

# COM 307H Life of the Mind

Fall 2018

TR 12:30--1:45, BMC 4.212

INSTRUCTOR: Dave Junker, Director, Moody College Honors Program  
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TA: Pratik Shah, doctoral student, Advertising  
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## Introduction

As the introductory course of the Moody College Honors Program, *Life of the Mind* is an initiation into the program's *Socratic* culture of critical thinking and open dialogue, where big questions are asked, assumptions are examined, and blind certainties held up to the light. Why do you want to study and practice communication? Just what is human communication, anyway? What defines "good" communication? What ends does it serve and who does it benefit? In what ways does communication help and hinder understanding of ourselves, society, and the natural world? Do pictures we take with our cell phones document reality or do they alter and distort it? Why is freedom of speech and freedom of the press the focus of the very first amendment in the Constitution? During this historical moment of unprecedented access to information and high-quality journalism, why is our country so divided? Why do we get so worked up over little details of speech, word choice, labels and terms? Why do we tell ourselves stories? How do they reflect our understanding of what is real and what is possible? Such questions will guide our intellectual journey through selected essays, fiction, film, lectures, guest lectures, student and panel discussions, and tours of campus museums, libraries, and public art and architecture.

While I will be your fearless leader and pedagogical guide, there will be many guides on this journey, the most significant of whom is [Brooke Gladstone](#), a highly regarded journalist and radio-show host and producer, as well as the author of two books that we will be reading in class: [The Trouble with Reality](#) and [The Influencing Machine](#). I am delighted to announce that she will also be OUR VERY SPECIAL GUEST on Oct. 11, visiting our class and giving a public talk that evening. Another big public event of the semester is a moderated conversation between notable media figures who represent opposite ends of the political spectrum, the topic of which will be dialogue across the partisan divide. That event is Oct. 30. Your TA for the semester, Pratik Shah, will also play a significant part in your journey this semester. More of your guides – real people, texts, tours, films and more – are listed below.

## Learning Objectives

- To initiate you into the program's culture of critical inquiry and discussion
- To encourage critical thinking expansively and across disciplines
- To cultivate a healthy skepticism for unexamined assumptions
- To provide you the opportunity to reflect on your role as intellectuals, scholars, citizens, and future leaders in your communities and communication professions
- To develop your skills in the arts of argument and persuasive writing – *more on your work requirements below*

## In-Class Events

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“Fun with Plato Day”: A Moderated Discussion of Plato’s *Gorgias* with Communication Scholar Barry Brummett. Thursday, Sept. 13. Meet in BMC 5.102.

“Life of the Mind and Life of the Brain”: A Moderated Discussion with Integrative Neuroscience researcher Bharath Chandrasekaran on what brain science can teach us about how we think and communicate, TBA.

Talia Stroud, scholar of media and public opinion, to lecture on Media and Political Bias, TBA.

Joshua Gunn, scholar of rhetoric and popular culture, to introduce film screening of *2001: A Space Odyssey*,” Nov. 15

### **Out-of-the Classroom Class Days, i.e. Field Trips**

Class at the Harry Ransom Center, Sept. 20

Class at the Blanton Museum of Art, Oct. 23

Landmark Public Art Tour, Nov. 13

### **Public Events Hosted or Co-Hosted by Moody Honors**

One of the special features of our honors program is our public events by leading thinkers, scholars, creatives, film-makers and professionals in the world of communication. This semester, our marquee event is a visit by Brooke Gladstone, co-host and managing editor of “On the Media,” a long-running and award-winning radio news program, and the author of two acclaimed books which we’ll be reading in class, “The Trouble with Reality: A Ruminations on Moral Panic in Our Time” and “The Influencing Machine: Brooke Gladstone on the Media.” Ms. Gladstone will visit our class for an informal Q&A before doing a moderated discussion open to the public later that evening. Both events listed in this section are open to the public, though you will have opportunities to interact with the guests via class visits, or small meet-and-greet sessions.

**Oct. 11 – A Conversation with Brooke Gladstone**, host of WNYC’s “On the Media” and author of “The Trouble with Reality: A Ruminations on Moral Panic in Our Time” (2017). Moody Honors is the lead sponsor, with Journalism co-sponsoring. *This event will serve as a kick-off for the first year of the new four-year honors program.* 5:30—7 p.m., BMC Auditorium. **Required.\***

**Oct. 30 – Dialogue Across the Partisan Divide, a conversation with [Dylan Marron](#) and [Guy Benson](#)**, Sponsored by Annette Strauss New Politics Forum, co-sponsored by Moody Honors. Marron represents the left side of the political spectrum and is host, writer and creator of the podcasts “Conversations with People who Hate Me” and “Sitting in Bathrooms with Trans People.” Benson represents the right end of the political spectrum and is political editor of Townhall.com and author of *End of Discussion*. 5:30—7:30 p.m., BMC Auditorium. **Required.\***

**\*Unless you have very good reasons, you are expected to attend these evening events so plan ahead.**

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## Required Reading

*"Life of the Mind" Reader* from [Jenn's Copies](#), 2518 Guadalupe St. Contents: "In Plato's Cave," essay from *On Photography* by Susan Sontag; "Entering the Conversation," the introduction from *They Say, I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein; "Chapter 1" from *Ways of Seeing* by John Berger and "Myth in the Modern World," the introduction to *The Power of Myth*, an interview with Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers

Book: *Plato's Gorgias*, Translated by James H. Nichols Jr.

Book: *The Trouble with Reality: A Ruminant on Moral Panic in Our Time* by Brooke Gladstone

Book: *The Influencing Machine: Brooke Gladstone on the Media* by Brooke Gladstone, illustrated by Josh Neufeld

Books are available to the [University Co-op Bookstore](#), 2246 Guadalupe St.

## Other Material and Stuff

A notebook for taking notes in class, at lectures and events, and for class tours; and some pens and pencils, of course.

We will watch two films outside of class. If you cannot attend the film screenings due to conflicts with work or class schedules, you are responsible for watching them on your own or with friends via the platform of your choice. The films are:

*Okja* directed by Bong Joon-Ho (Nov. 11, 5-9 p.m. range)

*2001: A Space Odyssey*, directed by Stanley Kubrick (Nov. 15, 5-9 p.m. range)

You will also be required to listen to two or more podcasts of "On the Media," a weekly radio show that is co-hosted by Brooke Gladstone, who will be our featured guest of the semester. You can listen on Spotify.

I will also post links to some articles that are available online. These will include the following, plus others as decided.

["What Does It Mean to Be Human? Don't Ask,"](#) by Martha Nussbaum, New York Times, Aug. 20, 2018

["The Beast in Me: We Tend to Forget We are Animals, Until We Become Prey,"](#) by Maxim Loskutoff, Aug. 17, 2018.

["The Slippery Slope of Dehumanizing Language,"](#) by Allison Skinner, Boston Globe

["We Are Merging With Robots. That's a Good Thing."](#) by Andy Clark, New York Times, Aug. 13, 2018.

["There Will Never Be an Age of Artificial Intimacy,"](#) by Sherry Turkle, New York Times, Aug. 11, 2018.

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### The Work

Thought Pieces	20%
Attendance and Participation in Class Activities	20%
Essay 1 on Plato (4-5 pages)	15%
Essay 2 on Gladstone – Draft and Revision (4-5 pages)	20%
Essay 3 Choice of Topic – Draft and Revision (5-6 pages)	25%

### Grading

Assignments will receive a score out of 100. Letter grades will not be given on these assignments. Final grades will be determined as a total percentage of all assignments. Writing assignments will be held to a very high standard. It is expected that all papers will be well written and carefully edited, their discussions clear and thoughtful, and their arguments compellingly supported.

#### Grading Scale

A = 94-100%  
A- = 90-93  
B+ = 87-89  
B = 84-86  
B- = 80-83  
C+ = 77-79  
C = 74-76  
C- = 70-73  
D+ = 67-69  
D = 64-66  
D- = 60-63

#### Work

You will have to read a lot and write a lot. But you are smart and hardworking and can do this. Some readings will be philosophical and dense but all of it is well-written and engaging – the same cannot be said for all the reading you will have in college. Below are a few notes about what to expect.

*Thought Pieces:* Nearly every week, you will be given a thinking/writing prompt in Canvas. Due dates may vary from week to week. Some of them will be intended for just me and Pratik, others as contributions to a class discussion that will be visible to the class (these will be clearly marked in advance). Some prompts will be very involved and require clear steps, others will be more open and less demanding. Accordingly, between 3-5 points will be accorded to each thought piece. The final thought piece of the semester will be worth 10 points.

*Participation and Attendance:* You're expected to come to class every day and participate. Unexcused absences will hurt your grade. We'll have guests and take a few field trips. You're expected to come and pay attention. I scheduled them for a reason. In some classes, I will do most of the talking in order to present some ideas and material. Other classes will be discussion-driven and will require you to participate. If you're prepared for class every day by doing the readings and taking notes, you'll be ready. For the class events that meet outside of class time, I expect you to make every effort to attend. But if you have a class conflict, I cannot make you skip another class to attend our event. If on the other hand, you like to watch "Glee" on

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Thursdays with your friends, I expect you to reschedule your “Glee” nights.

*Essays.* Each essay will have a specific prompt and guidelines, but all will be argument-driven, analysis papers. I will clearly outline requirements and expectations for each paper. A chapter from the writing resource *They Say, I Say*, from the class reader, will provide some general guidance for writing strong academic essays. Essays one and two will require you to respond to a specific prompt, the third will give you some freedom to choose your own topic. Essays two and three will require you to submit drafts and revise them based on peer and instructor comments.

### **Other Class Policies and Stuff**

Proofreading, checking facts and spellchecking -- Make sure whatever you turn in is in the best shape it can be given your deadline. Make your ideas clear and credible.

Canvas will be used to post course materials – syllabus, assignments, outlines, announcements and reminders, resources and links, readings and grades.

Due dates and Deadlines are firm for most assignments. But please contact me in extenuating circumstances.

Attending office hours -- Don't wait until you're having a crisis to come and see me. If you can't make our scheduled hours, talk to me before or after class or try scheduling an alternative time. Extra hours may be added, depending on need.

Role of the TA: Pratik Shah is a doctoral student in advertising with whom I have worked before. He will help read, grade and comment on your work; he will help lead discussion group activities; he will contribute to class discussions; and he will hold office hours just like me. We will divide the grading load roughly 60/40 and try to ensure fairness by making sure that each of you is graded by us in roughly equal amounts. Also, to ensure fairness in grading and assessment, the two of us will hold grading meetings prior to every assignment to set clear standards and expectations. If you wish to get clarification about a grade or comment on a paper, please take this up with the person who graded your paper first.

**\*Cell Phones and Laptops in Class:** There will be NO use of cell phones or laptops in class, unless specific permission is granted, or when we are reading an online article. I love my cell phone and laptop just like you. But they are too distracting in class. You can take notes in your books, your reader, or notebooks. Cell phones will be permitted at special events and tours ONLY for taking pictures or the purpose of recording (if permission is granted).

### **University Policies**

Academic Integrity -- University of Texas Honor Code: The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

Academic Dishonesty -- Any form of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, manufacturing

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quotes or sources, using another's reporting, research or quotes without giving proper attribution, will result in an automatic grade of "F" for your assignment, possibly the course and possibly worse. If you're ever unsure whether you're crossing the line, ask – that's what good practitioners and good journalists do.

**Special needs** -- The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic adjustments for qualified students with disabilities. Any student with a

documented disability who requires academic accommodations should contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at (512) 471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329-3986 (video phone). Faculty are not required to provide accommodations without an official accommodation letter from SSD. Please see me at the beginning of the semester if you have special needs or require alternative testing.

### COUNSELING AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Taking care of your general well-being is an important step in being a successful student. If stress, test anxiety, racing thoughts, feeling unmotivated or anything else is getting in your way, there are options available for support.

For **immediate** support: Visit/Call the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC): M-F 8-5p | SSB, 5th floor. [512-471-3515](tel:512-471-3515) | [cmhc.utexas.edu](http://cmhc.utexas.edu)  
CMHC Crisis Line: 24/7 | [512.471.2255](tel:512.471.2255) | [cmhc.utexas.edu/24hourcounseling.html](http://cmhc.utexas.edu/24hourcounseling.html)

**CARE Counselor** in the Moody College of Communication is: Abby Simpson, LCSW  
CMA 4.134 | [512-471-7642](tel:512-471-7642) (Please *leave a message* if she is unavailable)

#### **FREE Services** at CMHC:

Brief assessments and referral services

Mental health & wellness articles - [cmhc.utexas.edu/commonconcerns.html](http://cmhc.utexas.edu/commonconcerns.html)

MindBody Lab - [cmhc.utexas.edu/mindbodylab.html](http://cmhc.utexas.edu/mindbodylab.html)

Classes, workshops, & groups - [cmhc.utexas.edu/groups.html](http://cmhc.utexas.edu/groups.html)

### Writing Flag Criteria

This course may be used to fulfill three hours of the communication component of the university core curriculum and addresses the following four core objectives established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board: communication skills, critical thinking skills, teamwork, and personal responsibility.

Below is list of the specific writing flag criteria the class fulfills:

*Criterion #1: Require students to write regularly—several times during the semester—and to complete writing projects that are substantial.*

*Criterion #2: Be structured around the principle that good writing requires rewriting. Students must receive meaningful feedback from the instructor (or teaching assistant) so they can improve successive drafts. Instructors are encouraged to have students read each other's work in order to offer constructive criticism.*

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*Criterion #3: Include writing assignments that constitute at least one-third of the final grade in the course.*

## AUGUST

### PART I. CRITICAL THINKING AND DIALOGUE

WEEK 1      8/30      Welcome, Thought Piece #1 – “In Plato’s Cave,” by Susan Sontag

## SEPTEMBER

WEEK 2      9/4-6      Discuss thought prompt #1, HSC and candidates, Begin Plato’s Gorgias, Thought Piece #2

WEEK 3      9/11-13      Plato’s Dialogues, **Special Guest, Professor Barry Brummett, 9/13 (Room BMC 5.102)**

**\*HONORS ICE CREAM SOCIAL\* -- FRIDAY, Sept. 14, 5-6 p.m., BMC 3.206**

WEEK 4      9/18-20      **Essay on Plato Due 9/18, Mitch Landrieu Talk, Sept. 18 (TBA), Tour of Harry Ransom Center (9/20, 12:40 p.m. start), Thought Piece #3**

### PART II. MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

WEEK 5      9/25-27      Begin “Influencing Machine,” Thought Piece #3

## OCTOBER

WEEK 6      10/2-4      Denius News Integrity Panel, Oct. 2 (TBA), “Trouble with Reality”; Thought Piece #4

WEEK 7      10/9-11      “Trouble with Reality,” **Brooke Gladstone Visit and Talk, Oct. 11**

WEEK 8      10/16-18      **Draft of Gladstone Essay 10/18**

WEEK 9      10/23-25      **Visit Blanton Museum of Art, 10-23; “Ways of Seeing” by John Berger, “Myth and the Modern World” by Joseph Campbell, Thought piece #5**

WEEK 10      10/30-11/1      **Dialogue Across the Partisan Divide with Dylan Marron and Guy Benson (10/30), Gladstone Revision Due, 11/1**

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## PART III. COMMUNICATING THE HUMAN, OR STORIES ABOUT ANIMALS AND MACHINES

### NOVEMBER

WEEK 11	11/6-8	Articles from NY Times series on what makes us human; <b>Screening of film “Okja”</b> (11/8, BMC 5.102, 5-9 p.m. TBA),
WEEK 12	11/13-15	Articles from NY Times series on what makes us human, <b>Landmark Public ART TOUR (11/13)</b> ; Screen film <b>“2001: A Space Odyssey”</b> (11/15, BMC 5.102, 5 p.m. TBA), Thought Piece #6
WEEK 13	11/20	THANKSGIVING
WEEK 14	11/27-29	Loose Ends

### DECEMBER

WEEK 15	12/4-6	<b>Draft of Paper 3 Due 12/4</b>
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