

**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).

Christa Johnson – Department of Philosophy

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

Associate Professor of Teaching | Assistant Director, ASC Leadership Major

Proposer's Title

Johnson.4597@osu.edu

Proposer's e-mail Address

01/29/2025

Submission Date

Justin D'Arms(.1)

Approval of Department Chair of Academic Unit (please print)

Please return this form and any attachments to Todd Bitters, bitters.4@osu.edu, no later than MARCH 1.

Christa Johnson Biographical Statement

I am an Ethicist and teach undergraduate courses in the Philosophy Department, as well as for the Arts and Sciences Leadership Major. Courses include Ethics and Leadership, Social and Political Philosophy, and Moral Psychology. My research interests lie primarily in ethical theory and moral psychology. My current focus is on the role of moral emotions in our moral practice. I also regularly collaborate with a co-author on a number of applied ethical topics, typically in medical ethics. My work in Leadership Studies is in understanding and critiquing various models of leadership with a focus on Ethical Leadership. Importantly, ethical leadership requires gaining insights (and leaders!) from a variety of fields of study.

Leadership and Power:
Lessons from Kafka
First-Year Seminar: One Credit

ARTSCI 1137.xx (One credit hour, A-E)

Day: TBA

Time and Location: TBA

Professor: Christa Johnson

Department of Philosophy

Office Hours: Tu/Th TBA and by appointment

332 University Hall

Email: johnson.4597@osu.edu

Course Description

Whether it is a coach or a president, a band director or a CEO, much of our lives are shaped by leaders. Sometimes that leadership brings us together and pushes us to be better. Sometimes that leadership creates a toxic environment of power struggle and manipulation. How do we make sure that we put the former kind of leader in charge and not the latter? Is there a particular model of leadership more likely to lead to one result or the other? How can we make sure we become effective and ethical leaders ourselves?

This is a course in the study of Leadership. While we will discuss leaders, both good and bad, past and present, many of the lessons we will learn about leadership will be gleaned from fiction. In particular, we will explore models of leadership and power through the short stories of Franz Kafka. Don't worry, you do not need any familiarity with Kafka's work! We will explore these stories and lessons together. As we will see, Kafka often will provide us with cautionary tales of leadership, many of which have come to pass since his writings. In applying these lessons, we will become better able to assess leadership with a critical eye and develop into ethical leaders ourselves.

Course Objectives

- Become a more analytical observer and thinker
- Become a more articulate writer and speaker
- Achieve familiarity with different models of leadership
- Practice critical analysis in thinking about power and leadership

Required Texts

Leah Tompkins (2024) *Franz Kafka and the Truths of Leadership*
ISBN 978 1 80037 923 7 (cased) / ISBN 978 1 80037 924 4 (eBook)

Course Requirements

Class participation: You are expected to attend class prepared and participate in the seminar discussions. Your participation will be evaluated based on how actively you contribute to the small group and class discussions.

Weekly Journal (250 words): Each week you will be required to keep a journal of notes on leadership. This means for each week's topic you will make observations in your surroundings or conversations that you have been engaged in. Are there examples of this model of leadership you ran into? Did it go well? Poorly? You will submit your journal to our course's Canvas site the night before our class meeting. You will compare and discuss your notes with your classmates in small groups in class.

Final Project: For the final project you will work with a partner (or two) on one of the leadership models we discussed in class. Your project will explore the model more deeply by consulting your weekly journals with your partner and presenting an example of a leader exemplifying this form of leadership (this could be someone everyone would be familiar with (real or fictional) or someone in your own life). You and your partner(s) will give a 15-minute presentation on your leadership model, example leader, and your final assessment of the model. You will be evaluated on the clarity of your presentation and your ability to connect it to our readings and class discussions.

Grading

Class participation 30%

Final Project Presentation 30%

Weekly Journals 40%

Academic Misconduct

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term "academic misconduct" includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee ([Faculty Rule 3335-5-48.7 \(B\)](#)). For additional information, see the [Code of Student Conduct](#).

Students with Disabilities

The university strives to maintain a healthy and accessible environment to support student learning in and out of the classroom. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic, or temporary medical conditions), please let me know immediately so that we can privately discuss options. To establish reasonable accommodations, I may request that you register with Student Life Disability Services. After registration, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion.

If you are ill and need to miss class, including if you are staying home and away from others while experiencing symptoms of a viral infection or fever, please let me know immediately. In cases where illness interacts with an underlying medical condition, please consult with Student Life Disability Services to request reasonable accommodations. You can connect with them at slds@osu.edu; 614-292-3307; or slds.osu.edu.

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WEEKLY SCHEDULE

WEEK 1: Introduction

What is leadership and what can we learn about it from a literary figure? Do I need to know anything about Kafka (spoiler: no)? What are the different models leadership? How does power interact with leadership? How can one remain ethical while exercising power?

WEEK 2: *The Judgement*: Lessons for authentic leadership

Authentic leadership suggests that the fostering of one's 'true self' as a leader will enhance both morality and meaning in organizational and institutional relations, both for oneself and for other people. But what is true? What is the self? And, why should we think that such a notion will lead to productive and ethical leadership?

WEEK 3: *The Metamorphosis*: Lessons for caring leadership

Caring leadership emphasizes the wellbeing of one's followers, though it is often criticized for care's often unspoken power dynamics and the risks of exploitation in its name. One understanding of Kafka urges extreme caution about models of leadership that look – and may even feel – altruistic or enlightened.

WEEK 4: *The Trial*: Lessons for relational leadership

Relational leadership moves away from thinking about individual leaders in favor of studying the relationships between leader and follower, leader and organization, and so on, emphasizing the positive aspects of relationship on leading. A warning, however, may come in the form of a leader's search for recognition in those very relationships.

WEEK 5: *In the Penal Colony*: Lessons for embodied leadership

Though undertheorized as a model of leadership, embodied leadership focuses on the bodily experience and expressions of a leader. Think of the handshake, one's appearance, how one sets up a room. How do we balance the importance of being seen as in charge with the dangers of domination?

WEEK 6: *The Castle*: Lessons for transformational leadership

On some understanding of leadership, what is required is a vision for the organization or group being led. Leadership is not just a matter of getting through tough times, but challenging individuals and groups to better themselves. Yet, if you have ever read a mission statement, you may be skeptical of its substance.

WEEK 7: *Josefine, the Singer*: Lessons for collective leadership

Collective leadership models focus on the idea that the power of a leader is not in the individual, but in the group. Indeed, relying on the capability or integrity of the individual leader often emerges as unwise or unnecessary. Does this undermine the very idea of leadership?

WEEK 8: Interlude

This week we will take a break from our readings to discuss what we have learned, settle on groups for the final project, and anticipate the coming weeks' insights and inspirations.

WEEK 9: Tactics of version-control

Version-control is the idea that someone controls what "version" of events or idea comes to be understood as true. Here we will focus on manipulating attention and ambiguity. For example, When the truth can be bested by better versions, leaders' appeals to their supporters' emotions hold greater sway than objective facts or reasoned argument. This week, we explore post-truth leadership.

WEEK 10: The Language of Leadership

Words have power. On the one hand, the power to organize and stabilize, on the other the power to disorganize and destabilize. We see this very clearly in world leaders throughout history and in our own time. Words that gain traction have the force of an inescapable truth, but they are also made to seem flimsy, even arbitrary, and often hilariously so.

WEEK 11: Writing and righting the self

Just as power is exercised in assertions and counter-assertions of the truth(s) of events, so is it exercised in assertions and counter-assertions of the truth(s) of the self. Last week we explored version-control with respect to language, this week we look to version-control with respect to the identities of leaders.

WEEK 12: A Kafkan manifesto for leadership

In this final chapter, the author pulls together the implications of her Kafkan analysis for leadership. We'll suggest some of the ways in which we might exercise leadership over both ourselves and others, and how we might develop strategies of resistance – or at least survival – when we encounter oppressive leadership from others.

WEEK 13-14: Presentations