

**TEMPLATE**  
**Honors 201H**  
**Ideas that Change the World**

**Fall 20\*\* Syllabus**  
Class Meeting Time & Place

*Instructor:* Professor \_\_\_\_\_

[*contact info*]

*Office hours and location:*

**Course description**

Ideas that Change the World represents the beginning of your career as an honors student at UMass Amherst. In this discussion-based seminar, we will examine groundbreaking ideas that have shaped our world. The course materials draw from the writings of W.E.B. Du Bois and a range of influential works that raise issues of enduring importance. Throughout the semester we will also inquire into our own potential for transformative creativity, innovation, and leadership.

As an interdisciplinary seminar, this course illuminates ideas that cross the boundaries of the sciences and the humanities. Some of the fundamental questions we will ask throughout the semester are:

- Why do some ideas become influential?
- What social conditions tend to foster creative thinking?
- Under what circumstances can creativity transform societies?
- Across disciplines, what do innovators have in common?

Upon successful completion of this course with a grade of B or higher students will have satisfied the Honors Seminar 1 requirement of Commonwealth Honors College and will also receive a University General Education “I” (interdisciplinary) credit.

**Honors 201H as a 4-credit General Education “I” (interdisciplinary) course**

The purpose of the General Education requirement is to stretch students’ minds, broaden their experiences, and prepare them for

- Their college experiences and subsequent professional training
- Their careers and productive lives
- Community engagement and informed citizenship
- A diverse and rapidly changing world
- A lifetime of learning

Interdisciplinary General Education courses are often experimental, issue-focused, and speak to the basic integrations of (many) fields of human study. Each academic field develops its own spirit, and most disciplines tend to be highly specialized. There are many important issues, however, that cross the boundaries of disciplines. In Honors 201H students wrestle with broad interdisciplinary questions raised by highly influential works

in the sciences, arts, and humanities, noting where particular approaches are distinct and where they overlap.

### **Primary learning goals of this course**

Gen Ed courses share some specific, common learning goals. In particular, the primary learning goals of Honors 201H address 1) Creative, analytical, quantitative, and/or critical thinking through inquiry, problem solving and/or synthesis; 2) Pluralistic perspective-taking and/or awareness of the relationship among culture, self, and other; 3) Understanding and/or evaluating the consequences of one's choices and the implications of one's actions; and 4) Communicating persuasively and effectively in writing.

These goals are addressed in many ways over the course of the semester. You will regularly be asked to analyze critically the texts you read in the course. Your perspectives and analyses are central to the discussion-based nature of the course. You will be asked to synthesize information from various readings, that is, to identify where the readings have something to do with one another, and how, by bringing them together intellectually, they may have even more profound implications. We will also take advantage of the Special Collections and University Archives (SCUA) in the W.E.B. Du Bois Library, using the Du Bois Papers as a hands-on research experience.

As you think about your own potential as a student and thinker, you will be doing so in the context of the communities of which you are a part. What is your relationship to your communities? How can influential ideas affect communities positively and detrimentally?

You will also be expected to write effectively. It is challenging, even for seasoned writers, to express complex ideas succinctly and clearly. That is why writing essays is an essential part of Honors 201H. Use each essay and the feedback you receive to improve and refine your style. Ask your peers and your instructor what your strengths and weaknesses as a writer are. In this way, you will emerge from the course with an essential skill that will benefit you all through your life.

### **Course units and common texts for Honors 201H**

The course will be organized into four course units, each of which engages a common text as a primary example of inquiry and innovation, along with selected readings drawn from the Du Bois Papers in the Digital Collections of the UMass Amherst Libraries (<http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/collection/mums312>). The use of core texts creates a broad scholarly community in the Commonwealth Honors College. In addition to the writings of W. E. B. Du Bois (1868-1963), the core units and texts are as follows:

- **Models of Inquiry**

- Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (third ed., Hackett Publishing, 2001)

- **Social Thought and Civic Action**

- Mahatma Gandhi, *The Essential Writings*, Judith M. Brown, ed. (Oxford World's Classics, 2008)

- **Revolutionary Changes in Science and Technology**

- Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Mariner Books, 2002)  
• **The Power of the Arts**  
Orson Welles, *Citizen Kane*

### **Texts specific to this section of Honors 201H**

To complement the common texts, additional works are chosen by individual instructors. These texts vary from section to section, but have been chosen with the above Gen Ed and Interdisciplinary goals in mind.

The additional texts for this section are:

*[Additional text]*

*[Additional text etc.]*

*[Here instructors may describe how these works they have chosen meet the larger goals of the course, some of the questions raised by these works, etc.]*

#### Examples of additional texts that have been used

*A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn

*The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair

*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* by Mary Wollstonecraft

*The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin

*Multiple Intelligences* by Howard Gardner

*Rig Veda*, Ralph T.H. Griffith, Trans.

### **Faculty biography [optional; no more than one paragraph]**

### **Honors 201H evening lecture**

*Each semester there is a keynote lecture that accompanies the course. Speakers have included Whitney Battle-Baptiste, Wilmore Webley, Noy Holland, Sheila Patek, Léonce Ndikumana, Lee Badgett, Lynn Margulis, Sut Jhally, and many more.*

### **Class structure**

The class is designed as an intentional intellectual community. The goal is to foster an open forum in which to question and evolve our thinking through collaborative participation.

Preparation: completed assignments and active engagement demonstrated by thinking creatively and critically, demonstrating intellectual curiosity, raising questions, making connections, and extending investigation.

What needs to happen for the learning community to work:

- Individual preparation and engagement.
- Individuals and the group. To create an egalitarian community: if your twin, your roommate, your lab partner, or your soul mate is in the class with you, you need to be successful in putting the relationship aside for the class. Everyone needs to be actively engaged in creating an inclusive community, working on multiple levels that focus on personal/individual/intellectual, academic and cultural inclusivity.

- Participation grades are evaluated on the basis of effective group participation in which people are equally involved. There are different ways to accomplish this which but be advised from the start that you are charged with learning to stretch your skills and abilities in conducting group process and task completion. Note that people will not be rewarded for talking more than others but for facilitating the learning experience of the whole class.

### **Requirements and grading policies**

*[To be described by individual instructor; must include attendance policies and clear grading rubric.]*

*[Note: All Honors 201H sections assign at least 20 pages of paper writing or the equivalent.]*

### **Course schedule**

*[Format up to individual instructor, but all syllabuses must clearly demarcate the four units of the course (see general description for unit headings), incorporate substantial portions of the common texts, and indicate assignment due dates.]*

*[It is suggested that for each unit of the course, each instructor articulate focus questions, themes, or a brief description of subject matter covered.]*

### **Grade criteria**

The four major assignments count toward 80% of students' grade  
15% is determined by students' preparedness and participation in course discussions and activities including

- speaking up in full-group discussions;
- taking the lead in small-group activities;
- providing helpful follow-up questions to presenters;
- writing thoughtful comments in online discussions;
- eliciting comments from other classmates; and
- contributing to the learning of your fellow students.

The final 5% is determined by individual instructors.

Letter grades are equivalent to numerical grades as follows:

A	--> 94-100
A-	--> 90-93
B+	--> 87-89
B	--> 84-86
B-	--> 80-83
C+	--> 77-79
C	--> 74-76
C-	--> 70-73
D+	--> 67-69

- D --> 64-66
- D- --> 60-63
- F --> Below 60

**Accommodation Statement**

The University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If you have a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability on file with Disability Services (DS), you may be eligible for reasonable academic accommodations to help you succeed in this course. If you have a documented disability that requires an accommodation, please notify me within the first two weeks of the semester so that we may make appropriate arrangements.

**Academic Honesty Statement**

Since the integrity of the academic enterprise of any institution of higher education requires honesty in scholarship and research, academic honesty is required of all students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Academic dishonesty is prohibited in all programs of the University. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and facilitating dishonesty. Appropriate sanctions may be imposed on any student who has committed an act of academic dishonesty. Instructors should take reasonable steps to address academic misconduct. Any person who has reason to believe that a student has committed academic dishonesty should bring such information to the attention of the appropriate course instructor as soon as possible. Instances of academic dishonesty not related to a specific course should be brought to the attention of the appropriate department Head or Chair. Since students are expected to be familiar with this policy and the commonly accepted standards of academic integrity, ignorance of such standards is not normally sufficient evidence of lack of intent ([http://www.umass.edu/dean\\_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/](http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/)).