

**The Ohio State University  
First-Year Seminar Program  
Course Proposal**

**Course Information**

1. Attach a syllabus that includes the following (sample syllabi can be found at <http://firstyourseminars.osu.edu>):

- the course goals
- a brief description of the content
- the distribution of meeting times
- a weekly topical outline
- a listing of assignments
- grade assessment information (A-E or S/U)
- required textbooks and/or reading list
- the academic misconduct and disability services statements (sample statements can be found at <http://ascas.osu.edu/curriculum/asc-syllabus-elements>)

**Instructor Information**

2. Attach a brief biographical paragraph that includes the current research interests, teaching awards and honors, and undergraduate courses taught by the participating instructor(s).

Mark Rudoff

Proposer's Name and Primary Academic Unit (please print)

Associate Professor, School of Music

Proposer's Title

rudoff.2@osu.edu

Proposer's e-mail Address

March 6, 2023

Submission Date

Dr. Michael Ibrahim

Approval of Department Chair of Academic Unit (please print)

**Please return this form and any attachments to Todd Bitters, [bitters.4@osu.edu](mailto:bitters.4@osu.edu), no later than MARCH 1.**

## **BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT**

**Mark Rudoff** is Associate Professor of Cello and Chamber Music at Ohio State University. He is the studio instructor for undergraduate cello majors, coordinator of the undergraduate chamber music program, and faculty advisor for Cellohio. He also served four years as a faculty mentor in STEP, was selected as a presenter in the 2017 TEDxOhioStateUniversity for his "Not Another Bulls\*\*t Lecture." Mark was a recipient of the 2018 Ronald and Deborah Ratner Distinguished Teaching Award in Arts and Humanities in the OSU College of Arts and Sciences, and a 2020 Ethics Circle Fellow for the OSU Center for Ethics and Human Values. Mark holds BM and MM Degrees from Juilliard, and a JD from University of Saskatchewan. Over the course of his career, Mark has played in, conducted and managed orchestras; coached more than 200 string quartets; practiced law as an insurance and insolvency litigator; presented a classical music column on CBC radio, and worked in film as a cello stunt double. Closer to the academic mainstream, he has given papers before conferences of American String Teachers Association and College Music Society. His current research is focused on musical interpretation as pedagogy and practice, which he approaches as a forum for teaching students how to discuss and make decisions about important issues.

**Mediocrity:**  
**A Critical Inquiry into Truth, Beauty and Busting the Curve**  
ARTSCI 1138.11xxxxx (1CR) • AU2023

SLOT TBA

Prof. Mark Rudoff

N376 Timashev Family Music Building

rudoff.2@osu.edu • ofc: (614) 292-2589 • text: (614) 329-1688

OFFICE HOURS: By appointment

**Course Description and Goals:** One way to puzzle out an idea is to study its opposite. I propose that the opposite of excellent is not bad; the opposite of excellent is mediocre. You were admitted to Ohio State because you are an excellent student and chose Ohio State because you believe it is an excellent university. You are probably confident that you can tell when something—a meal, a movie, a song—is bad; you probably also know people who will tell you when something you created is bad. Mediocrity is more elusive, harder to pin down. And for an ambitious, creative scholar, the worst fear is mediocrity. (As in: When we create something we believe is original, beautiful, meaningful, we are afraid the harsh light of day will show it to be just ordinary.) To be honest, I struggle with and against mediocrity; you are going to help me figure it out. We are going to conduct a conversation aimed at understanding mediocrity to position you to critique work you come across in your college life, and more confidently recognize when you create work that is excellent.

**Required Texts:**

- Mediocrity Course Pack [TBA]. Includes selections from:
  - Peter Shaffer, *Amadeus*
  - Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt*
  - Steven Pressfield, *The War of Art*
  - Julie Schumacher, *Dear Committee Members*
  - Adam Grant, *Think Again*
  - Scott Timberg, *Culture Crash*
  - Derrick Bell, *Ethical Ambition*
- Movies
  - Ed Wood (1994)
  - Scenes from Amadeus (1984)
- And other readings (available online, as assigned)

**Course Framework:**

Class meets in-person for one hour each week. Classes are conducted in seminar format. Each session will engage with a short reading (as in: not more than 15 minutes of reading time) connected to an assignment that frames our discussion. Students are expected to prepare materials for each class and contribute to discussions.

**Required Activities:**

1. REFLECTIONS: Each week I will assign a reflection to be completed and submitted before next class. Each assignment will set up our discussion for the following class.
2. Students are expected to prepare assigned reading, attend each class, and participate in class discussions. I will evaluate your participation by how actively and meaningfully you engage and contribute to class discussion.
3. Discussion is the core of any seminar, the means by which we are going to solve the puzzle. Attendance is required. Each student may cash in two “get out of class free” during the semester.
4. Fair warning up front: NO SCREENS! With the limited exception of those occasions when an assignment involves media or we need instant research to resolve an issue, all phones, tablets and computers will be asleep and out of reach.
5. Here is what is NOT required for the course: there are no papers, exams or extensive outside research.

**Grading:** Satisfactory/ Unsatisfactory

Reflection assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reflections will be graded U/S.</li><li>• An “Unsatisfactory” submission is one that fails to answer the questions or respond to the prompts in the assignment. Students are permitted to resubmit to earn a “Satisfactory” grade.</li><li>• Must complete and submit 10 reflections to earn a grade of “S” for the course.</li></ul>	85%
Contribution to the discussion	15%

By around week 10, the class might have a discussion about why there are not letter grades for this course.

## COURSE ITINERARY

Wk	SUBJECT	READING
1	Introduction: In which we meet our hero, Antonio Salieri	<i>Amadeus</i>
2	Course themes: Expertise, values, judgment and ambition	<i>Babbitt</i>
3	Food: Good, bad, not bad	<i>For this class we will meet for dinner at a Traditions dining hall.</i> Reading: Foodie dreams
4	Values	VIA Inventory <i>The War of Art</i>
5	Delusions of adequacy	<i>Think Again</i>
6	Amateurs	Ed Wood
7	Criticism	<i>Dear Committee Members</i>
8	Charlatans, mountebanks and frauds	<i>Rolling Stone</i> reading on Anna Delvey
9	Politics and “politics”	On V. Muradeli’s Opera, “The Great Friendship”
10	Commerce	<i>Culture Crash</i>
11	Bringing it together:	Readings and listening to be assigned
12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does it matter?</li> </ul>	
13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guilty pleasures</li> <li>• How to take a compliment</li> <li>• Easy B, hard A</li> </ul>	
14	The Game: Fandom and loyalty	
15	Finale: Anything worth doing is worth doing well—really?	<i>Ethical Ambition</i>

### Academic Misconduct

I have the goal of encouraging collaboration, discussion and group study as you develop your ideas; note, however, what you submit must consist of your original work. All students are expected to understand OSU rules on plagiarism, impersonation and other academic dishonesty issues. If you are not clear on the policies, consult the Office of Academic Affairs website, particularly the Code of Student Conduct:

<http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/csc/>. A good guide is the 8 Cardinal Rules: <http://oaa.osu.edu/coameightcardinalrules.html>.

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. At OSU, academic dishonesty is defined as an intentional act of deception in one of the following areas:

- cheating: use or attempted use of unauthorized materials, information, or study aids;

- fabrication: falsification or invention of any information;
- assisting: helping another commit an act of academic dishonesty;
- tampering: altering or interfering with evaluation instruments and documents; or
- plagiarism: representing the words or ideas of another person as one's own.

Instructors are required by Faculty Rule 3335-5-487 to report any instance of alleged academic misconduct to the Committee on Academic Misconduct for investigation and possible University disciplinary action.

### **Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions) that have been certified by the Office of Student Life Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office of Student Life Disability Services is located in 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12th Avenue; telephone 614- 292- 3307, [slds@osu.edu](mailto:slds@osu.edu); [slds.osu.edu](http://slds.osu.edu).

### **Mental Health Services:**

As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce a student's ability to participate in daily activities. The Ohio State University offers services to assist you with addressing these and other concerns you may be experiencing. If you or someone you know are suffering from any of the aforementioned conditions, you can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the Office of Student Life's Counseling and Consultation Service (CCS) by visiting [ccs.osu.edu](http://ccs.osu.edu) or calling 614-- 292--5766. CCS is located on the 4th Floor of the Younkin Success Center and 10th Floor of Lincoln Tower. You can reach an on call counselor when CCS is closed at 614--292--5766 and 24 hour emergency help is also available through the 24/7 National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-- 800--273-- TALK or at [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org).