

THIS IS A SYLLABUS FROM THE FALL OF 2021. THE FALL 2024 VERSION WILL BE AVAILABLE CLOSER TO THE START OF THE SEMESTER.

DOSTOEVSKY: BENJAMIN FRANKLIN SEMINAR

Instructor: Dr. Aleksey Berg
Meetings: William Hall 1, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:45-3:15pm
Office Hours: Williams Hall 403, Monday 10:00am-noon, and by appt.

[Class Schedule](#)

[Assignment Dropbox](#)

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OVERVIEW

This course examines Dostoevsky's literary legacy considered in the context of its three major sources: Western philosophy, Orthodox Christianity, and Russian novelistic tradition. What is gained and what is lost by presenting philosophical ideas in works of fiction rather than in discursive prose? We will read Dostoevsky's major works with a view to showing how the problems they address (social, psychological, political, as well as artistic and philosophical) are inseparable not only from his time but from the distinctive novelistic form he created.

This course is a Benjamin Franklin Seminar with no prerequisites. Class discussions and writing assignments will ask you to provide your own interpretations in dialogue with those of others and are designed to help you develop skills in perspective-taking, close reading, and literary analysis. All readings, lectures, discussions, and written work are in English. Students who wish to work with texts in Russian are invited to consult with the instructional team in advance of major writing assignments.

It is **absolutely imperative** that the class keep up with the scheduled reading.

COURSE MATERIALS

The following texts, all by Fyodor Dostoevsky, are available through the Penn Bookstore. It is strongly recommended that you use the edition listed here as translations vary greatly in their quality.

NB: regarding the cost of textbooks: If purchase of these books will present an economic hardship for you, please consult with me about alternatives.

Dostoevsky, *The Double and The Gambler*. Trans. Pevear and Volokhonsky. Vintage.

Dostoevsky, *Notes From Underground*. Trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. Vintage.

Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*. Trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. Vintage.

Dostoevsky, *Demons*. Trans. Robert A. Maguire. Penguin.

Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*. Trans. Constance Garnett. Norton Critical Edition. Paperback.

Additional Readings:

These are available for download on the course's Canvas site or as links to external Internet resources.

COMPONENTS AND ASSESSMENT

Response Papers 20%

A minimum of five response papers must be submitted during the term. They are due at 5pm the day before our class meets: either Monday or Wednesday. These brief written reflections (no

more than two pages long) may respond to the reading assignment in any way. Some of the works we read will likely speak to you more than others; these response papers are an invitation to express your thoughts on the subject in a less formal way. Broadly speaking, you might take as your guide the vague questions of “what did you get out of reading this? How did it make you think and/or feel?”

You may be asked to informally present your response paper in class.

In-Class Writing Assignments: 20%

An unspecified number of times in the course of the semester, we will begin class with a short writing assignment, or engage in one in the midst of the class. These are designed to plunge all of us into questions provoked by the assigned reading. These will be graded on √+ (very rare, 100%), √ (95%), √- (88.5), 0 (55%).

Class Participation and Attendance: 30%

Class attendance and participation are mandatory. If you miss a class, you are responsible for finding out about that class' content. A previous class absence is not an excuse for a missed assignment or lack of preparation for the next class.

If class conflicts with a religious holiday, please let me know and you will be excused.

3 points: Present, on time, fully prepared.

2 points: More than 15 minutes late, and/or partially prepared, and/or minimally participating in class discussions.

0 points: Absent (you cannot participate if you are not in class)

Final Essay: 30%

This paper should be approximately 10 pages long, double-spaced, in Times 12-point font. The topic should be selected in consultation with the instructor. The final essay is due on Thursday, December 16.

Grading:

A+ 98+ A 94-98 A- 90-94

B+ 87-90 B 83-87 B- 80-83

C+ 77-80 C 73-77 C- 70-73

D+ 65-70 D 60-65 F 0-60

COURSE POLICIES:

Academic Integrity:

You are expected to abide by the Code of Academic Integrity of the University of Pennsylvania, which you can find at [this link](#). Contact Dr. Berg in case of any ambiguities.

Readings, Lectures, and Discussion:

Volume of readings is 200-250 pages per week. Please read all materials before the class for which the readings are assigned, as indicated on the schedule below. It is important to keep up with reading because we will have unscheduled in-class writing assignments that require you to keep up with the class. Note as well that participation in discussions is important for your grades.

Course work:

Students in the course will write five short response papers, a longer analytic essay, and a number of unscheduled, short in-class writing assignments. All your papers should be double-spaced, in Times twelve-point font, with one-inch margins on all sides. All written work should be submitted through Canvas, or handed directly to your instructor.