

PHL 399/CLS 399-01: STOICISM
SYLLABUS

Meeting Time: ThTh 12:20-2:00

Meeting Place: 066 University Hall

Instructor: Dr. Irvine

Office: 383 Millett (Get off the elevator on the third floor. Take a left. Walk thirty paces. If there is an unmarked, open door on the left side of the hall, enter it; it is the secret shortcut to my office, and it is the only way to get to my office at night. If no unmarked door is open, go all the way to the end of the corridor and enter 370 Millett, the Philosophy Department office. Take a left, and another left after that. My office is on the right side, about half way down the corridor.)

Office Phone: 775-2610 (If there is no answer, you can leave a message by calling 775-3063.)

E-mail: dr-irvine@philosopher.com (checked daily)

Office Hours: MWF 12:30-1:25, 3:55-4:30, TuTh 2:10-2:40, and by appointment

Course Website: <http://www.wright.edu/~william.irvine/> To access restricted material for this class, the password (in lowercase letters) is: stoic

Course Work:

► Students will write eight one-page papers. Papers will be graded with “checkmarks.” It is important that papers be turned in on the day assigned, since we will normally discuss them in that day’s class. Any paper not turned in on time will receive a check-minus.

► Students will take two midterms. (There will be no exam given during finals week; the second midterm will be given on the last regular class meeting.)

► Students are also expected to do assigned readings and to participate in class discussions. (I will call on people to ask questions about the assigned readings!) If you are unable to participate in class discussions for physical or psychological reasons, let me know immediately so we can figure out an alternative way for you to gain points for class participation.

Expectations for Class Attendance: I do not take attendance. Nevertheless, students who miss class will not be able to participate in class discussions, and this will have a substantial impact on their course grade.

Course Grade: The midterms will each count as 20% of a student's course grade, the papers will collectively count as 20%, and class participation will count as 40%. (This means that a student who does not participate in class discussion will get **at best** a D- as his course grade!)

Course Texts:

To buy:

Marcus Aurelius, Meditations

Seneca, Dialogues and Essays

Epictetus, Handbook of Epictetus

Irvine, Guide to the Good Life (I make a small royalty on the sale of each book. Any student who buys a new copy of my book and wishes a refund of this royalty should see me.)

Available for free (I will email it to students later in the course):

Irvine, Insults

Dates to remember:

First Midterm: Thursday, Feb. 4

Second Midterm: Thursday, March 11

(Turn over)

My Teaching Philosophy

1. If you are going to be a teacher, you might as well teach.
2. My primary job as a teacher is to move information from my head into yours, and I will do whatever it takes to make this transfer happen.
3. If you want to learn, I want to teach you; if you don't want to learn, I can't teach you.
4. You may need my help, but you don't need my pity; I don't give pity grades.
5. There is no such thing as coming in to office hours too often; you will tire of seeing me long before I tire of seeing you.

My Course Policies

Warning: At the end of each quarter, there are students (e.g., graduating seniors, people on probation, people with scholarships, people trying to get into certain programs) who come to me, tell me that they needed a certain grade in my course, and ask if there is anything they can do—now that the course has ended—to get it. Unfortunately, if the course has ended, I will not change a grade unless we can find evidence that your course work has been misgraded. It doesn't matter how badly you need the grade in question: I will invariably give you the grade you earned, not the grade you need.

This means that if you need a certain grade in my course, you must work for it. You will find that I am more than willing to help you learn course material. (I would much rather spend time helping you than have to give you a bad grade.) Consider me to be your tutor, your counselor, your coach. But be warned: If you do poorly in this course and make no effort to seek help, you leave me with no choice but to give you a grade that neither of us will be pleased with.

Infrequently Asked Questions

- Q.** I already took this course and failed it. Is it true that since I am retaking it, I am sure to pass?
- A.** Certainly not. In fact, I have had students do worse in the course the second time they took it than the first time. I had one student who failed one of my courses three times. (She refused to come in for help.)
- Q.** I am a graduating senior and I need to pass your course to graduate. Can I assume that you will give me a grade that will enable me to graduate?
- A.** I will give you the grade you earn, not the grade you need or want.
- Q.** I am taking your class but won't be able to attend very often because my life is very complicated. Will you overlook this and give me the grade I would have earned if my life hadn't been so complicated?
- A.** If your life is too complicated, it is unlikely that you will succeed in college. I will certainly be willing to help you outside of class, but having done that, I will give you whatever grade you earn, exactly like any other student.
- Q.** If I am not doing well in your class, will you come up with extra-credit projects for me to do so I can get a passing grade?
- A.** No. Your grade will be determined by class exams and assignments, just like it is for everyone else. If you aren't doing well in class, you need to come in regularly for help. My view is that extra-credit projects are generally given so that students can pass a course without having mastered the course content. If you don't master the content of this course, you will not pass.
- Q.** I won't get into Harvard Law School unless you give me an A. Will you raise my grade and thereby help me accomplish my goal?
- A.** Of course not. I will give you the grade you earned, not the grade you want.
- Q.** If I get As in all the other classes I take, doesn't it follow that you should give me an A as well?
- A.** It doesn't follow. Maybe you are better in those classes than in this class.
- Q.** Would you give a student a B even though doing so would ruin their perfect 4.0 GPA?
- A.** Yes, if they earned only a B, that is the grade I would give. My goal is to give you the grade you earned, not the grade that allows you to maintain or improve your GPA.
- Q.** If I stop coming to class half-way through the quarter, will you give me an INC so I can finish the class (without signing up for it again) in the next quarter?
- A.** No. Some faculty members do this sort of thing, but I don't. I will only give an INC to a student who has finished everything but the final, and has been forced to miss the final by circumstances beyond his control. If it becomes clear to you that you can no longer come to class, you should drop the class.
- Q.** If I come into office hours to get help, will it guarantee that I will pass your course?
- A.** It depends on what we do during office hours. If we talk about your pet cat, for example, it will probably have no effect at all on your course grade. If we discuss the course material, it will likely improve your chances of passing, but there are no guarantees.