

# DOSTOEVSKY

Fall 2012  
Tuesdays 7-9:50 PM

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Dostoevsky subway station in Moscow (opened in 2010) / photo by Sergei Sotnikov, NPR.

An examination of Feodor Dostoevsky's major works, with a view to showing how the problems they contain (social, psychological, political, religious) are inseparable not only from his time but from the distinctive novelistic form he created. Readings include *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoyevsky's two famous novels about murder, among other titles in addition to relevant theoretical and contextual texts, such as the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. All readings in English.

Books to purchase:

- Feodor Dostoevsky, Poor Folk
- . Notes from the Underground
- . Crime and Punishment
- . Demons
- . The Brothers Karamazov

Additional readings:

Though our attention will be mostly focused on the reading of Dostoevsky's novels, there will be occasional additional readings. These will be posted on the course website.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- 1) **Attendance is mandatory** – this is a seminar-style course and active participation is crucial to its success. Please inform me *in advance* about any family or medical emergency that might prevent you from attending the class.
- 2) **Short papers** (55% or 5x11%) – you will write five brief papers (2 pages) that should focus on each of the texts we are studying in this course. These papers should focus on some theme, common bond, or discrepancy in the texts we are reading; these papers should contain arguments and offer close readings of one or two examples from the text. The length is fixed: the purpose of this exercise is to practice your skills at expressing your ideas and arguments succinctly (this is one of the most useful writing skills that will serve you well in life beyond college). You don't need to use any outside sources in these papers: just you and the texts.
- 3) **Final paper** (20%) – the final paper (8-10 pages) is a space for you to synthesize different ideas from the course, offering your own analysis of the texts we've studied. Your experience in writing five short papers during the semester as well as the feedback on those papers, will prepare you for this assignment. We will discuss this assignment closer to the end of the course.
- 4) 20% - **Class participation (including blog entries and responses)**. Active participation is an essential part of any seminar – contributions by members of the class enhance the acquisition and digestion of knowledge by the entire group. This relies on individual participation and each individual's motivation to further their own and their peers' knowledge. But the quality and thoughtfulness of individual contributions also makes the entire community function. So, the class participation grade will be assessed in two ways: **a) Your individual contributions to discussions in class** – the usual way in which professors assess individual participation based on how active, thoughtful, and receptive to other ideas you are in class. It goes without saying that you should complete all the reading assignments and jot down questions about certain passages / mark certain passages that you'd like to discuss; **b) Class blog** (on Moodle). Each week one student (see sign-up sheet) will initiate a blog entry about the material we're discussing in any given week and prepare a short (5 minutes) introduction to the material we are discussing in class. Blog entries should be initiated no later than 4 PM on the day prior to class and all students must comment on the blog, with all blog entries completed by 4 PM on the day of the class.

## GRADING POLICY:

**A** = Excellent work - shows detailed in-depth knowledge of the material and an ability to think critically about it.

**B** = Good work - shows basic mastery of the material but has minor weak spots in knowledge or critical analysis.

**C** = Satisfactory work - shows fundamental grasp of material but with major omissions or misunderstandings.

**D** = Not satisfactory work - minimal understanding, barely passing

**F** = Unacceptable work - does not show sufficient knowledge of the material to allow me to certify that the student has understood the material and basic issues at stake.

## PRIVACY STATEMENT:

Moodle contains student information that is protected by the Family Educational Right to Privacy Act (FERPA). Disclosure to unauthorized parties violated federal privacy laws. Courses using Moodle will make student information visible to other students in this class. Please remember that the information is protected by these federal privacy laws and must not be shared with anyone outside class. Questions can be referred to the Registrar's Office.

## DISABILITY STATEMENT:

In compliance with Lafayette College policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that you may require as a student with a disability. Requests for academic accommodation need to be made during the first two weeks of the semester, except for unusual circumstances, so arrangements can be made. Students must register with the Office of the Dean of the College for disability verification and for determination of reasonable academic accommodations.

## ACADEMIC HONESTY:

Appended below are the College's "Principles of Intellectual Honesty." Please be familiar with them. Students who violate these principles can expect to receive an F for the course and to be referred to the Dean of the College for possible further sanctions.

*Principles of Intellectual Honesty* To maintain the intellectual and scholarly standards of the College and, equally important, the personal ethical standards of our students, it is essential that written assignments be a student's own work, just as is expected in examinations and class participation. The following generally recognized principles are designed to guide students in writing essays, papers, and reports, and to forestall acts of plagiarism, misrepresentation, and collusion, and the consequent disciplinary action.

*Use of other persons' writings:* The appropriation of the ideas or phrases of others, without proper acknowledgment, is plagiarism. This is an act of academic dishonesty.

*Use of reference material:* A student must often read extensively before being in a position to do any writing. A student may find passages in books, articles, and computerized sources such as websites that will be helpful in illustrating ideas. There is no objection to quoting such passages, provided the material is put within quotation marks and the source is indicated by footnotes or other means of showing authorship. If a paper or essay consists largely of quotations, normally it will not be regarded as an original piece of work. Paraphrasing, the appropriation of ideas with changed wording, is a form of plagiarism unless the source paraphrased is cited.

*Use of other students' work:* Submission of another student's work as one's own, with or without revision, is dishonest and subjects one to severe disciplinary action. The use of another person's notes or rough draft of a similar subject is considered equally dishonest.

*Working together:* Occasionally two or more students will consider it desirable and proper or will be assigned to engage in a joint investigation with individual or collaborative essays or reports as the finished products. Such a procedure is acceptable only when the instructor has consented to and approved the details of the collaboration. Collaboration beyond the limits established by the instructor is academic dishonesty.

*Re-use of paper:* Submission of the same work in more than one course is a violation of the intellectual standards of the College and is considered to be academic dishonesty. A student who commits academic dishonesty is subject to a range of penalties, including suspension or expulsion. Finally, the underlying principle is one of intellectual honesty. If a person is to have self-respect and the respect of others, all work must be her/his own.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- Students will discover how great works of literature maintain their appeal across generations and geographic spaces by speaking to broadly relevant human concerns, as well as social, psychological, and political issues.
- Through close reading of a series of works by one of Russian literature's acknowledged masters in light of key critical texts they will engage with and learn to describe the recurrent literary techniques, themes, and structures around which this author builds his narratives. In particular, this course will deal with the discussion of the novel – something that Dostoevsky perfected and made his own – as a literary form.
- As a result of engagement with this particular set of texts (five major novels by Dostoevsky) students will emerge from the course prepared to engage in close, critical analysis of literary works by other authors in other world contexts; this engagement will also contribute to their development as writers and thinkers in other fields of study.
- Through regular writing assignments, students will gain mastery of the process of articulating and supporting expository arguments, building claims based on close readings of texts, and combining material from diverse texts into a synthetic essay.
- In analyzing the specific cultural and historical references present in Dostoevsky's prose, students will develop an understanding of major political and social trends during a time of modernization, social reform, and political change in 19th century Russia.

## SCHEDULE OF CLASSES:

Note: The schedule might be adjusted slightly and additional short readings may be assigned. There will be a number of optional readings recommended to interested students throughout the course.

- August 28**      **INTRODUCTION: DOSTOYEVSKY AND THE RUSSIAN LITERARY TRADITION**
- In class: Nikolai Gogol, “The Overcoat”
- Sept 4**            **AN URBAN ROMANCE: LITERATURE AND SOCIAL ISSUES**
- Dostoevsky, Poor Folk [126 pages]
  - Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics (pp. 181-211 on discourse)
- Sept 11**          **CONFRONTING MODERNITY: IDENTITY, FREEDOM, POWER**
- Dostoevsky, Notes from the Underground [127 pages]
  - Dostoevsky, “Environment” [13 pp.] and “Something about Lying” [10 pp.] from Diary of a Writer (1873)
- Sept 18**          **THE CITY AND THE NOVEL (I): CRIME**
- Dostoevsky, Crime and Punishment [Parts I-III, 270 pages]
- Sept 25**          **Yom Kippur – no class**
- Oct 2**             **THE CITY AND THE NOVEL (II): PUNISHMENT**
- Dostoevsky, Crime and Punishment [Parts IV-VI and epilogue, 270 pages]
- Oct 9**            **Fall Break – no class**
- Oct 16**           **GENERATIONAL CONFLICTS: A NOVEL OF BAD MANNERS**
- Dostoevsky, Demons [Part I, 206 pages]
- Oct 23**           **VISIONS OF A DIFFERENT SOCIETY**
- Dostoevsky, Demons [Part II, 252 pages]
  - Dostoevsky, “At Tikhon’s” (a banned chapter from Demons, 34 pages)
- Oct 30**           **TERROR, HORROR, MURDER, SUICIDE**
- Dostoevsky, Demons [Part III, 205 pages]
- Nov 6**            **“ACCIDENTAL FAMILIES”: NATURE VS. NURTURE**
- Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov [Part I, 150 pages]
- Nov 13**          **EVIL AND “GOD’S WORLD”**
- Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov [Part II, 160 pages]
- Nov 20**          **LEGAL FICTIONS: THE NOVEL IN THE COURTROOM**
- Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov [Part III, 180 pages]
- Nov 27**          **USES AND ABUSES OF NARRATIVE**
- Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov [Part IV, 240 pages]
- Dec 4**            **CONCLUSIONS: DOSTOYEVSKY AND THE PROPHETIC (FALLACY?)**
- Dostoevsky, “The Pushkin Speech” (1880)
  - Course review and the discussion of final papers

## **WRITTEN WORK DUE DATES:**

Note: All assignments must be submitted on the day indicated below, by 7 PM, by email to the instructor, unless noted otherwise. Papers #1-5 should be 2 pages in length (double spaced, 12 pt font, 1 inch margins on all sides)

**Friday, Sept. 7** – Paper #1 (on Poor Folk)

**Friday, Sept. 15** – Paper #2 (on Notes from the Underground)

**Friday, Oct. 5** – Paper #3 (on Crime and Punishment)

**Friday, Nov. 2** – Paper #4 (on Demons)

**Friday, Nov. 30** – Paper #5 (on The Brothers Karamazov)

**Friday, Dec. 14** – Final paper