Sample Syllabus for Humanities FYE

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Citizenship and What It Means to Be an "American"

Note to instructors: Consider this document a template that can be used for any number of different concepts. The thematic focus of this particular syllabus is citizenship and the question of what it means to be an American (and how the tools of Humanistic study can unlock these questions for students). After Week 1's introduction to the methods and perspectives of the Humanities, each of the next 4-5 weeks will focus on a particular text or artifact to explore the theme of citizenship from different angles and perspectives (other potential themes might include friendship, sex, class, leisure, emotions, etc.). We encourage instructors to be creative and varied in their pedagogical methods, making use of discussion, small-groups exercises, role-playing, journal entries and postings, film clips, peer review, etc., to make the students' first experience with the Humanities as dynamic and engaging as possible.

Student learning outcomes:

- Think more deeply about what it means to be human
- Gain familiarity with different disciplines within the Humanities and their methodologies
- Analyze a single concept (in this case, citizenship) using the tools and perspectives of the Humanities
- Think critically and analytically about change and continuity in our quest to define ourselves as Americans
- Respond thoughtfully to diversity, especially how diversity reflects exclusion and inclusion as themes in the definition of citizenship
- Grapple with paradox and contradiction, particularly as these elements apply to citizenship in the US

Week 1: Defining the Humanities

Humanities methodologies for understanding the human experience include:

- Primary historical texts of experience
- Primary present-day evidence via interviews and/or observation
- Creative imaginings of human experience in film and literature
- Self-reflection and examination

Session 1 (Large Class)

Content of opening lecture: Introduction to the Humanities and its/their importance; Introduction to specific disciplines within the Humanities (team taught); representatives of each discipline (English, Philosophy, History, Women's and Gender Studies) explain their respective approach(es). What does it mean to be human? What does it mean to think deeply about the human experience? How does each discipline contribute answers to these questions? This opening

lecture/talk might include a definition like this one from Stanford's Humanities Program: "The humanities can be described as the study of how people process and document the human experience. Since humans have been able, we have used philosophy, literature, religion, art, music, history and language to understand and record our world. These modes of expression have become some of the subjects that traditionally fall under the humanities umbrella. Knowledge of these records of human experience gives us the opportunity to feel a sense of connection to those who have come before us, as well as to our contemporaries."

In-Class Writing Assignment: What Is (or Are) the Humanities? Without researching, reflect on what you think the humanities are, and what their value is. Why does anyone study or engage in them? What sorts of activities 'count' as being part of the Humanities? If you've never heard the term "Humanities" before, what do you think it means?

Session 2 (Breakout)

Overarching question: Do we go to college to get a job or become a certain kind of person? In what ways can the Humanities equip you to do both—to make a living and to live a meaningful life?

Readings (these are short enough to be read in class; assign a single reading to each group of 5-7 students; have the students read, discuss, and then report their findings back to the class).

- David Behling, "On Studying the Humanities: What Does it Mean to Be Human?" Huffington Post, June 5, 2012 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-behling/humanities-majors_b_1569600.html
- Interview with Rebecca Newberger Goldstein by Hope Reese, "Why Study Philosophy? 'To Challenge Your Own Point of View," The Atlantic, Feb 27, 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/02/why-study-philosophy-to-challenge-your-own-point-of-view/283954/
- Chad Orzel, "Why Scientists Should Study Art And Literature," Forbes, Oct 28, 2015 https://www.forbes.com/sites/chadorzel/2015/10/28/why-scientists-should-study-art-and-literature/#3a75045147ee
- David Brooks, "The Humanist Vocation," New York Times, June 21, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/21/opinion/brooks-the-humanist-vocation.html
- "STEM Education Is Vital—But Not at the Expense of the Humanities" https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/stem-education-is-vital-but-not-at-the-expense-of-the-humanities/

Questions for classroom discussion: What do these thinkers say about the humanities and its disciplines? What assumptions are made? Are their arguments convincing? Why or why not?

Session 3 (Breakout, cont.)

Question: Are humanities programs relevant in a post-industrial, hi-tech economy?

Readings: again, these are short enough to be read during class time; assign a single reading to each group of 5-7 students; have the students read, discuss, and then report back to the class.

- T. Rees Shapiro, "For philosophy majors, the question after graduation is: What next?" Washington Post (June 20, 2017): https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/for-philosophy-majors-the-question-after-graduation-is-what-next/2017/06/20/aa7fae2a-46f0-11e7-98cd-af64b4fe2dfc_story.html?utm_term=.83c7a09c3d33
- Jim Grossman, "History isn't a 'useless' major. It teaches critical thinking, something America needs plenty more of," Los Angeles Times, May 30, 2016, http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-grossman-history-major-in-decline-20160525-snap-story.html
- Paul B. Sturtevant, "History Is Not a Useless Major: Fighting Myths with Data," Perspectives, April 2017, https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/april-2017/history-is-not-a-useless-major-fighting-myths-with-data
- Steve Strauss, "Why I Hire English Majors," Huffington Post, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/steve-strauss/hiring-english-majors_b_3484409.html

Questions for classroom discussion: How do the humanities shape your job prospects? What are the transferable skills you gain in the humanities? Brainstorm career paths that draw on the humanities.

- Last 30 minutes of Friday's class: retrieve your in-class writing from Monday. How would you define the Humanities now? What has changed in your definition since Monday? Be ready to share. We will revisit this question again in Week 5-6.

Week 2: Defining the course theme ("citizenship") and exploring it through historical and cultural objects/artifacts

Definition: By "artifacts" we mean objects in our world that help us to understand the past, our culture, and the meaning of our lives. For this week, students will bring in a

physical object that exemplifies citizenship and, ideally, the gap between ideals and realities of citizenship.

Key Concepts Students Should Learn this Week:

- How historical and cultural objects contribute to Humanistic inquiry (what can historical objects teach us about citizenship?)
- The challenge of subjectivity in interpreting historical and cultural objects
- Tools for locating historical and cultural objects
- Techniques for analyzing objects

Session 1 (Large Class)

This opening class meeting has two goals:

1) Introduce students to the concept of "citizenship" via key questions: What is citizenship? What are some core definitions? What do we owe to our country as citizens? What does our country owe us? In what ways can people be denied full citizenship (formally, in practice, etc.)? How should we respond to the exclusion of fellow citizens from full participation in our society?

2) Introduce students to how historical/cultural artifacts can be used as a way of examining citizenship. Each professor could model an artifact/object analysis to illustrate to the students how humanities disciplines analyze these items (e.g., a facsimile of the US Constitution, a licensed gun (unloaded!), an enslaved person's manumission papers or bill of sale, a worn "He votado hoy" sticker from the last election, a poem like James M. Whitfield's "America (1855)", etc.) and what they embody and reveal about citizenship.

Readings to be completed prior to class:

- Listen to "To Pledge Allegiance," Backstory (6:38). https://soundcloud.com/backstory/to-pledge-allegiance-from-born
- Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Why We Need Things," in History and Things: Essays on Material Culture, edited by Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery, 20-29 (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993) https://llk.media.mit.edu/courses/mas714/fall02/csik-things.pdf

End today's session by giving students instructions for finding and selecting objects to bring/post for breakout sessions.

Sessions 2 & 3 (Breakouts)

Informal Assignment: In preparation for today's class session, students will have chosen any historical artifact and written a brief analysis of it (they can either post about it, write a journal entry, or bring a written version to class) and its relationship to the theme of citizenship

Instructions for students: An 'historical' artifact could be some cultural object, from either the distant or recent past. Find an object that tells a story about the significance of citizenship for that individual at that time. Examine the object: how

it was made, how it was used, etc. What does that object say about that time, and about citizenship at that time? Write a short reflective journal entry.

Breakout Discussions: Students share progress on object analysis. Small groups discuss findings and stumbling blocks. Each group reports to the whole breakout class. Instructor-led walk-through of successful artifact analysis; tips for those still working. [revised version of the analysis due by beginning of the following week]

Week 3: Using historical readings, plus present-day interviews & observation to examine American citizenship

Key concepts students should learn this week:

- Acquisition of knowledge about important milestones in history of citizenship—both US and other countries?
- Application of historical and philosophical understandings of citizenship to their own lives and the lives of others
- Complicating the notion of citizenship by looking at how citizenship rights have not been extended to all groups, and why.
- Expanded understanding of citizenship rights in global context

Session 1 (Large Class)

This opening class meeting focuses on a whole-class discussion of touchstone historical and contemporary examples of a) how citizenship rights have been conceptualized in our country and b) how they have been denied to specific groups based on race, gender, immigrant status, etc. Subsequent breakout sessions could break students into small groups to tackle specific texts and/or examples.

Key historical touchstones:

- The Creation of the House of Burgesses
- The 1774 Continental Congress
- The Constitutional Convention
- Bill of Rights
- 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution
- United States Citizenship Test
- 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution
- The 1964/5 Voting/Civil Rights Act

At end of large session, give instructions for Informal Assignment: Conduct interviews and observation: Students should Interview 1) a recent immigrant; and 2) a member of their family. These interviews should be face-to-face. Skyping is acceptable.

Sample Interview Questions:

- What do you see as your most cherished or valuable rights as a US citizen?
- What do we owe to our country as citizens? What does our country owe us?

- What does the US still need to do in order to ensure that all citizens enjoy their full rights as Americans?
- How have I been a good citizen? How have I failed to be a good citizen? What in particular can I do to become a better, more engaged citizen going forward? [these questions could also serve as the basis of a journal entry for in- or out-of-class writing. Reading relevant to the question of citizenship-engagement might include an excerpt from Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism"]
- Possible resource to consult: Immigration Timeline (https://www.libertyellisfoundation.org/immigration-timeline)

Session 2 (Breakout)

As the students are conducting their interviews outside of class, today's in-class session would give them a chance to view videos and read personal accounts of friendship across borders, between generations, and within or between genders, as a way of informing the write-ups they're being asked to do from their interviews:

Suggested readings (assign to small groups in class, or have students conduct prior to class):

- "Preparing for the Oath," http://americanhistory.si.edu/citizenship/ interactive game from Smithsonian National Museum of American History. (could be in-class activity)
- excerpts from Ronald Takaki's book A Different Mirror to illustrate what it means to be an American, especially from a non-white perspective https://zinnedproject.org/materials/a-different-mirror-a-history-of-multicultural-america/
- Abigail Adams' Letter to John Adams
- Cherokee Memorials protesting Indian Removal/Trail of Tears
- "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" Frederick Douglass (http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/what-to-the-slave-is-the-fourth-of-july/)
- Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet" (combative riff on "liberty or death"; critiques American Revolution and American political system)
- Martin Luther King Jr., "Where Do We Go from Here?" (1967 SCLC Presidential Address, strongly critical of American inequality, racism, militarism, etc.)
- "American Dream? Or Mirage?" Michael W. Kraus, NYT (May 1, 2015)
- Josh Barro, "Just What do you mean by 'Anchor Baby,'?" New York Times, Aug 28, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/30/upshot/just-what-do-you-mean-by-anchor-baby.html
- Income Inequality Facts: (http://inequality.stanford.edu/publications/20-facts-about-us-inequality-everyone-should-know)

Sessions 3 (Breakout)

In Class: Bring interview or observation experience to class for discussion.

Week 4: Using film and literature to examine citizenship

Session 1 (Large Class)

Informal Assignment: Outside of class, students view a film or read a short literary work that represents a complex picture of citizenship, and then write a short (2pp.) analysis/interpretation of what ideas about citizenship their chosen text seems to be conveying. What insights into citizenship can imaginative literature/film give us?

In the classroom session, instructors could ask students to consider larger ideas about citizenship in the text they have analyzed, e.g. legal and non-legal definitions of citizenship; the relationship of citizenship to other historical themes including slavery, civil rights, and immigration;

Examples from literature:

- Phillis Wheatley, "To the Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth" (1772; short poem subtly critiques colonists for rebelling against "slavery" when they themselves held actual slaves)
- Claude McKay, "America" and "The White House" (two sonnets by Jamaican/African American Harlem Renaissance poet about black identity and exclusion from America)
- Short story on immigration by Jhumpa Lahiri

Examples of films:

- Amistad (dir. Steven Spielberg)
- Selma (dir. Ava DuVernay; chronicles the struggle for black voting rights in the South)
- Citizenfour (dir. Laura Poitras)
- In America (dir. Jim Sheridan)
- Maria full of Grace (dir. Joshua Marston)

Sessions 2 & 3 (Breakouts)

Students bring drafts of their 2pp. analyses to class. Possibly have the students break into small groups and offer feedback on each other's drafts. Students could present their interpretations of what argument their text seems to be making about citizenship, and classmates could ask questions to help the authors clarify and sharpen their arguments.

Week 5: Using self-reflection and examination to examine citizenship

"Capstone" assignment: We imagine that the 5-week unit would end with some kind of final assessable essay or project that asks students both to reach their own

definitions of citizenship and to link that definition to the larger question of what it means to be human.

Instructions to students: What is your definition of citizenship—ideal and actual—and how have the specific activities you've engaged in (the object analysis, the interview, the film/short story analysis, etc.) shaped and informed that definition? How has your newly enriched understanding of citizenship in turn expanded your understanding of what it means to be human? Finally, please also consider how your use of the tools central to Humanistic study informed the new knowledge that you've gained?

Possibilities include:

- designing their own version of a citizenship test which encompasses their refined understanding of citizenship
- Creating podcast episode drawing on own reflections of citizenship, excerpts from literature and film, interviews, and object analyses
- Creative non-fiction essay examining theme of citizenship from multiple perspectives