cross-listed with Political Science (3 credits only)
- GRBK 3506 Freedom is cross-listed with Political Science (3 credits only) and with ENGL 3903

*Note:*

- GRBK 2206 Nature, Science, and Technology counts towards the Group C requirement
- GRBK 3406 Truth and Beauty counts towards the Group D requirement

### **GRBK-1006. Great Thinkers and Writers**

This course explores how great books address perennial human questions about knowledge, nature, love, justice, and freedom. The course is team-taught by two faculty members and prioritizes conversation over lecture. Together we read a range of great books from the ancient world up to the present day, such as novels by writers like Jane Austen and Toni Morrison, classical works by Homer, Plato and Augustine, and influential works of political thought by Aristotle, Nietzsche and Hannah Arendt.

### **GRBK-2006. Quest for the Good Life (HMRT 2206)**

What does it mean to live a good human life? What are the conditions for human happiness? Does human life have meaning? In this course we will study great books by writers like Homer, Augustine, and Virginia Woolf. With these texts as our guides, we will discuss fundamental human questions about love, family, fate, divinity, and self-knowledge. Our goal is both clear and elusive: we want to know how best to live.

### **GRBK-2103. Eros and Empire**

Many works of Ancient Greek literature and philosophy can be understood as responses to The Peloponnesian War (431-405 BCE). The conflict between Athens and Sparta seemed to reveal important truths about the dangers of imperialism, the limits of human power, and the role of eros (desire) in politics. In this study abroad course, students will travel to Athens, and read Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, alongside works by Plato and Aristophanes.

### **GRBK-2106. The Quest for the Good Life II**

Building on the themes developed in GRBK 2006, this course is designed to approach the perennial issue of The Quest for the Good Life through the thoughtful reading of some of the greatest works in a variety of disciplines. The texts will include ancient and modern, all selected because they speak to and illuminate this theme. Texts will vary from year to year but will include works such as Homer's *Odyssey*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, and Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Prerequisite: GRBK 2006, or permission of the instructors.

### **GRBK-2206. Nature, Science, and Technology (HMRT 2216)**

What is humanity's relationship to nature? Are humans natural beings, or uniquely free? How does the scientific revolution change humanity's relationship to nature? Modern science and technology have undoubtedly made life easier, but have there been costs? By studying works of natural science-ancient and modern-philosophy, literature, and theology we will explore various historical perspectives on nature and consider the consequences - both good and bad - of our technologically mediated lives. Fulfills Group C Requirement.

### **GRBK-2306. War and Peace**

This course will investigate the causes and consequences of conflict through a close study of literature, philosophy, history, and political theory. The course will examine the political failures that lead to wars, the ways that human drives and interests manifest themselves within war, as well as the material, psychological, and spiritual costs of war. Texts may include Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Shakespeare's *Henry V*, Arendt's *On Violence*, and Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*.

**GRBK-3106. Love and Friendship**

That love and friendship are essential to human flourishing is self-evidently true. As Aristotle said, no one would choose to live without friends (*philoí*) even if he had all the other goods (*Ethics*, 1155a5). For many of us, love and friendship are near constant preoccupations. But what *is* love? Is it a passion, an activity, a god? Is love rational? Does love make us selfish or selfless? And what do we owe to our friends? These are some of the questions we examine in this course.

**GRBK-3206. Nations and Borders**

This course will explore how humans use geographic, racial, and cultural categories to understand themselves and others. It is particularly concerned with how individuals define themselves as belonging to, distinct from, or in conflict with particular nations, cultures, or peoples. Students will explore themes such as nationalism, colonialism, exile, racism, slavery, and globalization. Texts may include *Exodus*, Shakespeare's *Othello*, Behn's *Oroonoko*, Kant's *Perpetual Peace*, Sears' *Harlem Duet*, and Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*.

**GRBK-3306. Justice (HMRT 3206) (POLS)**

Justice is among the preeminent concerns of political and philosophical thought - probably because we care so deeply about it. We demand justice. We often react viscerally to perceived injustices. And yet, we disagree about justice a lot. We argue about what's fair, or what's right and wrong. In this course we'll read great works on justice from diverse periods and traditions. We study canonical political thinkers like Plato and Locke alongside contemporary novels and films.

**GRBK-3406. Truth and Beauty**

In this course we examine philosophy and art, truth and beauty. Are some works of art - poems or films - actually works of philosophy? Must philosophy use poetry or images to communicate truth? To answer these and other questions, we will study works by great thinkers like Nietzsche and Plato alongside works of fine art, music, and poetry. Students will be given the chance to reflect on the works studied with a creative project. Fulfills Group D requirement.

**GRBK-3506. Freedom (HMRT 3216)**

Freedom is the great theme of modernity. In politics, art, and philosophy, freedom is regularly held up as the highest human good. But what are the conditions that promote freedom, and are we really as free as we like to think? Are humans free by nature? Should freedom have limits? American novelists and Enlightenment philosophers have much to say on this subject. We put them in conversation with a diverse set of ancient and contemporary writers.

**GRBK-3606. Faith and Reason**

This course will explore faith and reason as two ways by which human beings apprehend the truth, the fundamental object of our understanding. The nature and capacity of faith and reason as well as their relationship to one another will be explored through literary and philosophic texts that posit either one or both of these modes as the path to knowledge. Texts may vary from year to year, but normally the course will include works such as Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, *The Gospel of John*, Descartes' *Discourse on Method*, selections from Luther, and Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Prerequisite: GRBK 2006.

**GRBK-3706. Shakespeare and Politics (ENGL)**

While Shakespeare is best known as a playwright and poet, he was also one of the most astute and original political thinkers of the early modern period. Shakespeare's plays analyze the careers of monarchs, revolutions, gender politics, as well as the interplay between natural, divine, and positive law. This course examines Shakespeare's works alongside the works of other political thinkers to contextualize Shakespeare and to better understand his contribution to the history of political thought.

**GRBK-3903. Honours Thesis Proposal**

The purpose of this course is to afford students interested in writing an Honours thesis the opportunity to develop a thorough proposal, including a substantial annotated bibliography. Students will work closely with their thesis director in developing and writing the thesis proposal. Classes will meet throughout the term to assess progress. Students will be required to present and defend their proposal before their classmates and the faculty of the Great Books Program. Students must complete this course to be eligible for GRBK 4906.

**GRBK-4003. Independent Study**

Students undertake an independent study of a text or set of texts under the direction of a member of the Great Books faculty and with the permission of the Program Director.

**GRBK-4006. Independent Study**

Students undertake an independent study of a text or set of texts under the direction of a member of the Great Books faculty and with the permission of the Program Director.

**GRBK-4806. Special Topics Course**

This course involves the in-depth study of a particular text or set of texts related thematically. The course will be organized around the particular interests and expertise of the available faculty member teaching it, so as to capitalize on the research and theoretical interests of faculty participants in Great Books. Its content will also take into account the particular needs of students in any given academic year.

**GRBK-4903. Honours Seminar**

This seminar will be centred around intensive study of a particular text or thinker. The subject of the seminar will vary from year to year. The purpose of the course is to provide students with an introduction to advanced research methods, and to provide preparation for graduate-level study in the humanities. Enrolment is open to Great Books honours students, or other upper-year students with permission from the professor.

**GRBK-4906. Honours Thesis**

The honours thesis is an extended scholarly paper on a topic written under the supervision of a faculty member who agrees to serve as thesis supervisor. Upon completion, students will present and defend their thesis before their classmates and the Great Books faculty. Students must complete GRBK 3903 to be eligible for GRBK 4906.

**GRBK-4913. Capstone Seminar**

This seminar will normally focus on a single work of literature, philosophy, or political theory that has been extraordinarily influential. The subject of the seminar will vary from year to year. The purpose of the course is to provide students with an introduction to advanced research methods, and to provide preparation for graduate-level study in the humanities. Enrolment is open to Great Books honours students, or other upper-year students with permission from the professor.

*NOTE: Not all courses listed are offered each year. Please consult with the Program Director for more information about current and planned course offerings.*