

GESM 120: *Surviving the Zombie Apocalypse*

General Education Seminar, Spring 2021

Premise

The Zombie Apocalypse has arrived. Seventeen of you are trapped on the University Park campus of the University of Southern California, in the Hoose Library of Philosophy. You must work out what you are going to do to survive. The philosophical wisdom of the ages might help. Or it might not. You will have to learn more about it, in order to decide.

Instructor

Who: Mark Schroeder (he or they)
How: maschroe@usc.edu or through our course Slack

Class

Where: Live, synchronous instruction over [Zoom](#) (password 'zombies') and Slack
When: 3:30-4:50 Mondays and Wednesdays
Why: The zombie apocalypse is coming. Will you survive?

Student Contact Hours (otherwise known as 'Office Hours')

What: Dedicated time that I have scheduled each week to talk to you outside of class
When: Wednesdays 8:30-10:00 and Thursdays 4:30-5:30
Where: Our regular [Zoom](#) room (password 'zombies' as always)

Learning Objectives

In this class you will develop Mastery of important ideas from throughout the history of philosophy, and gain an understanding of what motivates these ideas. You will develop Critical Distance from these ideas and decide for yourself which you will take on board and why. You will develop concrete skills of philosophical argument and collaborative Inquiry. You will master the skill of working Cooperatively under high stakes stress. And you will have fun (assuming that you are not eaten).

Required Texts

There are no required texts for this course. All readings and course materials will be [distributed electronically](#). It is *strongly recommended* that you print out the readings, if you have access to a printer, as there is good evidence that people engage better with reading print materials, and it will make it easier for you to refer to readings in class discussion without flipping between windows on your laptop or apps on your tablet.

Required Work

Reading

Every week there will be assigned required reading for the week. You are expected to do this reading before the beginning of the week and come to class with specific questions about it to discuss in class. Some weeks different students will be assigned to do different readings, so that we can learn from each other in class. You are not responsible to do readings that are assigned to other students.

Writing

Each week you will complete a short writing assignment following the TIOR format that is explained later in this syllabus. Your writing assignment is due to be submitted through Blackboard and is due by midnight Sunday night each week.

Participation

You are required to actively participate in class discussions. This does not mean that you have to speak up in class. Your participation contribution can come from some combination of asking probing questions in class, leading class discussion, contributing to ongoing discussion on the course Slack, and participation in Student Contact Hours. Being wrong in interesting and important ways counts just as much toward participation as being right.

Class Project: Handbook

At the end of the semester, the class will submit an instructional 'handbook' covering how to survive the Zombie apocalypse, to which all of you will contribute. The handbook will cover all of the major course topics of the semester, and it will represent what you as a group have learned over the course of the semester, but beyond that the shape of the 'handbook' and the way that you distribute the workload for the handbook are entirely up to you.

Grading

Throughout the semester you will receive experience points (XP) in recognition of how well you as an individual or the group as a whole handle each challenge that you face. Experience points will be allocated in each of four areas: Mastery, Critical Distance, Inquiry, and Collaboration. All points for Mastery will be awarded on an individual basis, and all points for Collaboration will be awarded on a collective basis. In week 2 of class, you will decide as a group how the XP for Critical Distance and Inquiry will be assigned.

At the beginning of the semester, you will begin at level I. Whenever you accumulate sufficient experience points to meet the level standards in *all four areas*, you will advance to the next level. To pass the class, you must complete all assigned work (described above). To those who have completed all assigned work, grades at the end of the semester will be assigned as follows:

Level 10: A	(16,000 XP)
Level 9: A-	(12,000 XP)
Level 8: B+	(9,000 XP)
Level 7: B	(6,500 XP)
Level 6: B-	(4,500 XP)
Level 5: C+	(3,000 XP)
Level 4: C	(1,800 XP)
Level 3: C-	(900 XP)
Level 2: D	(300 XP)
Level 1: F	(0 XP)

So each grade means that you have performed at a certain level in all four of the key course objectives. There will be ample opportunities to earn XP throughout the semester, by continuing discussion outside of class, resubmitting writing, or in other ways. Our goal, after all, is not to limit the number of 'A's that we award, but for everyone to achieve mastery of every learning objective for the course.

Weekly Writing

Each week you will complete the reading to be discussed during the *ensuing* week by Sunday, and submit your writing assignment by midnight following the instructions on Blackboard. Every writing assignment will consist in a short argumentative paper, following the TIOR format. TIOR stands for ‘They say... I say... One might object... But I Reply...’.

So your papers will always include these four moves, in this order: first you will say what someone else says (usually the author of one of our readings for the week), then you will say what you say in response, then you will consider how your target might object to what you say, and finally you will say how you can defend yourself from that objection. At levels 1-6 your TIOR papers will be only four sentences long – one sentence for each of these four moves. Once you reach level 7, I will allow you to use one or two sentences for each move. At level 8 you will use two or three sentences for each move. And at levels 9-10 you may use three or four sentences for each move.

You may write in response to anything from the week’s reading. So your topic is entirely up to you each week. The semester is 15 weeks but there is no reading and no assignment due before week 1 or week 15, so there are only 13 weekly writing assignments. You must complete 12, so you get one freebie, but you may not take your freebie until at least week 5.

Papers

At the ends of each of weeks 4, 8, and 12 you will turn in an 800-1000 word paper answering the prompt that I give you two weeks in advance. Like your short writing assignments, your papers will follow the TIOR format, but you will have 1-3 paragraphs to develop each step of the argumentative structure of your paper, rather than just a sentence or two.

Handbook Project

There will be 4000 XP available in each category for the end-of-semester class project, so everyone who goes into the class project at the end of the semester having already earned an A- in the course will be in a position to earn an A with a good enough project.

Schedule of Topics and Course Calendar

The schedule of topics for each week of the course, including links to the readings available online and reminders of all writing and assignment deadlines, is available through the course calendar on the [course webpage](#), behind the password (as always) ‘zombies’.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Support Systems:

Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: sarc.usc.edu

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. equity.usc.edu

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. dsp.usc.edu

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. diversity.usc.edu

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. emergency.usc.edu

USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime.

Provides overall safety to USC community. dps.usc.edu

Notes: I need to have an average of 80 XP available by default in each category each week, to have the class on track if they collect most of them to be able to be on track for an A in the course.

This is complicated a little bit by the writing assignment schedule and the fact that there are two shorter weeks, including week 1. So let's go with 40 points per class session + 30 points per writing exercise + 120 holistic cooperative points. That makes $40 \times 28 + 30 \times 12 + 120 = 1600$.