

AP Seminar: What Does It Mean to Be Human?

Syllabus 2018-2019

“And God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”

— Genesis 1:27

“Man still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin.”

— Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871)

“Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself.”

— Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1946)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

What does it mean to be human? Students in AP Seminar will explore this perennial question by looking at a wide range of perspectives that bridge the sciences and humanities. Throughout the year, we will read and analyze essays, scientific studies, and classic works of literature and philosophy; listen to and view speeches and broadcasts; and experience artistic works and performances. Although specific topics change from year to year, investigating what it means to be human in the 21st century encourages us to ask a core set of enduring questions:

- * What characterizes basic human nature?
- * What, if anything, separates human beings from plants, animals, and machines?
- * What should be emphasized about the mental lives of human beings?
- * Why do human beings create art, fall in love, go to war, and engage in other behaviors?

In developing their own answers to these questions, students will learn to synthesize information from multiple sources, articulate their own perspectives in research-based written essays, and design and deliver oral and visual presentations, both individually and as part of a team.

AP Seminar is a foundational course in the AP Capstone Program, and its successful completion is a prerequisite to become eligible for taking AP Research.¹

¹ Adapted from the AP Seminar Course Description published by the College Board (2016).

COURSE GOALS / LEARNING TARGETS

This course is designed to strengthen your abilities in the following target areas:

Understand Context and Perspective

1. **Understand and Analyze Context:** I can understand the complexity of a problem of issue and connect arguments to the broader context in which they are situated.
2. **Understand and Analyze Perspective:** I can compare and interpret multiple diverse perspectives on an issue to understand its complexity.

Analyze Sources and Evidence

3. **Understand and Analyze Argument:** I can identify the main ideas in arguments, analyze the reasoning, and evaluate the validity of the conclusions.
4. **Evaluate Sources and Evidence:** I can evaluate the credibility and relevance of sources and the evidence they present.

Construct Evidence-Based Arguments

5. **Establish Argument:** I can develop a well-reasoned argument clearly connecting the thesis, claims, and evidence.
6. **Select and Use Evidence:** I can strategically choose evidence to effectively support claims.

Communicate

7. **Engage Audience:** I can choose and employ effective written and oral communication techniques, considering audience, context, and purpose.
8. **Apply Conventions:** I can choose and consistently apply an appropriate citation style and effective conventions of writing.
9. **Collaborate:** I can work constructively with others to accomplish a team goal or task.
10. **Reflect:** I can articulate challenges, successes, and moments of insight that occur throughout the inquiry process.

COURSE OUTLINE / UNITS OF STUDY

Unit 1: Defining Human Nature (August – September)

Unit 2: Unpacking Human Consciousness (October – December)

Unit 3: Investigating Human Behavior / Performance Task 1 (December – February)

Unit 4: Performance Task 2 (February – April)

Unit 5: Preparing for End-of-Course Exam and AP Research (April – June)

AP SEMINAR EXAM COMPONENTS²

Unlike most AP courses, a student's final score for AP Seminar is determined by work completed throughout the year. Students are assessed on two performance tasks completed in the spring semester and one end-of-course exam in May. Portions of the two performance tasks (e.g., the multimedia presentations and oral defense) are scored by the teacher and validated by the College Board.

Performance Task #1: Team Project and Presentation (20% of AP Seminar score)

Individual Research Report	Working individually, students investigate their team's research question using a disciplinary approach or thematic perspective of their choice. They then present their findings in a 1,200 word report (approx. 5 pages double spaced) that: identifies the area of investigation and its relationship to the overall research question; analyzes and evaluates the main ideas and reasoning in the chosen sources; and identifies, compares, and interprets a range of perspectives.
Team Multimedia Presentation and Defense	Working collaboratively, the team crafts a unified argument that synthesizes and evaluates their individual findings and perspectives. They then develop an 8-10 minute presentation for an audience of their peers. Following the presentation, each student must defend a portion of their argument by responding to one question asked by the teacher.

Performance Task #2: Individual Research Essay and Presentation (35% of AP Seminar score)

Individual Written Argument	Students read and analyze a collection of interdisciplinary texts, released annually by the College Board, to identify thematic connections and possible areas for inquiry. Drawing on the provided sources and additional research, students develop a well-reasoned argument of 2,000 words (approx. 8 pages double spaced) that answers an original research question.
Individual Multimedia Presentation	Students develop a 6-8 minute presentation using appropriate media and present it to an audience of their peers. Presentations must go beyond mere summary of student research, and should instead situate the argument within a broader thematic context.
Oral Defense	Students must defend their research process, use of evidence, and conclusion through oral responses to two questions asked by the teacher.

End-of-Course Examination (45% of AP Seminar score)

All students will take the AP Seminar end-of-course exam, which consists of two parts: (a) three short-answer questions that assess students' ability to analyze an argument, and (b) an essay question that assesses students' skills in synthesizing and creating an evidence-based argument.

² Adapted from the AP Seminar Course Description published by the College Board (2016).

STUDENT EXPECTATIONS FOR AP SEMINAR

This will be a seminar-style class where all members of the classroom take a shared responsibility for teaching and learning. This type of class is unconventional for high school, but it's common in upper-division (i.e., junior and senior) college-level courses. Participating in a seminar can be one of the most rewarding experiences you'll have in school; however, much of its success depends on what you bring to class every day. Be prepared: I set high standards for seniors, and I will hold you to them.

Before and After Class. Come to class ready to contribute to the day's discussion or activity. This means actively reading the assigned texts, answering study questions (if assigned), and writing down any reactions or questions you had while reading.

During Class. During class discussion I expect all students to take an active leadership role. So, what does active participation actually look like? Here are some examples:

- * Direct our attention to a specific passage in the text that indicates the author's main idea, or which helps us better understand what the author is saying.
- * Agree or disagree with an author or your classmates—or even your teacher!
- * Ask a classmate or your teacher to clarify their comment.
- * Ask an evaluative question about the argument or perspective under discussion.

Of course, there are other ways to participate in class. But regardless of how you participate, I expect you to actively listen to what your classmates say. A good rule of thumb is to restate what someone has said before responding or moving on to a different point.

Finally, success in a seminar-style class also depends on your ability to take thorough notes. Good notes record and neatly organize all the main ideas from a given class session. Since I expect you and your classmates to do most of the talking, ***anything your classmates say could be of importance***. Don't just write down what I say or write on the board!

Additional Expectations:

- * When you cross the threshold of my classroom door, you enter a community of teachers and learners. ***I keep the door locked to prevent disruptions, so make sure you arrive on time.*** Consistent lateness will lower your class participation grade.
- * To minimize distractions, ***no cell phones, tablets, or personal computers may be used during class.*** Exceptions to this rule will be made at the teacher's discretion.
- * I'm fine with you eating or drinking in my classroom so long as it doesn't distract you or your classmates, and so long as you tidy up when you are done.

ADDITIONAL COURSE POLICIES

(1) Absences and Late Work.

You are responsible for completing all assigned work for this course. If you are absent, consult the course's online calendar and/or get in touch with a friend to see what you must make-up. Make-ups for exams, essays, and seminars given in class are only granted for excused absences. Please note that if you fail to show up for the make-up exam, you will **not** be able to re-schedule and you will **not** receive credit. When turning in late or absent work you must fill out **The Form** (found in my classroom by the black-wire bin) and attach it on top of your late or absent work. Late work can only be submitted within **one week** after the due date. Note that work submitted without this form will **not** be graded.

(2) Revising and Resubmitting Work.

We often learn best from identifying and correcting our mistakes. In recognition of this fact, I will allow you to revise and resubmit any graded summative assessment given during the semester. Please note, however, that this policy does not give you unlimited opportunities to submit work, nor does it give you unlimited time to complete revisions. You are only allowed to resubmit an assignment **once**, and it must be submitted **within two weeks** of being returned to you. When turning in revised work you **must**: attach the original version to the back of the revised version, and staple a completed Form to the top. Work submitted without the original and the Form will **not** be graded.

(3) Peer and Teacher Feedback.

I will provide numerous opportunities for you to receive feedback over the course of the semester. Due to time constraints, however, I will **not** give substantial feedback on late or revised work. You are welcome to see me during office hours to discuss your performance on these assessments. In addition, please note that due to rules established by the College Board, I am not able to give you **any** feedback on the Performance Tasks administered in the spring semester. According to the AP Seminar Course Description (2016), teachers cannot "write, revise, amend, or correct student work," nor can they "give specific, directive feedback to individual groups" (p.38). During this time, I will provide opportunities that allow for peer feedback.

(4) Cheating and Plagiarism.

Learning is a shared activity, and during class discussions I encourage you to record each other's ideas and use them in your writing. That said, I do not tolerate academic dishonesty. Any student caught cheating or found guilty of plagiarism will receive a fail for the assignment with no possibility for make-up, as well as a drop in their final grade. The College Board has also established the following policy on plagiarism and fabrication or falsification of information, to which all students in AP Capstone must adhere:

AP Capstone Policy on Plagiarism: "A student who fails to acknowledge the source or author of any and all information or evidence taken from the work of someone else through citation, attribution or reference in the body of the work, or through a bibliographic entry, will receive a score of 0 on that particular component of the AP Seminar and/or AP Research Performance Task. In AP Seminar, a team of students that fails to properly acknowledge sources or authors

on the Team Multimedia Presentation will receive a group score of 0 for that component of the Team Project and Presentation.”

AP Capstone Policy on Fabrication or Falsification of Information: A student who incorporates falsified or fabricated information (e.g. evidence, data, sources, and/or authors) will receive a score of 0 on that particular component of the AP Seminar and/or AP Research Performance Task. In AP Seminar, a team of students that incorporates falsified or fabricated information in the Team Multimedia Presentation will receive a group score of 0 for that component of the Team Project and Presentation.

The bottom line: don't do it.

(5) Work Habits and Cooperation.

Work habits grades are based on consistently coming to class prepared and on time, as well as consistently submitting assessments by the due date. Cooperation grades are based on your conduct in class. Violations of the policies and procedures outlined in this syllabus, as well as any display of extremely rude or disrespectful behavior, will result in lowered work habits and cooperation grades. Please note: ***I will not write letters of recommendation for any student who has earned a U in cooperation in one of my classes.***

(6) Communication.

There are numerous ways to get in touch with me. You can always ask me a question before or after class; you can call the school office, or leave a note in my box in the main office; and you can reach me electronically via email, Schoology, or the Grant High School website. Please note that while I always respond to emails, I rarely check them after 7pm, so please allow for up to 36 hours for a response, especially on weekends. Emails inquiring about specific grades are never answered; schedule a meeting or see me during office hours to discuss your performance on a specific assignment.

GRADING PHILOSOPHY FOR AP SEMINAR

The AP Capstone program aims to empower students by helping them develop the skills and habits of mind needed to conduct independent research and inquiry. In keeping with this philosophy, this course takes a Mastery Learning approach to grading. This means that students are evaluated based on the learning targets identified in this syllabus, rather than on a point system. Rubrics will be provided with each assessment so students can easily see which concepts and skills they can use proficiently (or with mastery), and which require more practice and instruction. These rubrics are based on the following mastery scale:

4	Approaching Mastery	Student demonstrates a thorough and sophisticated understanding of course content and can competently use the targeted skills in familiar and unfamiliar situations. They rarely make mistakes and can help others who need assistance.
3	Proficient	Student demonstrates a clear understanding of the course content and can competently use the targeted skills in familiar situations. They make infrequent mistakes and only require assistance when facing unfamiliar situations.
2	Developing	Student demonstrates some understanding of the course content and can use the targeted skills in familiar situations. They express misconceptions about course content and/or make significant mistakes when working without assistance.
1	Beginning	Student demonstrates a partial understanding of the course content and basic competency with the targeted skills. They require assistance to successfully complete tasks.
0	No Attempt / Incomplete	Student has not yet submitted work, or has submitted work that is incomplete to the extent that no accurate assessment of the student's abilities can be made.

In a Mastery Learning classroom, a student's final grade is determined by the extent to which they master the standards, and not by calculating the average score on assignments. Only summative assessments like essays, presentations, and projects will count towards the student's final grade. Classwork and homework are meant to provide opportunities for students to practice the skills needed to succeed on the summative assessments; consequently, they do not count towards a student's final grade. The following chart explains how a student's final grade will be determined:

A	Is approaching mastery in most learning targets and is proficient in the rest (no overall score of 0-2).
B	Is proficient in most learning targets, with no overall score of 0 or 1.
C	Is developing in most learning targets, with no overall score of 0 or 1.
D	Has demonstrated at least beginning ability in all learning targets (no overall score of 0).
F	Has not yet demonstrated at least beginning ability in all learning targets.

For more information about Mastery Learning, please refer to the appendix at the end of this syllabus.

APPENDIX 1: WHAT IS MASTERY LEARNING AND GRADING?

Mastery Learning is a research-based instructional approach that is designed to help all students improve their learning. At its core is the belief that everyone can learn given the right circumstances—aptitude is dependent on the length of time it takes a person to learn, not how “bright” a person is. Putting this philosophy into practice requires teachers, students, and parents to shift their thinking about the purpose of assessment and grading.

O’Conner (2009) summarizes some of the common grading practices that a mastery learning approach seeks to avoid. The two most important are: only grading a student’s first efforts, and only using averages to determine a student’s final grade.

In a Mastery Learning classroom, by contrast, students are given the opportunity to revise and resubmit graded work without penalty. In addition, their final grade is determined by examining patterns in the gradebook—not by calculating the average. Instead, teachers are encouraged to look at the grade a student earns most often on assessments related to a given learning target (the mode). They are also encouraged to give more weight to grades earned on more recent assignments than on grades earned at the start of the year.

These grading policies are in keeping with the core belief that all students can achieve mastery given the right amount of time and practice. They also reflect the belief that a student’s final grade should indicate the degree to which they have achieved mastery by the end of a unit or grading period.

Garrison and Ehringhaus (2008) offer one of the best defenses of this approach to grading:

A good analogy . . . is the road test that is required to receive a driver's license. What if, before getting your driver's license, you received a grade every time you sat behind the wheel to practice driving? What if your final grade for the driving test was the average of all of the grades you received while practicing? Because of the initial low grades you received during the process of learning to drive, your final grade would not accurately reflect your [actual] ability to drive a car.

Just as a student driver is only judged by their performance on the final road test, and not while practicing with their driving instructor, grades for initial assignments—as well as homework and classwork that allow students to practice—are not included when determining their final grades.

To be clear: Although these assignments won’t be used to determine a student’s final grade, a student’s ability to succeed on the graded assessments (tests, essays, projects, etc.) will depend on the extent to which they have practiced the skills and concepts being assessed. Homework and classwork still matters.

To ensure that students’ final grades most accurately reflect their achievement, they will receive multiple opportunities to show their growth towards mastery in each of the learning targets specified in this syllabus. Throughout the year, the teacher will provide students with timely and meaningful feedback to guide students towards higher levels of achievement. We will use rubrics associated with each learning target, so students know exactly what they need to do to move towards mastery. Some important tips for parents:

- Ask students every day about what standards were covered in class.
- Ask students when their next summative (end of unit) assessments will be.
- The online Schoology gradebook will show many assignments “not counting toward students’ final grades” because those are formative assessments.
- Ask students to tell you their proficiency level on the standards for class.
- Ask students to review at home the standards that they are the weakest in.
- Ask students to show you evidence that they are proficient at a standard.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at max.cecil@grantmagnet.net if you have any questions about the Mastery Learning instructional approach.

Suggested Reading

Garrison, C., & Ehringhaus, M. (2008, January 22). Formative and summative assessments in the classroom. National Middle School Association. Retrieved from <http://www.nmsa.org/Publications/WebExclusive/Assessment/tabid/1120/Default.aspx>.

Gentile, J.R., & Lalley, J.P. (2003). *Standards and mastery learning: Aligning teaching and assessment so all children can learn*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Guskey, T.R. (2013). The case against percentage grades. *Educational Leadership*, 71(1), 68-72.

O’Conner, K. (2009). *How to grade for learning*. (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Reeves, D.B. (2004). The case against the zero. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 86(4), 324-325.

APPENDIX 2: MASTERY LEARNING AND THE GRADEBOOK

Below is a sample of what the online gradebook will look like for this course. As you can see, it is organized differently from a traditional gradebook. Since students' grades are based on mastery of the standards—rather than total points, percentages, and averages—there won't be any indication of a student's overall grade. Instead, students and parents will need to consult the grading policy explained in the syllabus and online.

<p>Since some assignments assess multiple learning targets, they may appear multiple times in the gradebook.</p>	LT.3. Identify the main ideas in arguments, analyze the reasoning, and evaluate the validity of the conclusions.	
	Active Reading Check #1	2
	Active Reading Check #2	3
	Socratic Seminar: What Makes Humans Special?	3
	LT.4. Evaluate the credibility and relevance of sources and the evidence they present.	
	Active Reading Check #1	2
	Active Reading Check #2	2
	Socratic Seminar: What Makes Humans Special?	3
	LT.5. Develop a well-reasoned argument clearly connecting the thesis, claims, and evidence.	
	Socratic Seminar: What Makes Humans Special?	3
	Individual Written Argument (IWA)	3
	Practice Synthesis Essay	3
	LT.6. Strategically choose evidence to effectively support claims.	
	Individual Research Report (IRR)	3
	Individual Written Argument (IWA)	2
	Practice Synthesis Essay	3
	LT.10. Articulate challenges, successes, and moments of insight that occur throughout the inquiry process.	
	Socratic Seminar Reflection	0
	Individual Research Report Reflection	4
	Individual Written Argument Oral Defense	4

Assignments are categorized by the learning target they assess, and not by traditional groups like "tests" or "homework".

Each assignment is given a score on the 4-point mastery grading scale. A score of "0" indicates that the assignment is missing.

This student would receive a B on their final report card because they have demonstrated at least proficiency on most of the assessments in most of the learning targets.

AP SEMINAR: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HUMAN? SYLLABUS ACKNOWLEDGEMENT 2018-2019

Please print and sign your name, indicating that you have read the policies and procedures outlined in this syllabus. For students signing below, you are committing to following these procedures in order to ensure a positive and productive year.

ADDITIONAL NOTE FOR PARENTS AND STUDENTS: MATURE CONTENT WARNING

In keeping with its mission to engage students in college-level work, the AP Seminar course may include perspectives that are intended for adult audiences, and which could be considered controversial. AP Seminar requires students to have the level of maturity and skill to thoughtfully consider and analyze diverse perspectives. Students in this class must be committed to treating all class subjects, materials, and discussions with the maturity they deserve. Alternative assignments are available upon request.

Student Name (print): _____

Period: _____

Student Signature: _____

Date: _____

Parent/Guardian Name (print): _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____

Parent/Guardian Preferred Method of Contact (*choose one or both*):

☐ Email: _____

☐ Phone Number: _____

As a parent/guardian, is there anything else that you'd like me to know?