Prof. Pericles Lewis
The Devane Lectures, 2026
Purposes of College Education

Summary
College is a crucial institution in which our society works through its expectations for young people. This course explores the purposes of college education through the first great book on the philosophy of education, Plato's *Republic*. We read *The Republic* in conversation with other thinkers including Aristotle, Confucius, John Stuart Mill, Virginia Woolf, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King. For the 325th anniversary of Yale's founding, we also explore the changing conception of college education at Yale over the centuries and read some of the college's and the university's key founding documents. Themes include the development of personal character, participation in a community, preparation for citizenship, and conversation with others on intellectual matters. We also explore some of the social and economic functions of college education.

Schedule & Location
Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:30-3:20 p.m., O.C. Marsh Lecture Hall, Yale Science Building

Texts
- The main required text is *The Republic of Plato*, trans. Allan Bloom (Basic Books, 2016; ISBN 978-0465094080). It costs about $12 new or about $5 used. You should read this edition as a printed book.

- I recommend that everyone read the following book, which includes material that will be the basis for some of the lectures:

    - Brooks Mather Kelley, *Yale: A History* (Yale University Press, 1974; 978-0300078435)

- Other recommended texts will be available in PDF format on Canvas. Additional readings will be drawn from the following books. You may want to purchase copies of some of them for optional further reading. The ISBN numbers are included to help you find the right edition:

    - Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross (Oxford World's Classics, 2009; 978-0199213610)
    - Confucius, *Analects*, trans. Annping Chin (Penguin Classics, 2014; 978-0143106852)
    - Gandhi, *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Beacon Press, 1993; 978-0807059098)
    - Martin Luther King, Jr., *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Warner, 2001; 978-0446676502)
    - John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and The Subjection of Women* (Penguin Classics, 2007; 978-0141441474)
    - Michael Oakeshott, *The Voice of Liberal Learning* (Liberty Fund, 2001; 978-0865973244)

- Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures* (Hackett, 2004: 978-0872206656)
- Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (Mariner Books, 2005; 978-0156030410)

Please bring a paper notebook to class. No electronic devices should be used during class time unless they are needed because of accessibility issues.

Reading Schedule
Reading for each week is listed on the following pages. Try to read the required sections once or twice before the lecture.

September
Unit 1 on Character
How might college change who you are and how you live?

Week one
W 2 What is College For? Introduction to the Course
F 4 What is Happiness or Human Flourishing?

Week two: What is Justice?
- Required reading: *Republic*, Book 1 (pages 3-34, notes on 439-446, and commentary* on 307-337; pay special attention to Thrasymachus' speech at 343b-344c [pages 21-22])

W 9 Introduction to Plato

*NB: reading the commentary is optional throughout the course.

Week three: Why be Just?
- Required reading: *Republic*, Book 2 (35-61, notes on 446-451, commentary on 337-353)
- Optional reading: Brooks Mather Kelley, Yale: A History, pages 3-10; An act for Liberty to erect a Collegiate School and other Founding Documents

M 14 Education in the Healthy City
W 16 Historical Interlude: The Founding of Yale College

Unit 2 on Community
What do we learn by living in a collegiate community?

Week four: Who Gets In?
- Required reading: *Republic*, Book 3 (63-96, notes on 451-455, commentary on 353-369; pay special attention to Plato's description of the noble lie at 414b-415d [pages 93-94])
- Optional reading: Michael Sandel on "Disdain for the Less Educated"

M 21 College as Community
If you are missing class for Yom Kippur, I can provide you with a recording of the lecture.
W 23 The Noble Lie

Week five
- Required reading: *Republic*, Book 4 (97-125, notes on 455-457, commentary on 369-379; pay special attention to Socrates' description of justice in the soul at 443b-445a [pages 123-125])
- Optional reading: Martin Luther King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail" or read it online at The Atlantic

M 28 The Tripartite Soul
W 30 Community and Injustice

October
Week six: How to Be a Philosopher-King
- Required reading: *Republic*, Book 5 (127-161, notes on 457-461, commentary on 379-397)
- Optional reading from Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, chapters 1-3 (focus on pages 383-388)

M 5 Education of the Guardians
W 7 Historical Interlude: The History of Yale College Admissions

Unit 3 on Citizenship
How can college best prepare you to participate in democratic decision-making?

Week seven: College and Democracy
- Required reading: *Republic*, Book 6 (163-192, notes on 461-465, commentary on 397-401)

M 12 College and Citizenship
W 14 The Ship of State

Week eight: Visions of Democracy
- Required Reading:
    - Abraham Lincoln, "Gettysburg Address"
    - Martin Luther King, "I Have a Dream"
    - Review Socrates' description of the ship of state at 488a-489d (pages 167-169)
    - We will also discuss Pericles' Funeral Oration in Thucydides' *The Peloponnesian War*, but you don't need to read the whole thing

M 19 Democracy, Ancient and Modern

October Recess: No class on October 21

Unit 4 on Conversation
What are the distinctive advantages of learning through conversation?

Week nine: The Nature of Knowledge
- Required reading: *Republic*, Book 7 (193-220, notes on 465-466, commentary on 401-412)
- Optional reading from John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*

- Optional reading from Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation"

M 26 Education as Conversation
W 28 Allegory of the Cave

November
Week ten: Education and Conflict
- Required reading: *Republic*, Book 8 (220-249, notes on 467-469, commentary on 412-422)
- Optional reading: Kelley, *Yale: A History*, pages 195-199, 348-356, and 395-405

M 2 Political Science: The Types of Regime
W 4 Historical Interlude: Yale during Wartime

Unit 5 on Curriculum
What must a young person learn in order to lead a responsible life?

Week eleven: The Content of Your Education
- Required reading: *Republic*, Book 9 (251-275, notes on 469-470, commentary on 422-426)
- Optional reading from Garsten et al., *Yale-NUS College: A New Community of Learning*

M 9 History of the Yale Curriculum
W 11 How to Avoid Becoming a Tyrant

Week twelve: Liberal Education
- Required reading: *Republic*, Book 10 (277-303, notes on 471-472, commentary on 426-436)
- Optional reading: Kelley, *Yale: A History*, pages 425-442
- Optional Reading from Michael Oakeshott, *The Voice of Liberal Learning*

M 16 The Best Life for Humans
W 18 Historical interlude: Yale College in the 20th Century

November Recess: No class on November 23 or 25

Unit 6 on Contexts of College Education
How does the socio-economic context of American society affect the purposes of college education?

Week thirteen: Economic Factors in a Yale Education
- Required reading: Yale College Class Profiles
- Optional readings:
    - Grey Gordon and Aaron Hedlund, "Accounting for the Rise in College Tuition."
    - Douglas Webber, "Are College Costs Worth It?" (if you have taken Economics)

M 30 Does College Control Access to the Middle Class?

December

W 2 Why Does College Cost So Much and is It Worth the Cost?

Week fourteen: Conclusion

- No reading required.

M 7 Does a Liberal Education Prepare you for a Career?

W 9 Purposes of a Yale College Education