Why do we learn? Many people would answer that we do so in order to achieve certain practical goals. In order to become a physician, I go to medical school; I practice reading maps in order to avoid getting lost on the road. In these and similar examples, if I did not care about the goals there would be little reason to invest in these educations.

Could there be a kind of learning, however, that is necessary for us because it is rooted in our very nature? After all, regardless of whether or not one wants to be a doctor or confident traveler, one is a human being. Suppose it were the case that to be human is also to be a learning being. Would it not follow that to live a human life is to pursue a certain education, call it a liberal education, as a way of life?

This course aims to examine this potential tie between our humanity and liberal education. Specifically, I propose that we explore how the latter two may emerge together from the experience of a particular predicament: that of having to search for something important enough to commit our lives to. Liberal education would be a way we recover from skeptical doubt that there is any such thing; overcoming this doubt with the help of others would encourage us also to recognize our common humanity.

In this exploration, we will study some classic texts in the Western tradition. The power of these texts to enter into conversation with each other will hopefully stimulate our own conversations. In addition, the class will present students with regular opportunities to articulate in writing critical reactions to these texts. Out of such departures may grow your own adventures in learning.

Required Reading and Viewing:


Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*, translated by Robert Fagles.


Augustine, *Confessions*, translated by Henry Chadwick.


René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, translated by Donald A. Cress.

William Wordsworth, “Expostulation and Reply,” “The Tables Turned,” “Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey,” “Resolution and Independence,” and “Ode (‘There was a time”).”


**Course Requirements:**

You are expected to attend all class meetings and to complete the reading and viewing assignments for each session. There will be midterm and final exams on these assignments. In addition, you will be responsible for writing five 2-3 page response papers on this material. Your course grade will be based on an evaluation that will be weighed roughly as follows: 20% on class participation in the discussion sessions, 40% on the response papers, and 40% on the midterm and final exams.