Philosophical Foundations Honors RAP

Students in this Honors RAP will live in Sycamore Hall in the Commonwealth Honors College Residential Community.

This program is ideal for students interested in an introductory philosophy course. Explore the well-known philosophers in western history, and the topics they considered. Learn to examine and analyze philosophical arguments throughout the semester. In addition, students will enroll in Ideas that Change the World. Both of these courses satisfy honors and general education requirements.

Students must be roommates with another student in this program.

Related Courses:
Phil 100H: Introduction to Philosophy

This course provides an historical introduction to Western philosophy through the examination of a work by one of the most important philosophers of all times, René Descartes. In addition to analyzing the reasoning in Descartes’ Meditations on First Philosophy, and discussing the ways he is ushering in “modern philosophy,” we will also evaluate the arguments of two of Descartes’ important critics: Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and David Hume. The topics that we will treat include scepticism; the existence and nature of human minds, bodies, and God; the relation of cause and effect; mind-body problems; knowledge that is independent of sense experience; and the problem of induction. At the beginning of the course, we will work on “reconstructing” arguments in a text. That is, we will work on interpreting a text in order to extract the structure of the reasoning in the form of premises and conclusions. We will also focus on evaluating arguments in terms of the validity of formal structure and the truth of premises. There will be ample opportunity to demonstrate mastery of textual interpretation and argument analysis in the one-page, weekly reflection assignments; the final take-home essay; and the two essay exams. Given the importance and breadth of the texts and topics covered, the stress on critical evaluation of arguments, and the focus on written and verbal expression, this course meets the objectives of the General Education (Arts and Literature) curriculum.

Honors 201H - Commonwealth Honors Seminar - Ideas that Change the World

In this interdisciplinary, discussion-based seminar, students will examine innovative thinkers, groundbreaking ideas, and the strategies that transform these ideas into effective actions.

The course explores dilemmas addressed by the sciences, the arts, and the
humanities. In each of these broad areas, the course focuses on questions about human nature, the sources of our knowledge, and the application of that knowledge to the solving of perennial and contemporary problems. The semester begins with inquiries into the nature of truth, of particular relevance in our era of debates over “alternative facts.” Then the course considers ongoing problems of violence, injustice, and environmental crisis. Our inquiries will establish a dialogue between past and present as we examine historical figures such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Rachel Carson, along with present-day innovators such as Temple Grandin and the Dalai Lama.

More details about the course