

# Introduction to Cultures and Traditions 201

Over the last 35 years, Wabash sophomores in C&T have engaged the ideas, products, and practices—that is to say, the various traditions—of a number of different cultures and historical time-periods. In so doing, they have begun to explore some of the complex ways that people from around the world, past and present, have lived, thought, and felt about their lives. As such, C&T offers all students and many of the faculty an experience in communal learning. Among other things, the course is designed to:

- Focus on learning as inquiry, through reading, writing, and discussion.
- Ground this inquiry in original or classic works, from a wide range of cultures and traditions, which are provocative, open to multiple interpretations, and pose questions for which there is sometimes no obvious right answer.
- Encourage students to use their own intellectual skills with confidence in understanding these works.
- Build a “transdisciplinary frame of mind,” so that students feel more confident reading texts outside their majors, or in fields outside their previous intellectual comfort zone (“Hey, I can read this!”)
- Model discussion as a process of sharing insights, testing one’s own ideas against those of others in a safe environment, and learning that reasonable people can disagree and discuss their differences.
- Highlight the diversity and development over time within a single culture, the complexity of interactions between cultures, and creative and intellectual traditions within and across cultures.

The fall semester begins with an extended engagement with one major text, the *Odyssey*. This module provides an opportunity to learn how to read and discuss texts for C&T and introduces some of the issues that appear later in the semester. The remainder of the semester is divided into four modules, each of which explores some of the great works of three ancient cultures: Classical Greece, the Ancient Hebrews, and Classical China, in their cultural and historical contexts. The fourth and final module takes an in-depth look at the art of Classical Greece and China. The following pages of the Readings Book contain the syllabus for the fall semester. Please take the time to review it carefully.

Reading is obviously an essential part of C&T, since you cannot discuss something that you have not read. You must read carefully and take the time to think about what you’ve read. Many of the ideas that you’ll encounter in the readings are both subtle and complex, and they often take considerable effort to understand. Before you get started, you might want to read through the section “On Reading Well to Discuss Well” which follows the syllabus. Note that the C&T faculty have included introductions for each reading, with study questions that may help you prepare for discussion. We have also added an occasional “Supplement” to the Readings Book. These are designed to enrich your experience in C&T and will often give you additional historical context, a glimpse of the archaeological remains of an ancient culture, an introduction to an ancient language, or links to related web sites that you can explore.

Lectures also play a vital role in C&T. Usually marking the introduction of a new module, they serve to provide context for the upcoming readings. They present background information that you might not be able to find on your own, or ease you into material that you might otherwise find strange or forbidding.

We would like to thank the many people who have made special contributions to this semester’s C&T, especially Mark Brouwer, Joe Day, Leslie Day, Jeremy Hartnett, Elizabeth Morton, Peter Mikek, J.D. Phillips, and Bob Royalty. Linda Brooks ordered the books, and Judy Wynne took care of obtaining copyright permissions. Jeana Rogers has prepared the digital images on the Virtual Media Reserve. Pam Sacco and Eileen Bowen have done superb work preparing the readings in the Readings Book and keeping us on track. Marcia Caldwell and Debbie Bourff have also done a great job of taking all the separate readings and turning them into a book. To these and many more, including the more than thirty years of Wabash sophomores and Wabash faculty who preceded us, we extend our thanks.

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Co-Chairs of Cultures & Traditions