



## HONORS COLLEGE CORE COURSE PROPOSAL FORM

Thank you for your interest in teaching for the Honors College. Before you fill out this core course proposal form, please note the following guidelines:

1. Honors core courses are three-credit hour courses taken primarily by Honors College freshmen with diverse backgrounds and interests.
2. Honors core courses are General Education courses, and must fit under at least one of the six categories (please see <http://www.uic.edu/ucatalog/GE.shtml>).
3. Honors core courses do not presume prior knowledge of any field or discipline.
4. To learn what Honors core courses have been offered in recent semesters, please visit <http://www.uic.edu/honors/learning/courses2.shtml>.
5. The usual compensation method is to provide \$7,000 per course directly to departments for faculty replacement.
6. You must secure the permission of your Department Head before submitting your core proposal to the Honors College. Please have him or her sign this form.

### About the Instructor

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Title: Professor  
College: Architecture and Arts  
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### About the Course

1. Course Title: "What is beauty? Thinking and feeling aesthetic experience with the histories of philosophy and art"
2. Course Description (please provide a very clear summary of the proposed course in one paragraph that can be understood by a general audience which has no background in your particular field.)

What is beauty? The main aim of the course is to consider this question through the interlocking histories of western philosophy and art with a single historical hypothesis in mind: that beauty as a philosophical and artistic concern has routinely served to reconcile two broadly defined world views, one that is religious or transcendental or universalist in its primary aims and another that is secular, technical, and analytical. Our overall historical narrative will be about the secularization of religious longings but in such a way that the category of beauty stands as a residual religious challenge to secular presumptions. Our goal will be to trace this history through the work of fourteen philosophers from Plato to the present and leading examples of the art of their times. Classroom discussion will center on short excerpts from the philosophical texts at issue but we will also lean heavily on artworks to test and complement the philosophical claims and to inquire into our own experiences of beauty. Additionally, each text and its companion artwork will be introduced by placing it in the context of period debates about religiosity and secularism as well as within relevant developments in the history of science and technology.

3. Course outline with clear, widely understandable phrases denoting major topics (with sub-headings, if necessary) and distribution of hours (should add up to 45 hours).

1. Introduction (3 hours)

This introductory discussion will raise the central problem or question for the course: whether the understanding and experience of beauty in the western philosophical and artistic tradition can be understood as the secularization of religious longings. Students will be encouraged to consider this an open and unresolved question.

2. Plato ON FORM (3 hours)

Plato's distinction between, on the one hand, abstract universal form which he associated with the gods, and, on the other, concrete particular objects which he associated with humanity, will be the foundation for our discussion all term. *Beauty turns on the experience of socially-realized approximation to such ideal forms.*

3. Aristotle ON RELEASE (3 hours)

Aristotle's account of catharsis, or release from the strictures of ideal form, as an earthly, ungodly, embodied aim of tragedy will be discussed as a foundational counterpoint to Plato's theory of forms. *Beauty emerges with the experience of individual cathartic release from the tension between the ideal and the real.*

4. Augustine of Hippo ON INTERIORITY (3 hours)

Augustine's turn away from the physical, outer world toward the promise of a cultivated, spiritual, inner self or inner godliness will serve as a rejoinder to Aristotelian earthliness and as a basis for the modern notion of self and the modern notion of aesthetic experience. *Beauty arises from the experience of the divine in the self at a distance from external worldliness.*

5. Thomas Aquinas ON SYSTEMATICITY (3 hours)

This session will focus on Aquinas's "divine science" or systematic theology as an effort to externalize and objectivize the spiritualized, interiorized, and aestheticized tradition inherited from Augustine. *Beauty is experienced as cognition.*

6. Niccolò Machiavelli ON PERSEPECTIVE (3 hours)

This session will focus on Machiavelli's efforts to externalize and naturalize the systematicity of Aquinas's theology by making it cyclical and calculative, and thus external to transcendental moral discrimination and imperative. *Beauty is the experience and realization of God-given desire through the exercise of instrumental reason.*

7. Martin Luther ON FAITH (3 hours)

This session will focus on Luther's more radical internalization and desocialization of spirituality enabled by, among other things, the invention of the printing press. *Beauty is the word as the point of mediation between human faith and divine will and grace.*

8. René Descartes ON DOUBT (3 hours)

This session will focus on Descartes' methodological doubt as a means of reducing being to thought. *Beauty is deduction or the subtraction of the transcendent from the determinate.*

9. Thomas Hobbes ON SOVEREIGNTY (3 hours)

This session will focus on Hobbes's model of the social contract and its implications for the ways in which beauty is experienced as the construction of a sovereign body. *Beauty is relational, contractual, legal in the sense of rights and restrictions.*

10. Jean-Jacques Rousseau ON GENERALITY (3 hours)

This session will focus on Rousseau's concept of the general will. *Beauty is the experience of shared humanity acting in the public interest.*

11. Immanuel Kant ON BEAUTY (3 hours)

This session will focus on Kant's foundational account of aesthetic experience. *Beauty is the experience of universality.*

12. Karl Marx ON COOPERATION (3 hours)

This session will focus on Marx's pendant accounts of ideology and class-consciousness. *Beauty is the cog-in-the-machine-like experience of one's place in the larger economy.*

13. Friedrich Nietzsche ON WILL (3 hours)

This session will focus on the complementary themes of dependency and the will to power. *Beauty is the experience of overcoming dependency.*

14. Sigmund Freud ON SUBLIMATION (3 hours)

This session will focus on Freud's pendant accounts of drive and repression. *Beauty is the experience of desire socialized.*

15. Theodor Adorno ON BECOMING (3 hours)

This session will focus on Adorno's account of aesthetic experience as caught between desire and reality. *Beauty is the experience of contradiction as a motor of desire and understanding.*

Total

45 Hours

4. List required/suggested texts and/or readings. In all instances, give author, title, and date of publication.

*NOTE:* Students will be directed to online editions for each of the readings but will be encouraged to use any available source and to compare and contrast translations when the meaning of a particular passage is unclear. The reading assignments have been kept as short as possible in part in order to encourage students to do supplementary reading on their own initiative.

1. Introduction: What is beauty?—no reading assignment

2. Plato

\*[Symposium](#) (385–80 BC), §210-212

\*[Parmenides](#) (370 BC), §129-135

\*[Republic](#) (360 BC), Book VII

Sample artwork: [Aphrodite of Milos](#)

3. Aristotle

\*[Ethics](#) (335-23 BC), §I:5-9, II:6, 9, X:5-9

\*[Politics](#) (335-23 BC), §I:1-6, II:1-3, III:6-7, VIII:7

\*[Poetics](#) (335-23 BC), §6-18

Sample artwork: [Memnon pieta](#)

4. Augustine

\*[Confessions](#) (398 AD), Book 7

Sample artwork: [Ladder of beauty](#)

5. Aquinas

\*[Summa Theologica](#) (1274), §I:5:1-4, I:12:1-4, I:39:1-8, I:91:1-4, II:27:1-4

- Sample artwork: [Saint Etienne's Cathedral in Bourges, France](#)
6. Machiavelli  
\*[The Prince](#) (1532), chapters 15-18, 24-25  
Sample artwork: [Leonardo da Vinci, The Last Supper](#)
7. Luther  
\*[On the Bondage of the Will](#) (1525), §9-27  
Sample artwork: [Lucas Cranach the Elder, Wittenberg altarpiece](#)
8. Descartes  
\*[Meditations on First Philosophy](#) (1641), Meditations I-II, VI  
Sample artwork: [Hyacinthe Rigaud, Portrait of Louis XIV](#)
9. Hobbes  
\*[Leviathan](#) (1651), introduction, chapters 1-3, 17-18, conclusion  
Sample artwork: [Thomas Gainsborough, Mr. and Mrs. Andrews](#)
10. Rousseau  
\*[The Social Contract](#) (1762), Book II  
Sample artwork: [Jacques-Louis David, Oath of the Horatii](#)
11. Kant  
\*[The Critique of Judgment](#) (1790), §1-5, 17-22  
Sample artwork: [Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, The Soap Bubble](#)
12. Marx  
\*[Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts](#) (1844), "Estranged Labor"  
\*[Capital](#) (1867), chapter 13  
Sample artwork: [Gustave Courbet, The Stonebreakers](#)
13. Nietzsche  
\*[On the Genealogy of Morality](#) (1887), Second Essay  
Sample artwork: [Umberto Boccioni, Unique Forms of Continuity in Space](#)
14. Freud  
\*[Civilization and Its Discontents](#) (1930), chapters 1-3  
Sample artwork: [Pablo Picasso, Les Femmes d'Alger \(O. J. R. M. and F.\)](#)
15. Adorno  
\*[Minima Moralia](#) (1951), §145  
Sample artwork: [Jackson Pollock, One: Number 31](#)

5. Please briefly explain how students will be assessed. Please note that each general education course must include at least one of the following components: (1) a laboratory, (2) a substantial paper writing assignment appropriate for the subject matter (a minimum of one 5-7 page paper or two 2-3 page papers, in addition to essay examinations), or (3) assignments that include either problem sets or written data analysis.

Students will be evaluated on the basis of their participation in discussion and on biweekly response essays. Both are designed to ensure that students have, on the one hand, become familiar with Western philosophical and artistic traditions on "beauty" through the works of fourteen philosophers of different historical periods, and on the other hand, cultivate critical thinking ability in assessing and engaging

debates about how conceptions of beauty have been developed, revised, and negotiated throughout history.

Classroom discussion will focus on the key themes of the course: the historical meaning and significance of the idea and experience of beauty, how it has developed over time, and its meaning and consequence for the world we find ourselves in today. Classroom discussions assess students' grasp of the material and key concepts on the one hand, and students' ability to organize their thoughts on the materials they have read and articulate ideas clearly and effectively, on the other. Also, by learning to debate and share ideas, students will deepen their understanding of conceptions of beauty by having to challenge themselves and others. Students will be evaluated based on evidence of their active critical engagement with the assigned texts and artworks as demonstrated through participation in discussion.

The seven biweekly two-page essays will be written in response to the assigned reading for the day they are due. Students will be asked to use the assigned reading to explore the core themes of the class: the historical meaning and significance of the idea and experience of beauty, how it has developed over time, and its meaning and consequence for the world we find ourselves in today. By examining the philosophers' work in a more focused manner, students will cultivate critical thinking ability as well as learn to integrate their personal experiences with these philosophical texts. These essays will also become a primer for idea exchange: students will be asked to present their papers to the class and discussion will develop in response.

Students will present their written work, which will serve the basis for analyzing the essay form and developing a collective understanding of what constitutes not only effective writing, but also meaningful and significant aesthetic response and critical thinking.

Over the course of the term, the class will develop its own criteria for good writing but will use guidelines developed by the Arts Writers Grant Program as a starting point: The goal for AWGP is to "honor and encourage" writing that is:

- rigorous, passionate, eloquent, and precise;
- in which a keen engagement with the present is infused with an appreciation of the historical;
- that is neither afraid to take a stand, nor content to deliver authoritative pronouncements, but serves rather to pose questions and to generate new possibilities for thinking about [aesthetic experience];
- that is sensitive to both the importance and difficulty of situating aesthetic objects within their broader social and political contexts;
- that does not dilute or sidestep complex ideas but renders accessible their meaning and value;
- that creatively challenges the limits of existing conventions, without valorizing novelty as an end in itself.

(<http://www.artswriters.org/guidelines.html>)

## About the Course's Fit with General Education

The General Education Core includes six categories. Please consult the UIC website on general education (<http://www.uic.edu/ucatalog/GE.shtml>) and indicate one or more core categories in which you believe your course would fit *best*.

- Analyzing the Natural World (No Lab)
- Understanding the Individual and Society
- Understanding the Past
- Understanding the Creative Arts
- Exploring World Cultures
- Understanding U.S. Society

## Additional Information

If there is anything else you'd like the Honors College Educational Policy Committee to consider (this may include your curriculum vitae, teaching evaluations, teaching awards you have received, past teaching for the Honors College, and so on), please note it here:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Course Proposer

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Department Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Please Print Your Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date