

ARTS & SCIENCE 1A06/ PRACTICES OF KNOWLEDGE (2021-22)

Mondays & Thursdays: 9:30-10:20am (online term 1)
 Instructor - Dr. Travis Kroeker: kroekert@mcmaster.ca
 Office hours: Mondays, 8:30-9:30am (Fall term online)

Teaching Assistants

Elias Elaneh: elanehe@mcmaster.ca
 Julia Menezes: menezej@mcmaster.ca
 Sharang Sharma: shars78@mcmaster.ca

Course Description and Objectives

"There's too much information, and information can't lead to knowledge"
 (Keith Jarrett, *JazzTimes* March, 2017)

In the *JazzTimes* interview Jarrett goes on: "Maybe I can clarify that. Information is surface, in my opinion. You can get information about chords, you can get information about melodies. You can read scores and get information from that. But as Lester Young asked a young player, 'Where is your story?' That's what I mean by knowledge. It would be self-knowledge in that case, right? Instead of you playing your sax, you're expressing who you are at that moment as well as you can as a musician. To do that, any amount of information is still not going to make that happen."

The aim of this course is not to transmit or acquire information. Rather it is to gain self-knowledge with regard to the "larger story" that shapes and expresses our shared imagination. In *Practices of Knowledge* (POK) we undertake an interdisciplinary exploration of intellectual and cultural sources from ancient to contemporary times and places on how to think about the perennial human questions: *what* do we mean by beauty, goodness, love, and justice, and *how* do we know? This means that our practices of knowledge in the course will be related to the study, not **about** various other times and places (e.g. information about the Ancient Near East, classical Greece or the Roman empire, medieval or Enlightenment Europe, modernity and postmodernity) but rather **of** primary representative works that "practice knowledge" thoughtfully and memorably. This is not the domain of narrow specialists of knowledge but rather of all thinking persons who practice knowledge through critical, imaginative self-awareness. Some of the works studied in this course will be more familiar, others less so, depending on your background, training and interests. But the aim is for all of us to gain experience in building up an intellectual imagination capable of thinking sympathetically and critically in relation to a wide range of paradigms, genres, and visions of life that still inform our own practices of knowledge as humans in a complex and diverse world. This will require each of us to bring our full "self" to the exploration: affective, sympathetic, shaped by particular experiences and cultural formations, with already formed commitments and beliefs, specific biases and blindspots, questions inside and outside various "boxes" (sometimes called frameworks or paradigms of thought). Our aim will be to improve our capacity for asking good questions and thinking critically about where they take us.

Among the guiding questions of this course, here are some to consider: What do we mean by “knowledge”? Some other European languages have at least two words to distinguish types of knowing (e.g. *savoir* and *connaître/connaissance* in French; *wissen* and *kennen*, and cf. *können*, in German); all of these words have long histories and a wide range of meanings (not to mention a host of synonyms like wisdom, information, intelligence, familiarity, awareness . . .). How are these meanings distinct, how are they related, and why does it matter? These words for knowledge and knowing may take the form of a noun or a verb, and the verb-al form is emphasized in the language of “practices.” That is, knowledge is an activity tied to habitual human practices of various kinds and contexts: vocational, institutional, religious, sexual, culinary, political, educational, technological, to name just a few. How do these contexts relate to the various practices of knowledge, and which of these contexts or habitual practices take priority or receive privilege in cultural and linguistic definitions and expressions of knowledge? Sometimes the emphasis is on embodied practices such as various trades and musical training; at other times the emphasis is on intellectual practices of abstraction such as mathematics, logical analysis, or critical argumentation. Aristotle distinguished between 3 types of knowledge: *theoria* (related to theories or visions of truth), *poiesis* (related to artistic making, including literary poetics), and *praxis* (related to action), but of course these types are always also related as well as distinct. We will be interested in paying attention to the distinctions and the relations in the texts and contexts we study.

These are daunting complexities and in our first classes we will begin to think together about how to approach, interpret and better understand them. The aim of this course is that by the end of it students will be much better equipped and trained (through “practice”) to recognize distinct practices of knowledge and to think about how they are related, why they matter, how and why they continue to influence our everyday life—our thought and action—in a complex, diverse, yet interrelated world.

Required texts:

Sophocles, ANTIGONE in *Sophocles I* (David Grene translation, University of Chicago)
 BLACK ELK SPEAKS (Bison Books, Univ. of Nebraska)
 Plato, GORGIAS (Library of Liberal Arts, W.C. Helmbold translation)
 Annie Dillard, HOLY THE FIRM (HarperCollins)
 Augustine, CONFESSIONS (Modern Library translation by Sarah Ruden)
 Joseph Conrad, HEART OF DARKNESS (Norton Critical edition)
 Aldous Huxley, BRAVE NEW WORLD (Vintage)
 Richard Powers, THE OVERSTORY (Vintage)

Students should purchase all the required texts in hard copy and are encouraged to print all texts posted on Avenue to Learn (A2L) in order to mark up the texts and make marginal notes. This is a course in close reading, and close reading requires underlining and notation as part of the practices of knowledge entailed in “thinking with” the materials we will study. The required texts will be made available via the McMaster campus store; they will also be available in a range of online venues, including used bookstore vendors like Abebooks. Other required reading or viewing materials (or links

to them) for POK will be available on A2L, as well as some supplementary materials for those interested in pursuing topics further on your own.

Course Format:

At least for the fall term, unfortunately, POK will be conducted online and this will present challenges—especially in a required year-long first year course in Arts and Science where we are also trying to build “cohort” synergy! Ideally that requires in-person, face to face engagement “in the flesh.” Since we can’t do that we’ll do the best we can under the circumstances. Each week the professor will post some lecture materials to assist students in interpreting the assigned readings and viewings for the week, as well as deliver a synchronous online Zoom presentation every Thursday, 9:30-10:20 a.m. that will be recorded and posted on A2L for students to review on their own later. Every Monday at 9:30 there will be a synchronous Zoom session taking up questions raised by students about lecture, reading and posted materials, and before the Monday session the professor will be available for an online office hour (please schedule in advance via email in the fall term). All course assignments will be posted on A2L and students will submit assignments to a drop box on A2L. As of now, the winter term is scheduled to be in person (hurray!!) for all classes and tutorials.

Course assignments and evaluation:

Participation, Term 1 & 2: 15% - Students will participate every week in a tutorial session, in which they are expected to be well-prepared to discuss and raise questions with regard to the assigned course materials for that week (more detailed description of tutorial participation and writing forthcoming). In addition there will be a “media detox” assignment with guided questions on which students will write a reflection, due **September 30** (more information provided on A2L).

Midterm examination, Term 1: 15% - Take-home short essay exam handed out on **October 28, 2021** based on the assigned readings up to that point.
Due: November 8.

Term essay, Term 1: 25% - Take-home essay (ca. 1500 words, 5 - 6 double-spaced typewritten pages) on term 1 course materials (including lectures)—no secondary materials. Essay questions will be posted in early December on A2L.
Due: December 17.

Midterm essay exam, Term 2: 20% - Take-home essay exam (ca. 1500 words, 5 – 6 double-spaced typewritten pages) relating philosophy and literature in materials up to and including *Brave New World* (no use of secondary materials). Essay questions will be posted in early March on A2L. **Due: March 18, 2022.**

Final Assignment: 25% - A “ruminating” essay that will engage selected materials from the entire course. Instructions will be posted in early April on A2L. **Due: April 22, 2022.**

Term 1: Remembering who “we” are

Sept 9 Introduction, POK orientation

Why do origin stories (cosmogonies and cosmologies) matter?

Sept 13-16 Genesis 1-11 (Robert Alter translation, A2L)
 20 Hieronymus Bosch, “Garden of Earthly Delights” (art link on A2L)
 23 Terrence Malik, “Tree of Life” (film link on A2L)
 27-30 *Black Elk Speaks* (chps I-XI) * Media DeTox due, Sept. 30 (A2L)
 Oct 4-7 *Black Elk Speaks* (chps XII-end)
 Bruce Beresford, “Black Robe” (film link on A2L)

Term break: October 11 - 15

How do tragedy and philosophy educate human desire?

Oct 18-21 Sophocles: *Antigone*
 25-28 Sophocles: *Antigone* & Plato’s *Gorgias*
 Nov 1-4 Sophocles: *Antigone* & Plato’s *Gorgias*

Oct. 28: Midterm Exam questions posted, due **November 8** (A2L dropbox)

Methodological interlude: What does it mean to translate knowledge?

Nov 8-11 Walter Benjamin: “The Task of the Translator” (A2L)

Confessional knowing: self and nature

What do I confess when I seek to know who/where/what I am in a mysterious world?

Nov 15-18 Augustine: *Confessions*, books 1 & 2
 22-25 Augustine: *Confessions*, books 8 & 9
 Nov 29-Dec 2 Annie Dillard: *Holy the Firm*
 Dec 6 Rabi’a al-Basri poems (A2L)

Dec 3: Term Essay questions posted, due **Dec 17** (A2L dropbox)

Term 2: Western Trajectories: Modernity and its Critics

The Will to Question Continued

How is “Enlightenment” a way out of “childish” thinking?

Jan 10 Kant: “What Is Enlightenment?” (A2L)
13 Foucault: “What is Enlightenment?” (A2L)

A New Origin Story of Knowing Good and Evil?

Jan 17 Nietzsche: “The Madman” (A2L)
20 Nietzsche: *The Genealogy of Morals*: Essay 1 (A2L)

How do we Know the Meaning of Sex and the Body?

Jan 24/27 Freud, theories of sexuality (selections on A2L)
Jan 31/ Feb 3 Foucault: *The History of Sexuality: The Will To Knowledge* (A2L)

Controlled Thought and Freedom

Is Enlightenment a new kind of darkness?

Feb 7/10 Joseph Conrad: *Heart of Darkness* Parts I & II

Feb 14/17 Conrad, *H of D* Part III; Francis F. Coppola, “Apocalypse Now” (A2L)

Feb. 21-25: Term Break

Saloman’s House: where is the new wisdom to be found?

Feb 28/ Mar 3 Alduous Huxley *Brave New World*
March 7/10 Alduous Huxley: *Brave New World*

Mid-term Exam Questions Posted (A2L Dropbox): Mar. 7 (**due Mar.18**)

Poetics, Seeing and Embodied Knowledge: “Poetically we Dwell”

March 14 Heidegger: “Memorial Address,” *The Discourse on Thinking* (A2L)
17 Heidegger: “The Question Concerning Technology” (A2L)

21 Hölderlin poem: “The Ister” (A2L)
24 Mary Oliver poetry: “At the River Clarion”; “The River” (A2L)

Are our practices of knowledge killing the Tree of Life?

Mar 28/31 Richard Powers, *The Overstory*

April 4/7 Richard Powers, *The Overstory*

April 11 Final Assignment discussion and course review

Final Assignment posted April 8, **due April 22** (A2L dropbox)

Arts & Science Course Outline Statements

Sustainable Written Work Submission Guidelines

The written work submission guidelines have been chosen to support the more sustainable use of paper, energy, and toner of the Office of Sustainability: <http://www.mcmaster.ca/sustainability/>. All written work (except for in-class and university supervised examinations) should be submitted in double-spaced typewritten pages and uploaded to the electronic dropbox on the Avenue to Learn course site.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the *Academic Integrity Policy*, located at <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/>.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

AUTHENTICITY / PLAGIARISM DETECTION

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. **All**

submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., online search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

COURSES WITH AN ONLINE ELEMENT

Some courses may use online elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses online elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

ONLINE PROCTORING

Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

CONDUCT EXPECTATIONS

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the *Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities* (the "Code"). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students' access to these platforms.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University's *Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities* policy.

REQUESTS FOR RELIEF FOR MISSED ACADEMIC TERM WORK

In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the *Policy on Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work*.

LATE PENALTY

Late Penalties of 10% per day (weekends count as one day) will apply to work that arrives after the assignment deadline specified on the syllabus.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION FOR RELIGIOUS, INDIGENOUS OR SPIRITUAL OBSERVANCES (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the RISO policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office *normally within 10 working days* of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

COPYRIGHT AND RECORDING

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors. The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done either by the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

EXTREME CIRCUMSTANCES

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.

NOTES FOR ALL ARTS & SCIENCE COURSES

1. Some of the statements above refer to a "Faculty Office"; please note that the Arts & Science Program Office serves in this capacity.
2. It is the responsibility of students to check their McMaster email regularly. Announcements will be made in class, via A2L, and/or via the course email distribution list.
3. For additional information regarding requests for accommodation, relief for missed term work (e.g. MSAF), deferred examinations, etc., students should read carefully the Requests and Resources pages on the Arts & Science Program website.