

## Freshman Seminars Program

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Monday 3–5 pm

Room: TBD

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### ADVICE TO YOUNG LEADERS (FS 40j)

At your Harvard Commencement, you will hear uplifting speeches—from your classmates (maybe by one of you in this seminar?), from the President, and from a celebrity or a politician dispensing the wisdom of a lifetime. Harvard's Commencement traditions are historic, stretching back almost four hundred years to the seventeenth century. This tradition of giving advice to young people setting out into the world to take on great, transformative, responsible positions, goes back even longer—at least two thousand years, to the ancient world.

In this Freshman Seminar, we will trace that tradition by working our way backwards from some recent Harvard Commencement addresses to ancient Rome and Greece. Along the way, we will engage with some of the great works of Western thought, a surprising number of which were directed to people, like you, in their late teens or early twenties, particularly those planning (also like you?) to enter public service or to take up positions of authority and leadership. We will read these works with an eye both to the past and to the present: in other words, we will read them historically, in their own terms and their own contexts, and we will also apply their wisdom to current concerns and ongoing dilemmas for leaders, young and old.

The goal of the class is to urge you to think rigorously about your own imminent responsibilities—as citizens and as leaders—by reflecting on arguments addressed to similar rising generations in the past, in classical Greece, ancient Rome, early modern Europe, and in the modern period, from the nineteenth century right up to 2016.

It is important, as well as exciting, to see historical editions of the works we are studying. Accordingly, on 7 November we will meet in the seminar-room in the Houghton Library to see them in their early forms, in print and manuscript.

### REQUIREMENTS

The main requirements will be attendance at all meetings of the seminar, keeping up with the reading, and participating fully in each discussion. Participation will also include a brief presentation during one class. Absences will only be approved for religious holidays, illness (with doctor's note), or a family emergency (with dean's note).

The writing requirements will comprise four response-papers (2–3 pages), and one long paper (10 pages). For each of the response papers, you should compose a concise comparison of a pair of authors we have read (e.g. Rowling/Woolf; Weber/James; Hobbes/Erasmus; Machiavelli/Seneca). The final paper will be a longer version of the same exercise, but written in the form of a dialogue between *any two* of our authors debating the best advice to give a young person embarking on their vocation. The choice of authors, subjects, and career-path will be up to you.

Participation and presentation:	40%
Response papers:	30%
Long paper:	30%

Final grades for the course will be Pass/Fail, though I will give you letter-grades for your written work to help you assess your progress during the semester.

### SET BOOKS

All these books have been ordered at the Coop and are on reserve in Lamont Library. They are also available from sites such as [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), [Abebooks.com](https://www.abebooks.com), [Alibris.com](https://www.alibris.com), and [Bookfinder.com](https://www.bookfinder.com). Please be sure you read the editions listed below, as translations and page-numbers can differ considerably from version to version.

Plato, *Republic*, ed. G. M. A. Grube and C. T. C. Reeve (Hackett) 978-0872201361  
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Hackett) 978-0872204645  
Cicero, *On Duties*, ed. M. T. Griffin and E. M. Atkins (Cambridge UP) 978-0521348355  
Seneca, *Moral and Political Essays*, ed. John M. Cooper and J. F. Procopé (Cambridge UP) 978-0521348188  
Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ed. Quentin Skinner and Russell Price (Cambridge UP) 978-0521349932  
Desiderius Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince*, ed. Lisa Jardine (Cambridge UP) 978-0521588119  
Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge UP) 978-0521567978  
William James, *The Heart of William James*, ed. Robert Richardson (Harvard UP) 978-0674055612  
Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*, ed. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong (Hackett) 978-0872206656  
Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, ed. Susan Gubar (Harvest) 978-0156030410

### CLASS SCHEDULE

31 August: INTRODUCTION

12 September: Harvard Commencement Addresses (online): [Steven Spielberg](#) (2016); [J. K. Rowling](#) (2008); [Bill Gates](#) (2007); [Madeleine Albright](#) (1997); [George C. Marshall](#) (1947).

19 September: Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929), pp. 3–112.<sup>1</sup>

26 September: Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation" (1917); "Politics as a Vocation" (1919), in Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*, pp. 1–31, 32–94.<sup>2</sup>

**1<sup>st</sup> response paper due (Woolf + one Commencement Address)**

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<sup>1</sup> Lectures to students at Girton College and Newnham College, Cambridge, November 1928.

<sup>2</sup> Lectures to Freistudentische Bund, University of Munich, November 7, 1917 and January 28, 1919.

3 October: William James, *Talks to Students* (1895–98), “The Gospel of Relaxation”; “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings”; “What Makes a Life Significant,” in James, *The Heart of William James*, pp. 130–44, 146–63, 165–82.

10 October NO CLASS (Columbus Day)

17 October: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), “Introduction,” chs. 1, 4–5, 13–14, 17, 21, 25, 30, “Review and Conclusion” (pp. 9–14, 24–37, 86–100, 117–21, 145–54, 176–82, 231–44, 483–91).<sup>3</sup>

**2<sup>nd</sup> response paper due (James/Weber)**

24 October: Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince* (1516), pp. 1–110.<sup>4</sup>

31 October: Niccoló Machiavelli, *The Prince* (1513), pp. 3–91.<sup>5</sup>

**3<sup>rd</sup> response paper due (Erasmus/Hobbes)**

7 November: Seneca, *On Mercy* (55–56 CE), in *Moral and Political Essays*, pp. 117–64.<sup>6</sup> **MEETING IN SEMINAR ROOM, HOUGHTON LIBRARY**

14 November: Cicero, *On Duties* (44 BCE), Books I, III (pp. 1–62, 101–47).<sup>7</sup>

**4<sup>th</sup> response paper due (Seneca/Machiavelli)**

21 November: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (c. 330s BCE), I. 1-10; II. 1-9; V. 1-8; VI. 7-9; X. 6-9 (pp. 1–14, 18–30, 67–80, 90–93, 162–71).<sup>8</sup>

28 November: Plato, *Republic* (c. 380s BCE), I, II, IV (pp. 2–59, 95–121).<sup>9</sup>

**7 December: Final paper due (5 pm)**

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<sup>3</sup> Dedication copy presented to Prince Charles, later Charles II (1630–85), aged 21; “I think it may be ... profitably taught in the Universities” (*Leviathan*, “Review and Conclusion”).

<sup>4</sup> Addressed to Prince Charles, later emperor Charles V (1500–58), aged 16.

<sup>5</sup> Dedicated to Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici (1492–1519), aged 21.

<sup>6</sup> Addressed to the emperor Nero (37–68), aged 18.

<sup>7</sup> Addressed to Cicero's son, Marcus Tullius Cicero Minor (65–? BCE), aged 19.

<sup>8</sup> Edited from Aristotle's lectures at the Lyceum.

<sup>9</sup> Written in Plato's Academy and reflecting forms of discussion there among young aristocratic men.