

# COM 307H Life of the Mind

Fall 2019

TR 12:30--1:45, BMC 3.206

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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? Can truth and reality ever be adequately expressed? Is communication power? If so, is that always a good thing? How does communication help us understand ourselves, society, and the natural world? Such questions are just the starting point of our intellectual journeys through essays, poems, songs, films, lectures, museum visits, public art tours and lots and lots of in-class discussion.

## **Learning Objectives**

- To initiate you into the program's culture of critical inquiry and discussion
- To encourage critical thinking expansively and inter-disciplinarily in a diverse world
- To cultivate a healthy skepticism of 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
- To get to know each other and get familiar with the campus and college

## **Public Events**

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 **David Wallace-Wells**, author of New York Times bestseller "**The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming**," an important book about the most important issue facing your generation: climate change. It's also one of the most difficult issues to comprehend, imagine, communicate about, and act on, which makes it a very suitable topic for this class. Below is a list of events sponsored, co-sponsored or promoted by the honors program. For events held outside of class time, you are expected to make every reasonable effort to attend.

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**September 12** – A Talk by **Patrick Radden Keefe**, award-winning journalist and author, including 2019 Orwell Prize for Political Writing. Event details coming soon. For more information about Patrick Radden Keefe, please visit: <https://www.patrickraddenkeefe.com/>

**October 1** – 2019 Liz Carpenter Lecture with **Samantha Power**, former U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Event details coming soon. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/jan/07/samantha-power-being-un-irish-dinner-table-obama-the-last-year-documentary>

**October 23** – “**Call Her Ganda**” film screening and talk back with **director PJ Raval**, award-winning filmmaker and RTF faculty member. <https://rtf.utexas.edu/faculty/pj-raval>

**October 28** – 2019 Mary Alice Davis Lecture with **Ayesha Rascoe**, White House reporter for NPR and Reuters. Event details coming soon. <https://www.npr.org/people/599484393/ayesha-rascoe>

**November 12** – A Talk by **David Wallace-Wells**, New America National Fellow, deputy editor of New York Magazine and author of the 2019 bestseller “Uninhabitable Earth.” Event details coming soon. For more information about David Wallace-Wells, please visit: <https://www.newamerica.org/our-people/david-wallace-wells/>

### Required Materials

Book: The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming by David Wallace-Wells (Available at [Books-A-Million](#) or [Amazon](#) or local bookseller [Book People](#))

A notebook for taking notes.

Spotify for building a class playlist and shared listening.

Readings and films via handout, the internet or streaming, which may include the following:

“The Hero’s Journey” by Joseph Campbell

“In Plato’s Cave” by Susan Sontag

Selections from Plato’s “Gorgias”

Selections from “Souls of Black Folk” by W.E.B. Du Bois

Selections from “A Field Guide to Lies and Statistics” by Daniel Levitin

“The Danger of a Single Story, a TED Talk by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

“Call Her Ganda,” a film by PJ Raval

“dawn,” a short film by Ya’Ke Smith

“Okja,” a film by Joon-ho Bong

“Eight Grade,” a film by Bo Burnham

Selected poems by Joy Harjo, Adrienne Rich, Wallace Stevens, Tracy K. Smith,

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Emily Dickinson, Victor Hernandez Cruz, Jose Olivarez and Wanda Coleman

### **The Work**

Thought Pieces	10%
Essay 1 (3-4 pages)	20%
Essay 2 (3-4 pages)	20%
Life of the Mind Essay (5-6 pages)	25%
Attendance and Participation in Class Activities	20%

### **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, with clear and thoughtful discussions and well-supported arguments.

#### **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**

*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 Jacob, others as contributions to a class discussion. Thought and effort should be prioritized over polish and perfection.

*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. You will be required to do a peer-editing workshop for Essay 2 and you will be required to revise either Essay 1 or Essay 2 before Thanksgiving Break for a better grade.

### **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.

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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 must be handed in even if you can't do it on time. 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: Jacob is a doctoral student in advertising. 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. Though not every assignment will be graded by both of us, we will make an effort to ensure that all of you will submit work that will be graded by more than one of us. 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 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.

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### **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:5124713515) | [cmhc.utexas.edu](http://cmhc.utexas.edu)  
CMHC Crisis Line: 24/7  
| [512.471.2255](tel:5124712255) | [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:5124717642) (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.*

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