

## AHS Humanities 12: 2015-16

# The Market and the Polis

8:25 - 10:27 a.m. (PEAK Wednesdays: 8:25 to 10:10 a.m.)

Instructor: Marcus Renner

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Office Hours: Thursday 1:13 to 2:13 (or by appointment)

## Course Description

12<sup>th</sup> Grade Humanities provides you, as students, with an opportunity to apply the skills and knowledge you developed thus far at Animas High School. The "market" and the "polis" represent two distinct frameworks (economics and politics) for understanding modern events. In this course you will use both to decide what contribution you want to make to local, national, and global affairs.

## Projects and Calendar

**College Essay** - We'll spend roughly the first week working intensely on a personal essay that you can adapt for your college applications. This will help me get to know you and your writing skills right away.

**A More Perfect Union** - Over the course of the first semester, you will complete a group project, a term paper, and craft a digital story to answer the essential question about what contribution you want to make within the public realm?

**Local Economies (tentative)** - You studied globalization in 10th grade, now you're going to get local. From roughly mid-November through January, you will create a plan for a business, economic development project, or weigh in on economic policies that will create a stronger, more resilient local economy in Durango, La Plata County, and the Four Corners.

**Senior Project** - From February to May, you will complete a research paper, present and defend the results in a TED-style presentation, and complete an action project on a topic of your choice.

## Collaborative Classroom

You know by now that while all the teachers at Animas share a belief in project-based learning, we all have our own styles. My own preference is to run a collaborative classroom. I jumped through all the hoops in high school, so I chose a college with no core requirements, pass/fail

grading, and great flexibility in the curriculum. I wanted to do my own thing. As a teacher, I have a fierce belief that you must own your education. Sitting back at letting me or anyone else tell you how and what to learn, turns you into a tool for others to use. That's not the life I want for you. You have to take charge of your life and your learning.

There are people, however, who can help you. There are people who have experience and knowledge and perspective that might prove useful. I want to be one of those people. I want to be your ally. This doesn't mean agreeing with you about everything. It means that as a teacher I will seek to understand and accommodate your learning needs and preferences. In turn, I ask that you respect and consider the feedback that I give you on your writing, your projects, and your work with others. This year I will have an ongoing conversation with each one of you about how you can use our class to get where you want to go in life. This conversation is why I'm a teacher.

With that in mind, here are some specific things to note about this classroom:

**Shared Decision-Making** - Many of the decisions about what, when, and how we will learn will not come from me. As a representative of Animas, I'll be part of the decision-making process, but I'm committed to giving you, as a group and as individuals, as much control over the class as the system at AHS will bear.

**Part of a Group** - Authority often defaults to the teacher because most assume a class of twenty teenagers all want and need different things. Letting the teacher be the supreme commander is the easiest, but not necessarily the best, way to sort this out. Kind of depends on the teacher, doesn't it? It is true, however, that you are part of a group experience. What works for you, might not work for someone else. You can learn things interacting with others that you can't learn on your own. You are not only collaborating with me to create a positive learning environment. You are collaborating with each other. Listening, teamwork, respect, appreciation are all vital to our success.

**Personalization** - To make this class feel relevant, you have to find a personal connection to the material. I can help, but you need to take the initiative and talk to me about your ideas for how to make projects and papers exciting and meaningful. You'll learn more failing at something you're passionate about than succeeding at something you find dull. Finally, if you're just not engaged by the material, let's sit down and figure out how the class can add value to your life and be a net positive rather than something you dread.

**Feedback on the Class** - I will consistently check-in with you as individuals and as a class to see how things are going. Many things I can change; some are beyond my control. In some situations, you'll have to persuade me, and in others you'll have to step up as a group to get what you want from the class. Teachers never stop learning, and if grad school was good for anything, it was showing me the limits of my own perspective and understanding. If you ever have concerns, needs, or ideas about how to improve the class, please talk to me. It will make both you and I feel a whole lot better.

One final note: while Lori and I are broadly covering the same material, our approach, our projects, and our styles are different. We will converge in February when we start working on Senior Project full-time. But until then, we'll be doing our own thing to the best of our ability and supporting your fellow seniors in any way we can.

## Grading & Evaluation

Philosophy - "All that stuff about collaboration sounds great, but you're still giving me a grade." True. Grades are awful when they become the motivation for work and learning. Grades are potentially useful when they provide accurate feedback about your progress, suggest where and how you can improve, and help you understand the consequences (positive or negative) of your decisions.

But in order for grades to be useful

1. you must understand what counts as an A, B, C, etc.
2. comprehend the reasons behind your grade
3. those reasons must seem fair
4. you must trust the person who is giving them
5. you must care about getting better

I will do my best to make sure the first four things on the list happen. The fifth is up to you.

To the greatest extent possible and practical, I will do the following:

- make all deadlines extremely clear
- present models of quality work
- give a variety of options for you to demonstrate your learning
- have us create assessment tools (e.g. rubrics, tests, and critiques) together
- evaluate your work against your personal academic goals
- give you detailed and specific feedback that shows how you can improve
- hold a collaborative conference where we can determine your grade together

My goal in this is for you to learn how to assess your own performance fairly and accurately. The most important grades in life are your own. Finally, I have high academic standards because I believe in your academic potential. I want you to believe in that potential as well. When I communicate "you can do better," it's because I know you can.

The Gradebook - I want the gradebook to be clear so that you know what upcoming assignments you should give more focus and attention and where you are doing fine and have room to give other aspects of your life the attention they need. With that in mind, until February your grades will go into one of four categories:

**Community learning** - This is your contribution to our common intellectual mission. Other teachers might call this "participation" or "collaboration." I call it community learning because it serves as a reminder of the responsibility you have to your peers. This involves engagement, interest, support for others, effort, and coming to class prepared and ready to go. This category will include: group work, seminars, and assignments that allow the class to work effectively on something together.

**Reflective learning** - This measures your ability to synthesize your learning experiences not just academically but personally. This is deeper learning that enters "life lesson" territory. This is the kind of learning that happens when you put together your POL. This category will include personal journal assignments, reflections, and, for our first project, your digital story.

**Content learning** - For me, content is ultimately a means to an end. Knowing the amendments to the Constitution allows you to make effective legal arguments. Understanding supply and demand can help you manage a business. Content is about more than facts. It's about depth in your analysis and the creativity in synthesizing information. It's about using information to do something. This category will include tests, quizzes, non-personal journal assignments, seminar questions, and presentations

**Writing** - Writing is arguably the most important skill that you can gain from a humanities class. But there's more to writing than words on a page. Writing involves thinking. You have to have something to say. In this respect, writing overlaps with content. There's an argument for combining these categories, but for now, they are separate. This category will include writing conferences, skills exercises, worksheets, outlines, major papers, and revisions.

How much each of these categories will count toward your semester grade is something we will decide together.

Late work - I will accept late work. But it will cost you. I will deduct a 1/3 letter grade (e.g. a B- will drop to a C+) for each 24 hour period that your work is late (weekdays and weekends are included in the count of days). This means you should submit as soon as you are done by sending me an email with your work as an attachment. If unavoidable circumstances warrant, I will grant extensions. Come talk to me.

Revisions - If I decide to accept revisions, I will give you a new deadline to turn in the revised work. You must check-in with me before you start. Most of the time, I average the score on the original draft and the revision. But this depends on the assignment. Sometimes I will grade the quality of your revision itself as a separate assignment. Please note that *nothing* irritates a teacher more than having someone turn in a revision with only minimal changes. For this reason, you must annotate your revision. I will not read or grade un-annotated revisions.

Extra Credit - This is rare. If I choose to give extra credit, everyone will have the opportunity to raise their score not just the people who need it.

Honors - Students who complete honors requirements get additional community learning points AND get evaluated on the quality of the work they turn in, either in the reflection, content, or writing categories of the gradebook. We'll talk about honors options separately.

Parental Questions - To encourage you to take ownership of your own grades, I ask that you please contact me directly with any questions about your assignments and grades. Please do not have your parents contact me regarding your grades until you have asked the questions first, via email, speech, or writing. If you or your parents still have questions after you have talked to me, I would be happy to address your/their concerns

Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct - Plagiarism is the copying of language, structure, or ideas of another and presenting the work as your own OR the copying of your own work submitted for another class or assignment. Examples can include the following:

- copying information from the Internet
- allowing someone to revise your work and submitting it as your own
- copying from another student's work
- copying from your previous work without providing a citation

Plagiarism is a serious offense that will result, at the very least, in failure of the assignment with a grade of zero. Not understanding appropriate academic conduct is not an excuse. If you are in doubt about a particular situation, come speak with me.

If I suspect that you have committed an act of academic misconduct, I will discuss it with you and share it with the administration. Depending upon the circumstances, academic misconduct can result in suspension or expulsion. Please ask me before you turn in any work that might be problematic or raise questions in my mind.

## Logistics

### What to Bring to Class

- your laptop computer
- readings, handouts, worksheets assigned for the day
- paper and a writing utensil
- a binder with dividers for readings, documents, and handouts
- a library card (from Durango Public Library) – they're free and easy to get
- a USB storage device
- 100% of your effort, whatever that is for any given day

Attendance, Tardiness, and Absences – I take attendance at the start of class. If you're not in the room on time, you get a tardy. Absences must be excused for you to get extra time to make

up assignments. You will generally get one additional day to complete an assignment for each day that you have an excused absence. If you have several excused absences in a row, you must check in with me so we can set new deadlines for your work.

Submitting Work – I will accept work by email but will most often request that you also give me a hard copy. Printing out your work at the last minute and frantically searching for a stapler is a time-honored tradition at college and one that you should start getting used to.

Formatting - All papers, including first drafts, must have 1-inch margins, use a Times New Roman, 12 pt. font, and have double-spacing. The first page must display the student's name and AHS Humanities 12. Work submitted via email must use the following format: SMITH\_TERMPAPER or SMITH\_POETRY\_ASSIGNMENT. **I will only accept 2-sided printing.** One-sided print-outs will go into my scratch paper pile.

Communicating with me - Email is the primary tool I will use to contact you between classes and is also the best way to contact me. I will try to respond within 24 hours. If you email me right before class, I will not read your message until after class.

## Class Etiquette and Decorum

Respect - We are a diverse academic community and we will be discussing controversial issues—issues that typically elicit strong opinions. It is important that you are tolerant, respectful, and considerate of your fellow classmates during discussion and in all online communication. We will set class norms for discussion early in the semester.

Food – You can eat in my classroom, but I will bust you if you leave a mess. Drinks and water bottles must have closed lids. I've put work into my classroom and having spilt coffee is not in the plan.

Breaks – I will give you a break half way through our two-hour block but exactly when and for how long is up to me. It will generally be ten minutes but some days it will be five.

Work Time - If you finish the task at hand, my expectation is that you will use the time to continue working on other assignments, preferably related to our class. You can listen to music during work time but keep it at a volume so that others can't hear it.

Electronics - Turn off all electronic devices other than laptops (such as phones, iPods, iPads, etc.) before entering the classroom. I will ask you to use your laptops and sometimes your phones for specific tasks. Beyond this, I don't want to see or hear them. We will talk about this early in the semester.

## In Conclusion: Ohana Kuleana

In Hawaiian, "ohana" means family or community and "kuleana" means responsibility, privilege, and duty. I'd like you to keep this phrase in mind as you embark on your journey into senior year. What *ohana* are you a part of and what is your *kuleana* toward those people? These are relevant questions not only for the abstract concepts of the market and the polis but for everything you do at Animas this year, including our class. I'm so pleased to have the chance to get to know you and look forward to the conversations we'll have throughout the year.

## AHS Humanities 12 - 2015-16

### A Note to Students

I have drafted this detailed syllabus to answer questions or issues that might arise during the year. Please indicate you have read and understand the syllabus below by signing your name. If you have questions, please ask.

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### A Note to Parents

The education of your child is a task shared by parents, teachers, peer groups, and other community members. Please assist me in serving your child by reading the attached syllabus and acknowledging its content by signing in the space below. Please save my contact info or bookmark my digital portfolio (<http://marcushumanities12.weebly.com>) in case you have questions about the course. Also, feel free to use this opportunity to open a line of communication with me by writing in the space below.

I have read and understand the content in this syllabus.

Parent Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Is there anything else I should know about yourself, your family, or your son/daughter that will help him or her succeed this year in my classroom? (If you have any comments, questions, or additional information, please write them in the space below.)