

**REL 193: LIFE WORTH LIVING, 3 CREDITS**  
**BALDWIN WALLACE UNIVERSITY, FALL 2024**  
**MWF 10:45-11:35**  
**CLASS FORMAT: FACE TO FACE, BERA CAMPUS**  
**(WITH OCCASIONAL HYBRID/REMOTE DAYS, DEPENDING ON CIRCUMSTANCES)**

Instructor: Dr. Ellen Posman

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 3:00-4:30 PM or by appt

**Note on availability:** While I will answer e-mails as promptly as we can, I cannot be available 24/7, and given the amount of e-mails I receive, there may be delays in response time. I will do my best to respond to e-mails within 24 hours during the work week and within 48 hours on weekends. I will prioritize responses based on the urgency of the subject matter.

**Note on Format:** At the time of writing this syllabus, the expectation is that class will be in person, face-to-face on all class days, and students are expected to attend in person. But recordings of classes will be made and housed on the CANVAS site to review course material or to watch in the case of a necessary absence. There are also some days when class may be held via ZOOM if the instructor is unable to come to class in person or if other circumstances demand it, so that link is provided below. **The above is the plan for the course as of the first day of class. Everything is subject to change depending on the health and well-being of everyone in the course and the guidance of BW, Cuyahoga County, Ohio, and US Public Health officials.**

**Expectations for Attendance:** Any student who is healthy and able to attend physically is expected to come to class. If a student cannot come to class, they should notify the professor by e-mail and attend at the ZOOM link above as an observer or watch a recording of class when it becomes available. For any class sessions fully on Zoom, students are expected to keep their cameras on and to keep microphones muted unless they are speaking to the class. Students are also expected to pay attention, avoid multi-tasking, and be active in the chat. These expectations are designed for optimal engagement and optimal learning. Students are also expected to attend three out-of-class informal meal sessions as we break bread, become a community, and have mini-retreats on the course topic. Students are also required to attend one in-person conference with the course instructor.

**Required Texts:**

All texts will be in the form of pdf documents and internet links provided on the CANVAS site.

**Course Description:** What is a life well lived? What do we mean when we consider ourselves “happy” or “successful” or “fulfilled” or “good people”, and how do these exist in relationship to one another? What role does suffering play in all this, and what role does spirituality play, or a relationship to God or a quest for Transcendence? How can we utilize the wisdom of those who have dedicated their lives to the pursuit of the answers to these questions as we determine our own answers? This course draws on philosophical and religious voices, texts, and traditions to provide a variety of answers to the questions of what it means to live a flourishing life in terms of happiness, success, purpose, pleasure, justice, ethics, love, and/or transcendence as we debate and discuss the meaning of these terms and their worth in a life that inevitably ends in death. The traditions we will examine to help clarify our individual answers will include Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Greek Philosophy, Marxism, and Existentialism (maybe Utilitarianism instead of one of these?) in addition to works from African American and Indigenous traditions (and/or Feminist traditions).

This course draws on the expertise of faculty from Religious Studies, Philosophy, and History as well as insider perspectives from video clips and in-person guests from within these traditions who will share with us what it means to them to pursue a well-lived life. After giving serious consideration to the visions provided by these philosophical and religious perspectives, students will analyze our contemporary society to articulate an understanding of how our modern everyday culture construes a life well-lived and to express their own individual views.

One goal of this class is for you to be as engaged as possible. The hope is for you not only to engage the material, but to engage yourself in personal exploration, to engage your classmates in discussions of meaning and purpose, and to consider finding ways to use that knowledge and those experiences to engage with your communities and the world. It does not matter what religion you are, or whether or not you are religious at all. What does matter is that you actively participate in the analytical and personal work of the course.

### **Course Goals and Objectives:**

As a core course in the area of Meaning and Purpose, Philosophical and Religious Traditions, or Logical Reasoning (depending on your catalog year), this course supports the mission of Baldwin Wallace University as well as the overall goals of the Core Curriculum or Advantage Curriculum. Baldwin Wallace University is committed to a “rigorous academic program that is characterized by excellence in teaching and learning within a challenging, supportive environment that enhances students’ intellectual and spiritual growth.” To this end, this course has the following objectives:

1. Increase the breadth of student knowledge by providing basic familiarity with some of the texts and voices from the major philosophical and religious traditions of the world.
2. Establish critical thinking and writing skills by composing reflections and essays that integrate and analyze textual evidence, first-hand accounts, social observations, and personal reflections.
3. Encourage students toward personal, intellectual, and spiritual growth by considering positions about a “life well-lived” in relation to their own views.
4. Challenge students to read complex primary and secondary sources, think deeply about the relationship between various philosophical and religious positions on a meaningful and ethical life, and utilize critical thinking and oral and written communication skills to express positions on these issues.

### **University Learning Outcomes:**

**For Seniors: REL 193 is a Meaning and Purpose Course** within the Core Curriculum.

**For Sophomores & Juniors: REL 193 is a Philosophical and Religious Traditions** course within the Core Curriculum.

**For Freshmen: REL 193 is a Formal Logic course using material from Philosophical, Ethical, and Religious Traditions** within the Advantage Curriculum

There are two learning outcomes associated with this course.

1. **Effective Communication**
2. **Critical Thinking**

### **A Note on the Life Worth Living Model: Principles for Teaching Life Worth Living**

Since the goal of a life worth living course is to facilitate both descriptive and normative study, the following principles will guide our inquiries:

1. Students and teachers are willing to increase their historical knowledge
2. All are open to fostering critical self-awareness
3. The community encourages intellectual generosity by modelling it themselves
4. Engagements with one another promote fluency with and capacity for truth-seeking conversations that value pluralism

### **How You Can Help Achieve These Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes:**

- 1) Come to class
- 2) Come to class prepared (do **all** the reading!).
- 3) Come ready to participate, preferably with questions.
- 4) Participate thoughtfully.
- 5) Come to office hours.
- 6) Write rough drafts.
- 7) Ask questions (about the material, about the assignments, about anything!).
- 8) Turn in assignments on time.
- 9) Read the newspaper.

### **How I Will Help You Achieve These Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes:**

- 1) I will come to class prepared.
- 2) I will assign manageable but challenging readings.
- 3) I will explain the material using diverse methods.
- 4) I will be available to answer questions or help you find answers.
- 5) I will look over drafts.
- 6) I will return graded assignments promptly with thorough explanations of grades.
- 7) I will stimulate your curiosity by displaying my own passion for the material.
- 8) I will stay current on the issues by reading the newspaper.

### **BW Resources To Help You Achieve These Goals:**

**The Center for Academic Student Achievement (CASA), Student Resource Center, and Counseling Center are all available to support students. Please see the CANVAS module on academic resources for more information.**

**Course Requirements:** Final course grades will be based on the following requirements:

20%: Written online comments on the readings: **These will be due to the class discussion board by 11:59 PM the night before each class period.**

20% Attendance and Participation: **These will be based on self-assessments at the midpoint and endpoint of the course and are subject to revision by the instructor**

30% Six Periodic two-page critical reflections (5% Each): These are due at **11:59 PM on Canvas on September 6<sup>th</sup>, September 30<sup>th</sup>, October 18<sup>th</sup>, November 1<sup>st</sup>, November 22<sup>nd</sup>, and December 2<sup>nd</sup>.**

20% Final Essay: This is due by **5:00 PM on Canvas on Friday, December 13<sup>th</sup>.**

10%: Five-minute oral summary presentation of your final essay and thoughts to the class. These will be presented during the **during the slated final exam time on Friday, December 13<sup>th</sup> from 8:00 AM to 11:00 AM.**

### **Course Policies:**

**Extra Credit Policy:** Various on-campus events will be encouraged as they arise. To receive credit, you need to attend the event and e-mail a reflection to the instructor with the subject heading "EXTRA CREDIT." Your reflection must detail what you learned, and how attendance at this event confirmed, challenged, and/or supplemented material from class. Each extra credit assignment will result in one point added to your final grade. A maximum of 5 are allowed.

**Late Policy:** Papers go down one-third of a grade (e.g. B to B-) per day late. During the Covid-19 pandemic due to the increased levels of anxiety, any student may request a 24-hour extension for any reason.

**Paper Grading Policy:** A is Excellent; B is Good; C is Fair; D is barely satisfactory; F is unsatisfactory. Further guidelines will be handed out at a later date.

**Grading Scale:** A+: 98 or more; A: 93-98; A-: 90-92; B+: 88-89; B: 83-87; B-: 80-82; C+: 78-79; C: 73-77; C-: 70-72; D+ 68-69; D: 63-67; D-: 60-62; F: 59 or lower.

**BW Policies:** University-Wide policies exist for Academic Integrity, Accessible Education, Concussion Management, Crisis/Emergency Notification, Discrimination and Sexual Misconduct Reporting, Religious Accommodations, Dropping a Course, Technology Requirements, and Withdrawing from a Course. Be sure to familiarize yourself with these policies via the CANVAS module on academic policies.

## Tentative Course Schedule/Calendar (Dates and Content are Subject to Change):

### WEEK ONE: INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS INVOLVED IN A LIFE WORTH LIVING?

- Mon. August 26: Introduction to course, materials, syllabus, and themes of the course  
What does it mean to live a “life worth living”?
- Wed. August 28: Becoming a Community  
Getting to know one another via individual interests  
Bringing in artifacts that implicitly advocate for aspects of lives worth living  
\*Assignment: Choose a poem, text, song, artwork, role model, etc. that guides you in your life.
- Fri. August 30: Analyzing Arguments: How to think logically about perspectives on a Life Worth Living  
\*Reading: Vaughn (PDF)

### WEEK TWO: UNIT ONE: Considering Voices and Traditions

- Mon. Sept. 2: **LABOR DAY! NO CLASS!**
- Wed. Sept. 4: Analyzing Arguments, Part 2: Identifying fallacies and other issues in arguments  
\*Reading: Vaughn, Part II (PDF)
- Fri. Sept. 6: What is a “Tradition”, and how do Voices and Perspectives relate to Traditions?  
A Community of Perspectives and Traditions: Whose Voices do I Listen to?  
Readings: Smart (PDF); W.C. Smith (PDF)  
Bringing in Artifacts of our own Traditions, Perspectives, Teachers, and Mentors  
In-Class Writing Exercise  
\*\*\*Friday, September 6<sup>th</sup>: Critical Reflection #1 Due on Canvas by 11:59 PM\*\*\*

### WEEK THREE: Perspectives and Voices from Judaism

- Mon. Sept. 9: Judaism: Traditional Jewish Scriptures and Sources  
Reading: Excerpts from the Tanakh and from the Talmud; Fonrobert (PDF)
- Wed. Sept. 11: Judaism: Modern Jewish Perspectives and Voices: Heschel’s The Sabbath  
Heschel (PDF)
- Fri. Sept. 13: Discussion: What answers do Jewish voices provide to the questions of a Life Worth Living? Are they logically sound? Do they resonate with you? Why or why not? Guest: Rabbi Enid Lader  
Watch: The Third Opinion: Why Jews Value Dissent:  
<https://centralsynagogue.org/worship/sermons/the-third-opinion-why-jews-value-dissent>  
Repairing the World: Is Tikkun Olam Jewish? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P1S4IRwHIIQ>  
Other Reading/Research/Perspectives: Crowdsourced by Class

### WEEK FOUR: Perspectives and Voices from Christianity

- Mon. Sept. 16: Christianity: Traditional Christian Scriptures and Sources  
Reading: Excerpts from the New Testament (PDF)
- Wed. Sept. 18: Christianity: Modern Christian Perspectives and Voices: Process Theology  
Reading: McDaniel (PDF)
- Fri. Sept. 20: Discussion: What answers do Christian voices provide to the questions of a Life Worth Living? Are they logically sound? How do these compare or contrast with Jewish perspectives? Which of these resonates or doesn’t with you?  
Video: Cole Arthur Riley: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P1S4IRwHIIQ>  
Other Reading/Research/Perspectives: Crowdsourced by Class

### WEEK FIVE: Perspectives and Voices from Islam

- Mon. Sept. 23: Islam: Traditional Islamic Scriptures and Sources  
Reading: Excerpts from the Qur’an and selected Hadith (PDF);
- Wed. Sept. 25: Islam: Classical Muslim Perspectives and Voices  
al-Ghazali’s *Deliverance from Error*: <https://ghazali.org/books/md/gz101.htm>  
Rumi, “Like This”: [https://www.rumi.org.uk/love\\_poems/#IfAnyoneAsksYou](https://www.rumi.org.uk/love_poems/#IfAnyoneAsksYou)  
Optional: al-Farabi (PDF)
- Fri. Sept. 27: Islam: Modern perspectives and Voices: Discussion: What answers do Muslim voices provide to the questions of a Life Worth Living? Are they logically sound? How do these compare or contrast with Jewish or Christian perspectives? Which of these resonates or doesn’t with you? Guest: Masroor Malik  
Reading: Tarsin (PDF);  
Other Reading/Research/Perspectives: Crowdsourced by Class

## WEEK SIX: Review of Unit 1; Perspectives and Voices from Hinduism

Mon. Sept. 30: Review of Abrahamic Religions

Discussion and In-Class Writing Exercise

\*No Reading Today; Post Essay Ideas on Class Discussion Board

\*\*\***Monday, Sept. 30<sup>th</sup>: Critical Reflection #2 is Due on Canvas by 11:59 PM**\*\*\*

Wed. Oct. 2: Hinduism: Traditional Hindu Scriptures and Sources and Modern Interpretations

\*Reading: Katha Upanishad (PDF); Modern Sanyasin (PDF)

Fri. Oct. 4: Hinduism: Modern Hindu Perspectives and Voices

\*Reading: Gandhi (PDF); Orwell (PDF)

Discussion: What answers do Hindu voices provide to the questions of a Life Worth Living? Are they logically sound? How do these compare or contrast with ideas from the previous unit? Which of these resonates or doesn't with you?

## WEEK SEVEN: Perspectives and Voices from Buddhism

Mon. Oct. 7: Buddhism: Traditional Buddhist Scriptures and Sources

\*Reading: Excerpts from Buddhist Sutras (PDF)

Wed. Oct. 9: Buddhism: Modern perspectives and voices

\*Reading: Thich Nhat Hanh (PDF)

Fri. Oct. 11: Discussion: What answers do Buddhist voices provide to the questions of a Life Worth Living? Are they logically sound? How do these compare or contrast with others we have seen or heard? Which of these resonates or doesn't with you?

\*Reading/Watching: Batchelor (PDF) or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EF87sRH4NWM>

Other Reading/Research/Perspectives: Crowdsourced by Class; **NOTE: CLASS IS ON ZOOM TODAY!**

## WEEK EIGHT: Perspectives and Voices from Confucianism

Mon. Oct. 14: Confucianism: An Introduction

\*Reading: Ames (PDF)

Wed. Oct. 16: Confucianism: Traditional Sources

\*Reading: Excerpts from the Analects (PDF)

Fri. Oct. 18: Confucianism and Neoconfucianism: Medieval and Modern Voices

\*Watch: Lecture by Tu Wei Ming: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ya-jsyg6c\\_I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ya-jsyg6c_I)

\*Reading: Wang Yangming (PDF)

Other Reading/Research/Perspectives: Crowdsourced by class

## WEEK NINE: Perspectives and Voices from Classical Greek Philosophy

Mon. Oct. 21: **NO CLASS!!! HAPPY FALL BREAK!!!**

Wed. Oct. 23: Discussion: What answers do Confucian voices provide to the questions of a Life Worth Living? Are they logically sound? How do these compare or contrast with others we have seen or heard? Which of these resonates or doesn't with you?

In-Class Writing Exercise

\*\*\***Wednesday, Oct. 23<sup>rd</sup>: Critical Reflection #3 is Due on Canvas by 11:59 PM**\*\*\*

Fri. Oct. 25: Ancient Greek Texts and Perspectives: Epicureanism

\*Reading: Epicurus (PDF)

## WEEK TEN: Perspectives and Voices from Classical Greek Philosophy, Continued

Mon. Oct. 28: Ancient Greek Texts and Perspectives: Aristotle

\*Reading: Aristotle (PDF)

Wed. Oct. 30: Ancient Greek Texts and Perspectives: Stoicism

\*Reading: Excerpts from Epictetus, Laertius, Cicero, Marcus Aurelius (PDF)

Fri. Nov. 1: Discussion: What answers do these philosophical voices provide to the questions of a Life Worth Living? Are they logically sound? How do these compare or contrast with others we have seen? Which of these resonates or doesn't with you?

Other Reading/Research/Perspectives: Crowdsourced by Class

In-Class Writing Exercise

\*\*\***Friday, Nov. 1<sup>st</sup>: Critical Reflection #4 Due on CANVAS by 11:59 PM**\*\*\*

## WEEK ELEVEN: Perspectives and Voices from Indigenous Thought

Mon. Nov. 4: Indigenous Traditions: Traditional Teachings

\*Reading: Excerpts from Traditional Indigenous Stories and Teachings (PDF)

Wed. Nov. 6: Indigenous Traditions: Modern Voices and Perspectives

\*Reading: Kimmerer (PDF)

Fri. Nov. 8: Discussion: What answers do these voices provide to the questions of a Life Worth Living? Are they logically sound? How do these compare or contrast with others we have seen or heard? Which of these resonates or doesn't with you?

\*Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrIO1ZXmBK0>

\*Readings: Acosta (PDF)

Other Reading/Research/Perspectives: Crowdsourced by Class

## WEEK TWELVE: Perspectives and Voices from Feminist and Queer Thought

Mon. Nov. 11: Feminism and Feminist Theology

\*Readings: de Beauvoir (PDF); Saiving (PDF); Harrison (PDF); hooks (PDF)

Wed. Nov. 13: Queer Perspectives

\*Readings: Excerpts from Second Person Queer (PDF);

Watch: Yoshino on Covering: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NyxJQTKMF\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NyxJQTKMF_Q)

Fri. Nov. 15: Queer Theory and Queer Theology

\*Readings: Cheng: (PDF); Love (PDF)

Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGFj96WRBjg>

Other Readings/Research/Perspectives: Crowdsourced by Class

## WEEK THIRTEEN: Perspectives and Voices from African American Thought

Mon. Nov. 18: African American Thought: Classical Sources

\*Readings: DuBois (PDF)

Wed. Nov. 20: African American Thought: Contemporary Voices

\*Readings: Walker (PDF)

Fri. Nov. 22: African American Thought: Contemporary Voices

\*Readings: Martin Luther King Jr. (PDF)

Other Reading/Research/Perspectives: Crowdsourced by Class

## WEEK FOURTEEN: Everyday Messages

Mon. Nov. 25: Discussion: What answers do these voices provide to the questions of a Life Worth Living? How do these compare or contrast with others we have seen or heard? Which of these resonates or doesn't with you?

In-Class Writing Exercise

\*\*\*Monday, Nov. 25<sup>th</sup>: Critical Reflection #5 Due on CANVAS by 11:59 PM\*\*\*

Wed. Nov. 27: No Class! Thanksgiving! (Observe messages received)

Fri. Nov. 29: No Class! Thanksgiving! (Observe messages received)

## WEEK FIFTEEN: GROUP WORK

Mon. Dec. 2: Analyzing Our Daily Lives: Paying Attention

\*No Reading: Bring in Observations

Wed. Dec. 4: Discussing Messages in Daily Life; In-class Writing Exercise

Fri. Dec. 6: Concluding Discussion: Writing Workshop: Final Essay.

\*\*\*Friday, Dec. 6<sup>th</sup>: Critical Reflection #6 is Due on Canvas by 11:59 PM\*\*\*

FINAL EXAM TIME SLOT: FRIDAY, DEC. 13<sup>TH</sup>: 8:00 AM-11:00 AM

\*\*\*INDIVIDUAL PRESENTATIONS AND CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

\*\*\*FINAL ESSAYS DUE BY 11:59 PM ON CANVAS!!!