

**SAMPLE SYLLABUS: The Value of Education**  
**Third- or fourth-year undergraduate course**

This is a third- or fourth-year course that I would like to teach. The course is designed to meet both content and skill objectives. The content objectives are (a) to familiarize students with a range of arguments one might use to justify the importance and value of education and to (b) introduce students to some key distinctions in value theory. The skill objective is to equip students to engage in fruitful, independent exploration of the central topics of the course. The overarching aim of the course is to show students how philosophical concepts and styles of argument can be applied to real-world questions.

Because 60% of the course assessment depends on essay grades, I have assigned two low-stakes reading responses early in the semester. These assignments target individual elements of philosophical essays (e.g. summary, supporting reasons, and objections) and are intended to familiarize students with the building blocks of philosophical writing before they embark on full-length projects. I have also included two essay workshop sessions prior to the final essay deadline, to provide students with the opportunity to get structured feedback on their paper plans.

# The Value of Education

## Course Description

Many of us spend years in school systems getting “an education.” Some of us go on to devote more years to college or university getting “a liberal education.” But what is all this education good for? What (if anything) makes it worth devoting years of our lives to? One common view is that having a good education is valuable because it enables one to achieve certain kinds of success: getting a good job, for example, or navigating the complexities of the modern world. Another view is that having a good education—or being well-educated—is valuable because it makes us better citizens and so contributes to thriving democracies. Yet another view is that being well-educated is valuable because just knowing specific subjects (e.g. art and philosophy) and being able to think in certain ways (e.g., critically) enriches one’s life. In this course, we will explore and evaluate a variety of arguments (from both contemporary and historical sources) for the value of education.

We’ll begin by distinguishing between a vocational education and a liberal education (Weeks 1 and 2). Following that, we’ll consider several kinds of arguments for the instrumental value of education: some appealing to the material success education affords, others appealing to the contributions education (especially liberal education) can make to promoting democracies and democratic citizens (Weeks 3-8). In the final unit of the course (Weeks 9-13), we will take a look at non-instrumental arguments for education. We’ll pay special attention to the features of education that might give it non-instrumental value (e.g. its content or the kind of thinking it develops in us).

## Required Texts

Course readings will be made available on the course website.

## Course Goals and Objectives

This course is intended for third- or fourth-year undergraduates. Some familiarity with philosophical concepts and methodology will be presupposed. The course is designed to

- foster critical engagement with a range of contemporary and historical arguments for the value of education;
- familiarize you with distinctions in the theory of value (e.g. intrinsic vs. extrinsic and instrumental vs. final value);
- increase competencies in reading and writing philosophical texts;
- hone the skills necessary for engaging in productive philosophical discussion.

## Course Requirements and Grading

We will work towards the course goals through the achievement of some more modest aims: namely, the completion of reading and writing assignments and participation in in-class exercises, presentations, and discussion.

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>% of Final Grade</b>
Reading responses (1/2-1 page each, due weeks 2 and 3)	2x10%
Midterm essay (5-7 pages, due week 6)	25%
Final essay (8-10 pages, due week 13)	35%
Participation (including attendance, discussion, and essay workshops)	20%

Please note:

- Reading responses: In the first third of the course, you will be responsible for writing two short response papers. Each paper will focus on developing a philosophical skill or writing technique that you can use when you write your longer essays or when you are participating in class discussions.
- Essays: In the second and third parts of the course, you will write a midterm essay and a final essay. In these assignments, you'll use the skills and techniques you acquired through writing your response papers to develop more sustained arguments. Essay topics and more detailed instructions will be circulated before the essay deadline, but you may also choose to write on your own topic (provided you discuss this with me in advance). In Weeks 11 and 12, we will have group presentations of final essays (students will each talk through the central ideas and arguments in their essays and receive feedback from the whole class).
- Participation: 20% of your final grade is based on participation. In order to participate, you must attend. Throughout the semester, we will be developing strategies for productive participation in philosophy courses and seminars, and I will provide you with feedback on how you are doing. In general, however, good participation involves consistently making contributions to the discussion that show evidence of genuine engagement with the topic and with what one's interlocutors are saying about it; it involves raising questions about the material, posing objections, or offering arguments that help the group think more clearly and carefully about the topic; and it also involves participating in any in-class activities (such as writing exercises, presentations, or peer reviews).

## Course Policies

[Deleted for brevity.]

## Tentative Schedule of Topics and Readings

(for a 13-week seminar meeting once per week)

<u>Dates</u>	<u>Topics</u>	<u>Readings</u>
<b>Week 1</b>	Introduction Vocational vs. liberal education (I)	Aristotle, selections from <i>Politics</i> , Bks. 7 and 8 Rousseau, selections from <i>Emile</i> , Bk. 3
<b>Week 2</b>	Vocational vs. liberal education (II) <b>[first reading response due]</b>	Booker T. Washington vs. Du Bois (selections from Du Bois' <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> )
<b>Week 3</b>	Education and economic success <b>[second reading response due]</b>	Barrow and Rouse, "Does College Still Pay?" (op-ed) Camilleri and Camilleri, "The Economic Case for Education"
<b>Week 4</b>	Education and well-being	Sen, selections from <i>Development as Freedom</i> (chs. 2 and 12)
<b>Week 5</b>	Education and citizenship: making good citizens	Plato, selections from <i>Republic</i> (Bks. 2-4) Isocrates on education and politics ( <i>Antidosis</i> )
<b>Week 6</b>	Education and citizenship: democracy (I) <b>[midterm essay due]</b>	Dewey, selections from <i>Democracy and Education</i> Nussbaum, <i>Cultivating Humanity</i>
<b>Week 7</b>	Education and citizenship: democracy (II)	Gutmann, "Democracy and Democratic Education" Curren, selections from <i>Aristotle on the Necessity of Public Education</i>
<b>Week 8</b>	Education as liberation	Freire, selections from <i>Pedagogy of the Oppressed</i>
<b>Week 9</b>	Education and kinds of value	R.S. Peters, "Education as Initiation" Schmidt, "How to Value the Liberal Arts for Their Own Sake without Intrinsic Values"

<b>Week 10</b>	The value of curriculum	Carr, "Curriculum and the Value of Knowledge" Scheffler, "Justifying Curriculum Decisions"
<b>Week 11</b>	The value of knowledge [final essay workshops]	Plato's <i>Meno</i> Kvanvig, selections from <i>The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding</i>
<b>Week 12</b>	The value of understanding [final essay workshops]	Elgin, "Education and the Advancement of Understanding" Ryle, "Teaching and Training"
<b>Week 13</b>	The value of critical thinking [final essay due]	Lipman, "Education for Critical Thinking" Passmore, "On Teaching to be Critical"