

IDSVA SYLLABUS

Seminar 902: Dissertation Seminar: Reading for Research

Course Number:	902
Course Name:	<i>Reading for Research</i>
Dates:	Sept 1- Dec 17, 2025
Format:	Online
Instructors:	Professors Howard Caygill and Silvia Mazzini
TA:	Nandita Baxi Sheth
Credits:	4

Course Description

Dissertation Seminar 902 continues the conversation begun at the Dissertation Online Residency, in which we systematically learned how to choose the topic and to formulate the question at the core of a successful dissertation. In this seminar, we will start writing the introduction, which will be completed, together with all other parts of the Written Exam, during the Spring semester.

Logistically, we will proceed along two interconnected tracks. One, we will work on close reading techniques and methodologies, applied in two fundamental texts for artist philosophers: Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* and Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*. Two, students will develop independent research on their dissertation topics, working on the bibliography and selecting five fundamental texts, from which they will extract and comment on relevant quotes and passages to support their arguments. (Note that you will add five more texts next semester for a total of ten eventually)

While discussing these developments during individual calls with the professors and interactive forums with their peers, students will also start working on parts 1, 2, and 4 (Thesis, Concept, Methodologies) of the dissertation template, which will constitute a solid starting point for Dissertation Seminar II in the spring.

Learning Objectives

- To prepare students for the process of initiating a long-term, large-scale research project.
- To improve and refine close reading techniques and contextualization practices and methodologies.
- To help students gain an understanding of different philosophical perspectives and how they interact with one another.
- To help students realize how to implement these insights in their own philosophical orientations, which are exemplified in their dissertation projects.
- To sharpen the methodologies students learned in the previous years and understand how to use a combination of them in their own projects.

Course Requirements

Open Class Forum. In designated OCF weeks, there will be a formal and collaborative discussion of readings. OCF is a focused conversation with the readings and one another (not a social-media forum).

- During these weeks, the TA will post on OCF up to three intertextual questions based on the assigned readings. These questions will be posted as one post no later than Monday at 12 am Eastern Time.
- Replies to questions should be thoughtful and succinct (under 200 words) in order to keep the conversation lively and to the point.
- Replies should (i) address at least one of the questions, and (ii) engage productively with other student comments.
- You are welcome to reply to more than one question, but please post the replies separately.
- Every student is required to answer a question in OCF in designated weeks. Replies must be posted by **Sunday** at midnight at the latest, but you are strongly encouraged to post replies sooner, to enable more fruitful discussion.
- There will also be optional discussions in Canvas every week.
- In addition to serving our immediate learning and engagement with the material, Open Class Forum discussions should also lay the groundwork for the seminar essay questions. The Cohort OCF discussion is archived and, if you have a good solid OCF trail, oral exam prep is very doable. Without that, orals prep can be very difficult.

Videoconferences (VC).

Students are required to *participate* in video conference seminar discussions, so please come to class having completed the readings for that week. The critical approach will be grounded in close reading and intertextual analysis, with the primary focus being on the given week's assigned reading. You should factor in 2 hours per video conference (plus some buffer time at the beginning and end) and make every effort to be present via webcam and audio.

VC Etiquette:

- Students are expected to participate via webcam. Being on **video** enhances the interactive character of the VC, increases the level of attention of the students, and helps the instructor engage more actively in their communicative skills. Any exemption should be discussed with the professor in charge before the class takes place and will be considered on a case-by-case basis. For example, if you are traveling or experiencing connection problems, ask the professor for permission not to use the webcam or to participate via phone.
- This is a safe space: whatever is discussed in the course cannot be distributed or shared outside of it.
- Please use the **chat function** only if you encounter technical problems or to post information and links that are relevant to the discussion. Avoiding parallel conversations helps develop a shared conversation with all students and the professor.

Attendance policy: students are expected to attend *every* class. Video recordings are available as a make-up resource for missed classes, but they should not be considered equivalent to attending the class in person. More than two missed Videoconferences will lower the final grade of 0.25 points per missed meeting. Please inform the TA and the professor in advance if you cannot attend the VC.

Individual Calls or Small Group Calls (IC or SGC).

Each student will engage in phone/Google/Zoom discussion with Prof. Caygill and Prof. Mazzini. The Calls will be scheduled approximately a week in advance, and they will last approximately 30 minutes. Students should come to the calls prepared to discuss the readings or ideas for that week and with a couple of questions about the reading to be discussed with the professor.

Attendance policy:

If you need to reschedule your IC, please notify the professor in advance. Please reschedule only for urgent reasons, and possibly within the designated IC week.

More than two missed VC will lower the final grade of 0.25 points per missed meeting. Please inform the TA and the professor in advance if you cannot attend the VC. You will not receive a reminder so, we strongly suggest you add the scheduled IC into your calendar: in order not to miss it.

Writing Assignment (WA)

At the end of the semester, students shall upload (all in one document):

1. **Overview** (1-3 pp.), including: 1) topic, 2) thesis statement, 3) main points in support of argument; 4) methodological approach (with specific references to key texts). This can be based on a further development of the “scaffolding.”
 2. **First pages of the written exam** (approximately 12 pp.), consisting of an Introduction to your proposed dissertation project (see Umberto Eco, *How to Write a Thesis*, Chapter 4: “The Work Plan and the Index Cards,” especially pp. 107-115 for a good explanation of what the Introduction is supposed to do at this stage). Please use the “Introduction Template” to structure your written exam and fill out the sections.
 3. **Bibliography** (work in progress) intended to act as a roadmap for ongoing dissertation research. Five fundamental titles will be annotated this semester. (Five more next semester for a total of 10) Books and essays from the course of study should be part of your bibliography; in fact, you should make sure that roughly half the texts in your list come from the core seminars list. You will read and annotate the remaining titles in your bibliography in the spring semester.
- Please use a Times New Roman font, point 12, double-spaced, leaving a 1” margin all around. No other fonts or formats are acceptable. Make sure all your documents are editable: files should have a word **.doc or .docx** extension – no .pdf or .pages will be accepted. Clearly mark your name, seminar and assignment on the front page of your document, and number your pages. Each assignment should also include the names of at least two students with whom you have worked on the question.

- Please use MLA style in your papers. Please also review the *IDSVA Writing Guide* (available in Canvas), especially Section VIII, for some tips on discussion style, writing style and mechanics. Submitted documents should be uploaded through Assignments in Canvas, and the file named according to the following format:
family name, givenname_704_assignment #_yymmdd
(e.g., “Jones, Sally_704_assignment 1_180211”).
- Students are required to familiarize themselves with the Rubric for Long Papers Evaluation (available in Canvas), which will be used as a meter to assess final papers.
- The papers will be graded no later than two weeks after the deadline.

Assessment and Grading

The course grade will be based on the following:

- the average grade of your writing assignments (50%; all must be completed)
- the grade for your collaboration work on OCF (10%)
- the grade for your contributions to Videoconference seminars (20%)
- and the grade for your Individual Phone Call discussions (20%).

Extensions are granted on a case-by-case basis in response to special circumstances. For extensions exceeding two weeks after the due date at the end of the semester, students should request an Incomplete (see Student Handbook).

Required Texts

Acquire the correct editions (listed below), confirming that the publisher, translator, and year are the same. If you intend to use an electronic version please make sure it is the correct edition. The available ISBN #s for the books are listed; this is another way you can search (although it is not always an exact science).

- **Heidegger, Martin.** *Being and Time*. Transl. by J. Stambaugh, revised ed. by D. J. Schmidt. State University New York Press, 2010. (ISBN: 978-1-4384-3276-2)
- **Arendt, Hannah.** *The Human Condition*. 2nd edition. University of Chicago Press 2018. (ISBN-13: 978-0-226-58660-1)
- **Eco, Umberto.** *How to Write a Thesis*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015. (ISBN-10: 0262527138).
<https://mitpress.mit.edu/9780262527132/how-to-write-a-thesis/>