

## Friendship and Islam: From Rumi to Ramy

**Dr. Peter Kitlas**

Office Hours via zoom (link on Canvas): Mon 3 - 4pm, Fri 10am - 12

### **Course Description**

What do the poet Rumi, bureaucrat Sari Mehmed Pasha, and comics author G. Willow Wilson have in common? They are all Muslim theorists of friendship. In this class we will explore the relationship between Islam and friendship across time and space. We begin with the poetry of Rumi and others to understand how Islamic mystics define friendship with God. We will then look to Islamic political theorists, past and present, to determine how friendship is deployed in international relations. Comparing Ottoman imperial handbooks and speeches from figures like Ayatollah Khomeini we will ask: how is friendship a limiting or liberating construct in international relations? We end with a focus on personal friendship(s). With an eye to anthropological theories, we will look at friendship across religious divides in Palestine, representations in graphic novels, and female kinship in historical fiction.

### **Sample Readings**

Ibn al-Muqaffa', *al-Adab al-Kabīr*

Jalal al-Din Rumi, *Mathnavi*

Shamsuddin Muhammad Hafez, *The Collected Lyrics of Hafiz of Shiraz*

Aisha al-Ba'uniyya, *The Emanations of Grace and Gathering of Union*

Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*

Ibn al-Muqaffa', *Kalila wa Dimna*

Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*

Sari Mehmet Pasha, *The Book of Counsel for Vezirs*

G. Willow Wilson, *Ms. Marvel*

Weishut, *Intercultural Friendship: The Case of a Palestinian Bedouin and a Dutch Israeli Jew*

### **Reading / Writing Assignments**

Weekly readings will range from 50-75 pages. Class time will be split between discussion of primary texts and 'practicum' sessions, where students work individually or in groups on activities such as object analyses, digital galleries, or debates. Three main assignments will include a presentation, op-ed, and capstone project of the student's choice (i.e.: research paper, podcast, graphic novel, creative essay, digital art gallery, StoryMap, etc.).

## **Textbooks / Assigned Materials**

You will not be required to purchase any materials for this course. Everything will be available through the Canvas website. You may however choose to purchase some materials for the sake of convenience, but it is not necessary that you do so.

## **Structure of the Course**

### **Narrative Description**

In this course we survey the concept of friendship as defined and engaged with by Muslim actors across the world from the 8<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. Though we will be reading and discussing primarily Muslim authors from the past, the goal of this course is to use the concept of friendship as a way to interrogate possibilities for present human connectivity. In doing so, our primary objective will be to ask: *are conceptions of friendship specific to one particular religion or culture? Or is friendship something that transcends cultural and religious boundaries?* To approach this question, the course is divided into four modules each attempting to better define the relationship between conceptions of friendship and Islam.

In the first module students gain an understanding of the complexity of friendship from an Arabic, linguistic perspective. With this foundation in hand, we then turn to the Islamic mystical tradition, *Sufism*. In reading the poetry of Rumi, Hafez, and Aisha al-Ba‘uniyya we will interrogate the role of religion and spirituality in defining the characteristics of friendship. In what ways do spiritual tenets inform our more mundane conceptions of friendship? How is this relationship structured and imagined by Islamic mystics? At the end of this module students will give a short presentation about invocations of friendship vis-à-vis a particular religious tradition.

In the second module we turn to philosophy, a standard bearer for definitions of friendship from Aristotle and Plato to Derrida. Instead of first turning to these authors, however, we will look to Muslim writers who offered their own philosophical treatises on friendship through *adab* literature and fiction. Students will explore the differences between philosophy and mysticism through texts like *Kalila wa Dimna* and *al-Adab al-Kabir*. In doing so, we will critique the relationship between religion and philosophy, ultimately turning back to the Greek tradition to determine whether or not there is a common philosophical understanding of friendship. At the end of this module students will workshop and write their own philosophical treatise of friendship either through their own voice or the voice of a historical actor of their choosing.

Building off the philosophical tradition, the third module examines Islamic political literature in the past and present. Straddling the past and present students consider how definitions and conceptions of friendship might change over time. We will read political treaties from the Ottoman and Mughal Empires as well as contemporary speeches, legal proceedings, and

constitutional language from around the globe. At the end of this module students will use their historical framework of friendship to write an op-ed that tackles a contemporary event of their choosing through an informed and nuanced historical perspective.

Finally, in the fourth module we engage with individual characterizations of friendship in the present. We will look at cross-cultural friendships in Israel and Palestine as well as different ways in which contemporary Muslim-American authors and filmmakers portray the complexities of friendship in the United States. At the end of this module students will complete their capstone project (research paper, podcast, digital art gallery) that engages with friendship from a historical and theoretical perspective, offering their own perspective on this concept's future in our global society.

### **Course Workflow**

Each week there are **lectures**, **background readings**, **foreground readings**, and a **practicum**.

**Lecture:** For many weeks there will be a lecture in the form of a short audio podcast. The point of the lectures is to briefly introduce the context of that week's readings as well as the larger stakes of the themes of that week. You can think of these as introductions to the readings if you want.

**Reading:** Each week the syllabus lists "**background**" and "**foreground**" reading. **Foreground** readings are the actual materials that will be the subject of discussion each week. Our lectures will try to cover the bare minimum you need to understand foreground reading, but in most cases some additional **background** reading will be required to help understand the foreground reading. These **background** readings may include contextual information or theories that will be applied to our analysis of the foreground readings. You should read both the background and foreground readings every week.

**Practicum:** Finally, each week there is a **practicum**. The practicum is an additional meeting each week which we use for a variety of more interactive activities, including additional discussion, short presentations, Q&A sessions to clarify course materials and assignments, targeted exercises that are designed to reinforce the themes of the week, workshops for writing and reflection on course modules, and periods of debriefing and communal progress reports. There are weeks where you will be asked to prepare something for practicum, usually a low stakes assignment that asks you to do some outside research, prepare a presentation, write down some ideas about a topic, or some combination of all of these. Two practicum meetings will be devoted to workshopping written assignments. Overall, the practicums serve as a place to practice communication and writing skills and to bring more personal topics into the course.

## **Grading and Assessment**

30% Participation

5% Practicum

15% Friendship Presentation

15% Friendship Treatise

15% Op-Ed

20% Capstone Project (Final)

### **Participation: 30%**

The vast majority of your participation in this course will be during discussion since the lectures are pre-recorded. Therefore, in terms of receiving participation credit, it is crucial that you are prepared to engage with conversation during discussion in precept and practicum. That means doing the readings prior to class, as well as other exercises which are designed to prepare you for discussion.

What does it take to receive an A in participation? Simply put, it should be clear to us in discussion that you have done the reading, or enough of the reading, to have a legitimate intellectual conversation about it. You also have to speak every week, preferably twice per discussion or more. Some of the readings are challenging and distant, others are very real and relevant to the present day. It should not be difficult to come up with something to say, even if all you have to offer is an emotional reaction to the text.

Participation is 30% of the grade because I really care about it. It's the core of the course.

### **Accords:**

In this class we will:

- Arrive on time, prepared to talk about the readings and ask questions.
- Keep an open mind throughout discussion and listen to our peers as they are speaking.
- Do our best to not judge our peers for something they say. When we disagree (which is fine!) we will take issue with the argument, not the person.
- Encourage our peers as they explore new material, think through difficult concepts, and ask questions. We can enact a form of sustained mutual collaboration.
- Be open to making new friends.

### **Practicum: 5%**

The practicum grade applies specifically to the short low-stakes assignments that accompany practicum discussions. At most these assignments will be two pages of writing designed to get you to think about that week's material, but sometimes we will ask you to present something in

practicum. The practicum will be graded along the lines of participation: effort, creativity, and engagement will be rewarded.

**Projects: (Presentation, Friendship Treatise, Op-ed (15% each) & Capstone Project (20%))  
(Total 65%)**

At the end of each module you will be asked to deliver a larger project. These vary module to module. See assignment sheets at the end of the syllabus for more details.

# Course Outline

## MODULE 1: Friendship and the Spiritual

### Week 1: What does friendship mean in Arabic?

11 January

*Foreground:*

- Ahmed, Excerpts from *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*, pp. 3-10.

*In class:* Introduction, syllabus, expectations

13 January

*Background:*

- Obiedat, "Friendship in Arabic: Its Synonyms, Etymologies, and Transformations" pp. 49-68.

**Practicum:** Friendship classification project.

### Week 2: Islamic Mysticism, Between Friendship and Love

18 January

*Background:*

- Chittick, "Friendship and Love in Islamic Spirituality" pp. 77-88.

*Foreground:*

- Rumi: #s 5, 23, 44, 65, 71, 72, 73, 85, 89, 93, 95, 108, 152, 163, 173, 174, 177, 181, 182, 190, 50.

20 January

*Foreground:*

- Hafiz: pp. 231, 235, 237, 241-42, 246, 255-56, 267-68.

- A'isha Ba'uniyya: pp. 28-29, 51, 68-69, 70-72.

- Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*, pp. 11-37.

**Practicum:** Bring in a non-Sufi poem about friendship. Be prepared to offer a short analysis of the text in a show and tell setting. What are some of the main differences and similarities in these poetic styles? Do conceptions of love and friendship play similarly intertwined roles?

### **Week 3: Being God's Friend**

25 January

*Foreground:*

- Selections from Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*, pp. 39-91, 105-106, 148-152.

27 January

*No Class*

## **MODULE 2: Friendship and Philosophy**

### **Week 4: The Ethics of Friendship**

1 February

**Due** Friendship presentations.

*Background:*

- Mahallati, "Three Dimensions of Friendship: A Qur'anic Perspective," pp. 125 – 142.

*Foreground:*

- **Qur'an Excerpts** in context. Using a website like <https://quran.com/> find the passages that Mahallati quotes in his text. The citation of **Q#:** # corresponds to the chapter (sura) and verse (aya). For instance on pg. 126 Mahallati writes "In his commentary on verse 4:175 ..." This refers to Surat an-Nisa verse 175. I want you to look into a few of these quotations and read around them. What is happening in this chapter (*sura*)? What is the overall context from which this quote is being pulled? Come prepared to talk about a few of these examples in class.

3 February

*Foreground:*

- Ibn al-Muqqafa' (Nasrullah Munshi) "The Lion and the Bull" in *Kalila wa Dimna*, pp. 3-40.

**Practicum:** Show and tell for an object (art, story, film, T.V. show, podcast, etc.) that represents contemporary philosophies of friendship. This can come from the Islamic context, but can also be connected to another religion, culture, or society (like what you presented on earlier). The main goal here is to think about the multiple meanings and lessons that these objects attempt to impart and how that reflects the ethics of friendship today.

## **Week 5: Ethics of Friendship continued**

8 February

*Foreground:*

- Ibn al-Muqaffa', "Treatment of Friends" in *al-Adab al-Kabir* pp. 69-75.
- Ahmad Abu Ali ibn Muhammad Miskawayh, *Love and Friendship*, pp. 121-154. Focus on pp. 123-129 & 139-153.
- Nasr al-Din al-Tusi, *On the virtue of friendship and the manner of intercourse with friends*, pp. 242-252.

10 February

**Practicum:** Friend reality show ... On our show tonight are Ibn Muqaffa', Miskawayh, and al-Tusi. The special panelist – who is looking for a new friend – comes from the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For this activity you will be split into four groups. The 'modern' group will devise a list of 9 questions to ask the three contestants (3 questions each). The other groups will each be assigned one of our thinkers and will have to distill their thought and prepare to respond to whatever questions might be waiting. Let's see who the best match is!

## **Week 6: Friendship across philosophical traditions**

15 February

*Foreground:*

- Siddiqui, "Virtue and Limits in the Ethics of Friendship," pp. 167-195.
- Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.
- Plato's *Lysis* (Optional).

17 February

*In Class:* Show and tell on treatise.

**18 FEB DUE** – Friendship treatise.

## **MODULE 3: Politics and Friendship**

### **Week 7: Friendship in domestic & international politics**

22 February

*Background:*

- Neumann, "Political and Diplomatic Developments" in *The Later Ottoman Empire, 1603-1839*, pp. 44-62.

- Albrect, “Formation and Development of Territorial Concepts” in *Dār al-Islām Revisited: Territoriality in Contemporary Islamic Legal Discourse on Muslims in the West*, pp. 43-63.
- Bouzenita, “The *Siyar* - An Islamic Law of Nations?” pp. 19-46 (Optional).

24 February

*Foreground:*

- Ibn al-Farra, selections from *Kitab rusul al-muluk*, pp. 58-60, 71-73, 77-91.
- Sari Mehmed Pasha, *Book of Counsel for Vizirs*, pp. 133-141.
- White, “Fetva Diplomacy: The Ottoman *Şeyülislam* as Trans-imperial Intermediary,” pp. 199-221.

## **Week 8: Politics, Gift Giving, and Friendship**

1 March

*Background:*

- Behrens-Abouseif, “Protocol and Codes of Gift Exchange” in *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate: Gifts and Material Culture in the Medieval Islamic World*, pp. 11-33.
- Dewière, ““*Ismaël pria Osman de luy donner quelques Chrestiens*”: Gift Exchanges and Economic Reciprocity in trans-Saharan Diplomacy (Sixteenth–Seventeenth Centuries),” pp. 223-247.
- Adigüzel, “In Search of Diplomatic Gifts - On a Group of 18th Century Polish Porcelain in the Topkapı Palace Collection,” pp. 166-174 (Optional).

3 March

*Foreground:*

- Do Paço, “Women in Diplomacy in Late Eighteenth-Century Istanbul,” pp. 1-23.
- Philliou, “Communities on the Verge: Unraveling Phanariot Ascendancy in Ottoman Governance,” pp. 151-181.

**Practicum:** Bring in a news story or op-ed that addresses (directly or indirectly) the relationship between religion and diplomacy or international relations. What role does religion play, if at all, in how diplomatic relations are discussed today?

**SPRING BREAK**

## **Week 9: Can states be friends today?**

15 March

*Background:*

- Devere et al. "A History of the Language of Friendship in International Treaties" pp. 46-70.

*Foreground:*

- Ibn Ishaq, "The Covenant between the Muslims and Medinans and with the Jews" pp. 231-233.

17 March

*Foreground:*

- Treaty of Peace and Friendship between U.S. and Morocco
- Treaty of Peace and Friendship between U.S. and Tripoli
- Treaty of Amity and Commerce between U.S. and France
- Treaty of Friendship, Limits, and Navigation between U.S. and Spain

**Practicum:** Does friendship play a formal role in international treaties throughout the 18th century? For this week we are going to dig into the treaties that the U.S. made with various European and North African states using Yale's Avalon Project and Word Clouds. The goal here is to test Devere et alia's theory about what role friendship plays (or doesn't) in the way these formal state documents reflect the power dynamics of political realities. See assignment sheet for more details and guidelines.

## **Week 10: Friendship and Politics in the Media**

22 March

*Foreground:*

- Op-Ed: Love, hate, indifference: Is the US-UK relationship still special?
- Op-Ed: Daniel Thomas Potts, "Iran and America: A forgotten friendship"

*In class:* Op-ed workshop with peers

24 March

*In class:* Op-ed workshop continued, discussion, reflection.

## MODULE 4: Friendship, culture, and society

### **Week 11: Friendship across cultures**

29 March

*Background:*

- Leszczensky, "Intra- and Inter-group Friendship Choices of Christian, Muslim, and Non-religious Youth in Germany," pp. 72-83.

*Foreground:*

- Weishut, *Intercultural Friendship: The Case of a Palestinian Bedouin and a Dutch Israeli Jew* pp. 1-3, 7-16, 72-90.

31 March

*Background:*

- Echchaibi "Unveiling Obsessions: Muslims and the trap of representation" in *On Islam: Muslims and the Media*, pp. 57-70.

*Foreground:*

- Ms. Marvel (Parts 1-2)

**Practicum:** Begin Friendship Museum Exhibit.

### **Week 12: Female Friendships in Islam**

5 April

*Foreground:*

- Ms. Marvel (Parts 3-5)
- Ramy, Selected Episodes

7 April

*Foreground:*

- Wilson, *The Bird King*

**Practicum:** Continue Friendship Museum Exhibit

### **Week 13: Islamic Friendship in America**

12 April

*Foreground:*

- Wilson, *The Bird King* (continued)

14 April

*Foreground:*

- Wilson, *The Bird King* (continued)

**Practicum:** Final Project Workshop

**Week 14:**

19 April

*In class:* Final Project Presentation

21 April

*In class:* Final Project Presentations

## **End of Module Assignments**

### **Assignment # 1: Friendship Presentation (15%)**

**Due:** Feb 1, 2022

The main topic of this course, unsurprisingly, is friendship within the Islamic tradition. However, a little comparison and broader context is always a good thing. For this first assignment, I want each of you to examine friendship in a context outside of Islam. This can be a particular social, cultural, religious, national, or regional context, etc. If this was a full year course we might venture off and explore friendship in other contexts. Since we do not have the time to do that, this assignment gives you all the opportunity to learn about friendship in a different context. You will become an ‘amateur expert’ and present your findings to your classmates.

**Ground Rules:** The goal here is to define and concisely describe the various ways in which friendship is approached in your chosen context. In other words, what are its defining features and characteristics? Feel free to get creative in choosing your context. Since we have a large group of students, try to make your topic specific. For instance, “Friendship in 90s American TV through the lens of ‘Friends’” could make for an interesting topic. It is defined both temporally and within a specific socio-cultural context. Please email me your topic by Jan 20, 2022 .

**Assignment:** Create a **10 minute** presentation that includes slides and imagery. If you want you can treat it as a sort of introductory lecture to the general, informed public about your topic. Make sure you define any important terms and provide specific examples to back up your claims. Because of the pandemic making our class meet virtually during January, I ask that you each record your presentation and upload it to Canvas. In addition to your own video, you should watch your classmates’ presentations and comment on at least 2 other videos.

**Here are some questions to guide you as you conduct your research:**

What are the different ways in which friendship is invoked?

What are its underlying implications in these circumstances?

How do people respond to friendship?

How does the meaning of friendship change depending on the circumstances?

Why does friendship matter / how is it valued?

## Assignment # 2: Friendship Treatise (15%)

**Due:** Feb 21, 2022

This module has focused on the philosophical dimensions of friendship, which are oftentimes expressed in the form of a friendship treatise. These texts take a broad, meta approach to friendship and offer insights into conceptions of friendship related to particular places and eras of the historical past. As you have seen, when taken as a collection these texts represent the dynamism of friendship as a concept - forever changing and serving as reflections of particular moments throughout history.

**Ground Rules:** The goal here is for you to write a treatise on friendship. This can be done in two ways. The first option is you can choose to write a treatise from your own 21st century perspective. There are a lot of contemporary issues that the medieval authors did not include in their writings on friendship that seem increasingly important today - technology, gender identities, multi-ethnic communities, etc. How might these 21st sensibilities be reflected in a philosophical treatise on friendship? As a second option you can choose a historical figure from the past (Muslim or otherwise) and write a friendship treatise in their voice and from their perspective. For this, you will need to be prepared to defend your choices for the decisions you make in footnotes.

**Assignment:** Write a **4-5 page** 'Treatise on Friendship' (feel free to give it a more creative title). This is no easy task and will require some thought and, most likely, a good deal of editing. What you want to produce is a piece of writing that is imbued with a clear voice and follows an internal logic or narrative. This is a chance for your own voice (or a particular historical one) to come through. Have fun with this part and don't be afraid to take some risk - as long as there is coherence with your tone and structure.

### **Key Elements to include:**

1. Your treatise's 'thesis' should be the main characteristics of friendship that you identify (e.x. Aristotle's three categories).
2. You should be sure to inform the reader how these characteristics are related to each other.
  - You must address at one point with the issue of technology. It does not need to be the focus of the treatise, but it should be clear what role technology plays in your definition.
3. In expanding on each individual characteristic you should provide both general and specific examples.
4. You must engage with at least 2 sources from class and 2 from outside. You can use them as critical examples or further support of your framework.

### Assignment # 3: Friendship Op-Ed (15%)

**Due:** Mar 28, 2022

Throughout this module we have focused on instances of friendship (gift-giving, treaty making, diplomacy) in politics and international relations. As we have also noticed, this ‘acting out’ of friendship oftentimes spurs on think-pieces and op-eds that aim to give their own take on whether the act of friendship was pure, substantive, or rather just a superficial façade. Now it's your turn to interrogate friendship's place in the field of international relations and diplomacy.

#### Ground Rules:

1. Choose an event, person, place, or object (broadly defined) and through your analysis of it comment on the role of friendship in diplomacy and IR.
2. You do not need to argue for or against friendship's existence in IR writ large! A stronger Op-Ed argument will complicate or nuance where, when, and to what extent friendship can exist, has existed, or has the potential to exist.
3. Your op-ed must have contemporary relevance, but can also bring in historical objects, places, or people.
4. You should engage with at least two texts that we have discussed in this (or previous) modules relating to conceptions of friendship.
5. You should link to sources directly in the article and provide a list of any printed or non-linkable sources as a short bibliography at the end.

**Assignment:** Write a ~ **1000 word** op-ed meant for an informed readership. You should begin with a Lede, which hooks the reader and provides the necessary context and background information. The Lede *leads* you into your thesis, which should be stated with clarity and concision. You can then defend your argument with evidence, counter potential objections to your argument, and finish the whole thing with a conclusion that returns to the Lede, reinforcing the connection between the object and your argument.

**Here are some resources to help you plan for your op-ed:**

[The Op-Ed Project](#)

[How to Write an Op-Ed, Duke](#) (Content)

[How to Write an Op-Ed, Harvard](#) (Revision and Checklist)

## Capstone Project (20%)

**Due:** May 5, 2022

Throughout this course many of our conversations have pivoted around the question of to what extent friendship is specific to particular cultures and societies versus a trans-human phenomenon. This is your chance to explore this even further and to give your own, personalized spin, on a complicated debate.

### Guidelines:

- Your ideas can be sparked by content on the syllabus, but you should focus on examples and content from outside of the syllabus
- Each project should be supported by a bibliography that includes no less than five items

### Potential Formats:

**Virtual exhibition:** Develop a virtual museum exhibition using the website [art steps](#). Pick 15 objects, which can be pieces of art, artefacts, photographs, memes, video clips, etc., and create a show that engages with the themes of the course. You can display objects in clusters as long as it serves the purpose of demonstrating some sub-theme within the exhibition. You will need to write descriptions for the objects similar to how you see exhibit descriptions in a museum. You should write some brief text introducing the exhibit and explaining its goals. You will also need to make an exhibition catalogue that contains much of this information, a few choice pieces from the show, and the interpretive framework that connects the exhibit to the themes of the course.

**Podcast:** Create 30 minutes of content for a podcast. This can be split between multiple episodes, so long as each episode is longer than 10 minutes. If you want to record the podcast with a friend you can record 40 minutes of content instead. The speaking time should be roughly equal between the two participants. Podcasts take all shapes and forms. Maybe you want to do a popular history podcast in the style of Dan Carlin's "Hardcore History." Maybe you want to focus on current events related to the course. Maybe you want to do a deep dive into an aspect of popular culture that you think informs our own thinking / re-thinking of friendship. All of these are acceptable, so long as you support your work with a basic bibliography.

**Opinion Piece:** Write a longer opinion piece (8-10 Pages) in the style of the *New Yorker* that engages with the themes of the course while exploring an object or cultural phenomenon. This is essentially a longer op-ed, but you may also do a more investigative style piece with interviews if you wish. If you have been skeptical of friendship as a trans-cultural phenomenon throughout the semester and want to argue that true friendship does not exist, this is probably the format you want to adopt. Your piece should explore some objects or events (which could be interviews) in the process of making its point. It can also employ theories and ideas from the course, but keep

them targeted towards current events. Whatever topic you settle on, please run it by me first so I can clear it before you begin to work on it.

**Research Paper** (8-10 pages): Pick a topic related to the course (which can be just about anything in a course like this). Your research paper should explore a question that results in a debatable thesis. In other words, I don't want a descriptive paper. You should be developing some kind of argument that engages with primary and secondary sources. You might try to apply some of the theories/ideas we studied in the course to a historical or geographic context that we have not already studied in the class. If you need help identifying materials, consult me and I can try to point you in the right direction.

**Book Review:** Find two books that are related to the material of the course and write a New York Times style book review that brings them into conversation with one another in a review essay (8-10 pages). There are many books that could be related to the course. Anything with the word friendship in the title is likely a candidate. Try to find at least one book that was published in the last 10 years, the other one can be as old as you like. **Whatever books you pick, run it by me first.** The focus of the review essay is not to describe the books, but to comment on how they differently approach a similar subject, what each book contributes to the broader conversation, the evidence authors use, and so on. Prioritize analysis over description.

**Fiction:** Write a short piece of fiction (8-10 pages) accompanied by a 2 page explanation of how your piece of fiction engages with some of the themes of the course. You will probably want to write historical fiction, so that the connections to the course are more apparent, but you might do equally well writing science fiction or epic poetry. Stories can be character driven, dialogue driven, philosophical, etc. but we do not want to see late-night, stream of consciousness musings. While we are not expecting the next Hemingway or George R.R. Martin, we do want to see quality literature. If you have difficulty writing the 2 page explanation, try adopting the perspective of someone who wanted to argue that your piece of fiction should be included in the course syllabus.

**Video or Vlog:** Create a video or video series that engages with the themes of the course. Try to record 30 minutes of content. Again if you want to record something with a friend, record 40 minutes of content instead. In terms of production value and audience you should aim to be a mid-level YouTuber, but the style of the video can take the form of an educational lecture (like the ones we recorded), a vlog, a filmed podcast, etc. Your face does not have to be on the video, you can narrate over images if you like. You will also need to write a short description introducing your podcast to potential listeners as well as a list of future episodes.