

PHIL 89.001 FIRST YEAR SEMINAR
THE SELF: ASPIRATION AND TRANSFORMATION

Professor Jennifer M. Morton

T/Th 9.30am-10.45am

Caldwell Hall 103

Spring 2020

Professor E-mail. jmmorton@unc.edu
Office Hours: T 2pm-3pm, Th 11am-12pm
Office Location: Caldwell Hall 215C

Credit Hrs: 3
Course Website: TBA
Department: Philosophy

DESCRIPTION: Novels, memoirs, and aisles of self-help books attest to our desire to transform ourselves. Yet, the idea of self-transformation is puzzling. If a person decides to embark on a new adventure in the hopes of transforming herself, can she really become a new self or is she merely exhibiting her preexisting adventurousness? What about the aspiring college student who is hoping that college will change him? How can we make sense of his aspiration? In this class, we will critically examine the idea of aspiration and transformation. Readings for this course will be drawn from philosophy, fiction, and literary criticism.

READING: You are required to purchase Ta-Nehisi Coates's [Between the World and Me](#), Tara Westover's [Educated](#), and Richard Rodriguez's [Hunger for Memory](#). All other readings will be available through the course website.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

6 Reading Responses [RR] (1-2 pages)	30%
Paper Summary (1-2 pages)	5%
Paper Critique (1-2 pages)	5%
Paper Argument (1-2 pages)	5%
Paper Draft (1-2 pages)	5%
Final Paper (6-8 pages)	30%
Oral Exam	10%
Participation & Attendance	10%

COURSE GOALS & OBJECTIVES: The first goal of this course is to allow you to reflect on the nature of transformation and aspiration. By the end of this course, you will have developed a clearer understanding of these ideas and have developed your own perspective on them. The second goal of this course is to introduce you to philosophical methods of thinking and writing that will allow you to approach the topic of this course critically and rigorously. By the end of this course, you will be able to express your ideas about transformation and aspiration with greater clarity and precision. Finally, I hope that this course will empower you to get the most out of your college education. By the end of this course, you will be able to articulate a vision of your educational trajectory that aligns with your current values and with those of who you want to become.

READING RESPONSES: Questions for reading responses will be posted the week before they are due. 10 questions will be posted in total, you only need to complete 6 during the term. Reading responses that are turned in on time, show that you have read the material, and demonstrate an honest attempt at answering the question posed will be given full credit. Reading

responses that are late, demonstrate you have not read the material carefully, or do not answer the question will receive no credit.

PAPER: This is your chance to demonstrate your mastery of the philosophical skills you will have developed throughout the course. The paper topic will be distributed far in advance of the due date. I highly recommend you make an appointment to meet with me and discuss how you plan to approach the paper before you sit down to write it. You will turn in several preparatory assignments that will scaffold your writing process. Extensions can be granted but they must be arranged with me at least **48 hours** in advance. No extensions will be granted for the final submission.

ORAL EXAM: You will schedule a time to talk to me one-on-one during the final exam time for our class. This exam is meant to give you a chance to engage in an intellectually invigorating discussion about what you learned in this course; it is not meant as a traditional 'test' of the course material.

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION: Students who are persistently absent are more likely to do poorly in class and fail. I strongly recommend that you make attending class a priority. You will be granted three absences (no questions asked), but any absences above that number will have an effect on your performance in this course. You can participate in class in many ways: you can ask a question during class, write me an e-mail with a question or idea, or you can come to office hours to chat about anything that is on your mind. All of these forms of participation count towards your participation grade.

PROFESSOR AVAILABILITY AND COMMUNICATION: I am available in my office during my office hours to talk about **anything** related to this class or college. Please do not hesitate to stop by, even if you do not have a specific question. If you cannot attend my office hours, make an appointment to come see me at a different time. If you're nervous about coming to office hours alone, bring a friend! It is extremely important to your success in this course and in college that you communicate with me whenever you are confused, need help, or have questions.

ELECTRONICS: Research shows that the use of electronics decreases your capacity to understand, remember, and learn. It also distracts other students. I discourage you from using electronics in class for anything other than reading along or taking a few notes. I will ask you to close your laptops when I think the class requires it. If you have an emergency and need to use your phone to deal with it, please feel free to step outside of the classroom and return when you are ready to participate in class fully.

HONOR CODE: For this class, you are expected to turn in your **own original** work. Work copied from online sources, peers, or other classes (even papers you've written for other classes) undermine the educational aims of this class. Assignments that are found to be in breach of the honor code will be given a failing grade and the student reported to the Office of Student Conduct. More information about the honor code can be found here: <https://studentconduct.unc.edu/>

ACCESSIBILITY RESOURCES & SERVICE: UNC-Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations for students with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, mental health struggles, chronic medical conditions, temporary disability, or pregnancy complications, all of which can impair student success. See the ARS website for contact and registration information: <https://ars.unc.edu/about-ars/contact-us>

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES: CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short- or long-term needs. Go to their website: www.caps.unc.edu or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Service building for a walk-in evaluation to learn more.

MODIFICATIONS TO SYLLABUS: I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus, including project due dates and test dates, when unforeseen circumstances occur. These changes will be announced as early as possible so that you can adjust your schedules.

Class Date		Topic Covered	Reading that must be completed before class	Assignment due
Th	1/9	The Self in Self-Help	Kathryn Schultz, "The Self in Self-Help"	
The Self				
T	1/14	Self as Endorsement	Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person"	Reading Response 1
Th	1/16	Critique of Frankfurt	David Velleman, "Identification and Identity"	
T	1/21	Understanding Philosophical Methods	Frankfurt & Velleman Continued	Reading Response 2
Th	1/23	The Ethical Self	Charles Taylor, "Responsibility for Self"	
T	1/28	Negotiating Racialized Selves	W.E. DuBois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings"	Reading Response 3
Becoming a Self				
Th	1/30	Transformation Through Education	Tara Westover, <u>Educated</u>	
T	2/4	Transformation Through Education	Tara Westover, <u>Educated</u>	Paper Summary
Th	2/6	Transformation Through Education	Tara Westover, <u>Educated</u>	
T	2/11	Parenting for Autonomy	Joel Feinberg, "The Child's Right to an Open Future"	Reading Response 4
What is Transformation?				
Th	2/13	The Impossibility of Responsibility	Galen Strawson, "The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility"	
T	2/18	Incommensurability	Joseph Raz, "Autonomy and Pluralism"	Reading Response 5
Th	2/20	Difficult Choices	Ruth Chang, "Hard Choices"	
T	2/25	Transformative Experiences	Laurie Paul, "What You Can't Expect When You're Expecting"	Reading Response 6
Th	2/27	Writing Philosophy		
Oppression and Transformation				
T	3/3	Resistance & Transformation	Ta-Nehisi Coates. <u>Between the World and Me</u>	Paper Critique
Th	3/5	Resistance & Transformation	Ta-Nehisi Coates. <u>Between the World and Me</u>	
T	3/17	Education for Transformation	James Baldwin, "A Talk to Teachers"	Reading Response 7
Th	3/19	World Traveling	Maria Lugones, "Playfulness, "World"-Travelling, and Loving Perception"	
What is Aspiration?				
T	3/24	Aspiration	Agnes Callard, selections from <u>Aspiration</u>	Reading Response 8
Th	3/26	Aspiration continued	Agnes Callard, selections from <u>Aspiration</u>	
T	3/31	Aspiration and Education	T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent"	Reading Response 9
Transformation & Authenticity				
Th	4/2	The Bicultural Self	Richard Rodriguez, <u>Hunger of Memory</u>	
T	4/7	The Bicultural Self	Richard Rodriguez, <u>Hunger of Memory</u>	Paper Argument
Th	4/9	The Bicultural Self	Richard Rodriguez, <u>Hunger of Memory</u>	
T	4/14	At what price?	Jennifer Morton, Chapter 1 from <u>Moving Up Without Losing Your Way</u>	Reading Response 10
Th	4/16	Navigating Identities	Robin Dembroff & Cat Saint-Croix, "Yep, I'm Gay. Understanding Agential Identity"	
T	4/21	Writing Workshop		Paper Draft
Th	4/23	What is an Education for?	David Foster Wallace, "This is Water"	
F	5/1	Oral Exam & Final Paper Due		