The Great Books at the University of Texas at Austin

The Thomas Jefferson Center for the Study of Core Texts and Ideas
"A good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life. Unless wariness be used, as good almost kill a man as kill a good book: who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God’s image; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were, in the eye. For books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are; nay, they do preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them. I know they are as lively, and as vigorously productive, as those fabulous dragons teeth; and being sown up and down, may chance to spring up armed men."

—John Milton, Areopagiticus
A Word from the President

“The Thomas Jefferson Center for the Study of Core Texts and Ideas is one of the most exciting new initiatives to develop on campus during my tenure. When I became president of the university, among my top priorities was to focus our efforts on building an even stronger core education for undergraduates, especially in their first two years. The Jefferson Center helps to meet this goal by providing a rigorous, integrated “strand” of related courses to fulfill basic education requirements. I can’t think of a better way to do this than by focusing on the great books.”

“I must judge for myself; but how can I judge, how can any man judge, unless his mind has been opened and enlarged by reading?”

—John Adams, Diary

A Message from the Dean

“The work of the Thomas Jefferson Center is at the heart of our commitment in the College of Liberal Arts to teach students to think critically and independently so they can thrive in the world beyond campus. The study of great books is essential to the liberal arts education, and the Thomas Jefferson Center provides an important venue for serious discussion of core texts that form the basis of our civilization and that continue to shape our world today. The deep study of core texts instills in our graduates a passion for life-long learning, and a strong sense of connection to the world of ideas and how we use them to serve others and our communities. The Center brings together a unique community of scholars from many departments and schools of thought to study, discuss, and debate the fundamental questions of the human experience.”

“Reading in company with my friends, I go through the treasures of the wise men of old which they wrote and left behind in their books; and if we see something good, we pick it out; and we hold that it is a great gain if we become friends to one another.”

—Socrates, in Xenophon’s Memorabilia
The aim of the Thomas Jefferson Center is to realize Jefferson’s vision of educating citizens and leaders to understand the meaning of liberty and to exercise it wisely. We share Jefferson’s conviction that one of the best ways to attain a liberal education—an education suited for a free individual in a free society—is through a serious study of the great books.

We offer for students in all colleges the Certificate program in Core Texts and Ideas, which provides an integrated path through UT’s core curriculum, based on a study of the great books. The program includes courses in ancient philosophy and literature, world religions, the history of political philosophy, and the principles of the American founding. In collaboration with the Liberal Arts Honors Humanities Program, we also offer an interdisciplinary major in the great books.

When students join the Jefferson Center’s community of scholars, drawn from many departments and schools of thought, they begin a probing and critical study of the major creative and theoretical works that have shaped human thought and history. They enter into the great historic debates about human nature, ethics and the meaning of life. In the process, they learn the skills of critical reasoning, close reading, and clear, cogent writing.

The Center also sponsors post-doctoral teaching fellowships, a lecture series, the Jefferson Book Club, and other symposia for the university and broader community.

**Why the Great Books?**

“For the first time in college, I feel like a class has actually affected the way I live, and the way I see the world.”

— Joshua Lee, Rhetoric and Writing Major
Lorraine Pangle is Professor in the Department of Government, where she teaches political philosophy and ethics. She has won fellowships from the Searle, Olin, and Earhart Foundations, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Her publications include:

- The Learning of Liberty: The Educational Ideas of the American Founders, co-authored with Thomas Pangle (Kansas, 1993);
- The Political Philosophy of Benjamin Franklin (Johns Hopkins, 2007);
- Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship (Cambridge, 2003);

In addition, Professor Pangle has written articles on Plato, Aristotle, the American founders, and the philosophy of education. She is currently at work on a book on classical philosophy and the problem of moral responsibility.

Tom Pangle holds the Joe R. Long Chair in Democratic Studies in the Department of Government. He has won Guggenheim and four National Endowment for the Humanities fellowships, and has been awarded the Robert Foster Cherry Great Teacher of the World Prize from Baylor University. He is a lifetime Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada.

His publications include:

- Montesquieu’s Philosophy of Liberalism (Chicago, 1973);
- The Spirit of Modern Republicanism: The Moral Vision of the American Founders and the Philosophy of Locke (Chicago, 1988);
- The Ennobling of Democracy: The Challenge of the Postmodern Age (Johns Hopkins, 1992);
- Justice Among Nations: On the Moral Basis of Power and Peace, co-authored with Peter J. Ahrensdorf (Kansas, 1999);
- The Theological Basis of Liberal Modernity in Montesquieu’s Spirit of the Laws (Chicago, 2010).

His DVD and audiotape lecture course, “The Great Debate: Advocates and Opponents of the American Constitution,” is marketed by The Teaching Company.

“Going into college I knew I wanted to get a well-rounded education that also focused on classic books. At the same time I also wanted to have a marketable skill, so I chose to major in business. With the Core Texts and Ideas certificate I get the best of both worlds. I’m taking interesting classes about subjects that I really want to learn about in a program that is easy to work around my business schedule.”

— Armiya Humphrey, Business Honors Program
Certificate Program in Core Texts and Ideas

An Education for Citizens and Leaders

The certificate program in Core Texts and Ideas, open to students in all undergraduate colleges of the university, complements any major by offering an integrated, interdisciplinary sequence of six courses on great works of philosophy, literature, science, and the arts. Emphasizing debates about fundamental questions of enduring human concern, the program provides a grounding in the major ideas that have shaped the Western world and the democratic principles of the United States. Students engage in a sympathetic but critical study of the great authors’ competing teachings on human nature and the good life. As a result, skeptics and believers, liberals and conservatives alike become more reflective about their own beliefs, more capacious in their sympathies, and better prepared to engage in a thoughtful dialogue with people of different schools of thought. They thus emerge from the program better prepared to live thoughtful, serious lives, both as citizens and as human beings.

Students in the certificate program take courses in four required areas and two elective areas.

Ancient Philosophy and Literature

The first required course introduces students to selected masterpieces from ancient Greece, the cradle of both republican self-government and the daring enterprise of philosophy. Students study classical epics and tragedies, dialogues of Plato, and other works of ancient philosophy.

I must admit that I never felt much passion for the history of antiquity, but this course changed that by making the concerns and questions of modern life more visible in the lives of the ancients. Studying these texts has broadened my capacity to comprehend these vital questions.”

— Edward Witliff, Radio-Television-Film Major

The Thomas Jefferson Center for the Study of Core Texts and Ideas
The Bible and Its Interpreters is without a doubt my favorite class I’ve taken. Part religious studies, part philosophy, and part history: it’s got it all. Then add into the mix great works by such influential thinkers as Augustine, Aquinas, Dante, and Newman and you’ve really got the makings of something special. This is why I love CTL.”

— Austin Choate, Philosophy and Religious Studies Major

Basic Texts of World Religions

The second required course is an introduction to the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, the Qur’an, and other major religious texts. Students may choose between “Judaism, Christianity, and Islam” or “The Bible and its Interpreters.” In both courses they reflect on the ethical and theological teachings of the texts and the different ways the texts have been interpreted and applied by the authors and the communities they have inspired.

The History of Political Philosophy

The third required course explores the ongoing dialogue in Western thought about rights, political legitimacy, and the proper functions and limits of government. Students study the works of revolutionary thinkers in the history of political philosophy and come to understand the ways that these thinkers have shaped the world we live in. Common texts for this course include Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics and Politics*; Thomas Aquinas’ political writings; at least one foundational text of modern liberalism, such as Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government*; and the writings of at least one modern critic of liberal enlightenment principles, such as Rousseau, Marx or Nietzsche.

Principles of the American Founding

The fourth requirement is a course on America’s grounding constitutional principles. Common readings for this course are the Declaration of Independence, the *Federalist Papers*, and Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*. Other readings may include writings by the Puritans, Franklin, Jefferson, Madison, Washington, the anti-Federalists, presidential speeches, and Supreme Court cases.

Electives

To complete the certificate program in Core Texts and Ideas, students choose two electives from among the dozens we list each semester. Recent offerings have included courses on Renaissance art and architecture, Einstein, Darwin, Boccaccio, Tolstoy, Adam Smith, Cervantes, and what great thinkers have taught about the moral basis of international relations.
Voluntary Small Discussion Sections in Large Lecture Classes

The Jefferson Center, in collaboration with the Sanger Learning Center, ensures that voluntary small discussion sections are offered in all of the large lecture courses in the Core Texts and Ideas program. Here students can engage in lively debate about the ideas they encounter in the great books, and get tutoring to improve their writing and study skills.

Course Development Grants

The Jefferson Center provides small grants for faculty members to develop new courses on the great books or to integrate more readings from major primary sources into existing courses. Examples of courses that have been developed in this way are a course on the Bible and the ancient Jewish and Christian communities it describes, a course on Darwin’s Origin of Species, and several sections of our new required course on America’s Constitutional Principles, including one that examines the theme of religious liberty and the experience of Catholics as a minority group in the United States.

Faculty Reading Group

Professors from a variety of disciplines and departments meet regularly to discuss a great book of broad interest and relevance, such as Alexis de Tocqueville’s classic Democracy in America. The primary purpose of the group is to allow faculty to delve together into a rich text and to discuss the fundamental questions the book raises. We also select books that faculty members have expressed an interest in integrating into their courses but that may be peripheral to their field of expertise. Thus the faculty seminar expands the study of the great books across the UT curriculum.
Two or three Teaching Fellowships are awarded annually to young scholars from across the country, who have recently completed doctoral dissertations on the great books in all areas of the liberal arts. Fellows teach one course each semester in our interdisciplinary undergraduate program, making a crucial contribution to fielding our four required Certificate courses. The fellows are also given time to revise their dissertations for publication.

The Thomas Jefferson Center is a model for the nation. Not only does it enhance education for students in Austin, but it is becoming a proving ground for young Post-Doctoral fellows who have gone on to become professors at other elite universities. At the Jack Miller Center, we seek out programs exactly like the Thomas Jefferson Center where we know our philanthropic support can really make a difference.

— Raphael Major, Director of Faculty Development and Online Education, The Jack Miller Center for Teaching America’s Founding Principles and History

Join Us

Contributions to the Instructional Fund support the courses taught in the Jefferson center by our post-doctoral fellows and lecturers, as well as small discussion sections in our lecture courses.

“The CTI Program distinguishes itself from anything I have experienced on campus through its faculty, who have created an environment friendly to debate and discussion inside and outside of class. Coming into the CTI program was like coming into a family. Enrolling in the certificate program is one of the best decisions I have made.”

— Hamid Poorsafar, Mathematics, Economics, and Finance Major
The Jefferson Book Club

The student book club is an extra-curricular forum in which undergraduates, graduate students, and professors meet to discuss short selections from great books and great authors, selected by students in collaboration with the faculty. The club is one of several initiatives that extend the impact of the Center beyond the classroom, thus building a lively intellectual community around conversation and debate on the most important issues. The club gives students an informal venue in which to share and refine their ideas and in which their love of the great texts can flourish. It is not uncommon to see members of the book club in the student lounge discussing what they’ve read, long after the official reading group has ended. During the summer, the club meets every week, giving students who are in Austin the opportunity to continue their education even when classes are out.

Some Recent Works Discussed by the Club:
- Abraham Lincoln, selected writings and speeches
- Ibn Tufayl, Hayy Ibn Yaqzan
- Jane Austen, Sense and Sensibility
- Cervantes, Don Quixote
- Ben Franklin, Autobiography
- Alexander Solzhenitsyn, A World Split Apart
- The 1001 Nights
- Adam Smith, Theory of Moral Sentiments
- Voltaire, Candide
- Rousseau, Letter to D’Alembert
- Shakespeare, Tempest; Measure for Measure

"The book club has been something very meaningful to me. I have gained significantly not only from the works we have read, but from the discussions we have had about them. It has been great getting to know and learn from the bright and devoted undergraduates, grad students, and professors from the Jefferson Center who attend the meetings regularly and help make the club the excellent group that it is. I hope the club will mean as much to other students in the future as it did to me these last few years."

— Matthew Levinton, Government and History Major
Rome Summer Study

For centuries, a journey through Italy was thought of as a natural complement to a liberal education. Revisiting the ancient, medieval, and renaissance art and architecture offered to youth a sense of the depth and the grandeur of the past that was being eclipsed by the more fair-minded, but smaller world of egalitarian modernity. Both its ruins and its life made Italy a privileged vantage point from which to contemplate the virtues and the vices of the modern world. Modern thinkers of no less stature than Goethe, Shelley, Keats, Byron, Stendhal, Burckhardt, Wagner, George Eliot, Henry James, Nietzsche, Mann, Joyce, Pound, and T.S. Eliot all found study in Italy congenial to their spirits and essential to their work.

Our affiliated summer program, The Rome Institute of Liberal Arts, allows undergraduates to take interdisciplinary courses on great books while exploring the art and architecture of Rome. Discussion-based classes on philosophy, literature, and history are combined with excursions through Italy’s artistic heritage, led by art historians and classicists. University of Texas students can receive course credit and satisfy their university fine arts requirement through these summer courses.

The RILA program was an incredible opportunity to engage with classic texts while exploring Rome’s treasure trove of impressive art and architecture. It has given me the most valuable experience of my college career. I left Rome with a deeper appreciation for history and a greater sense of the splendors of the past.”

— Jacquelyn Walker, Plan II Honors and International Relations Major

Join Us

Contributions to the Student Excellence Fund provide scholarships for the Jefferson Scholars and for summer study at the Rome Institute of Liberal Arts.
Becoming involved with the Jefferson Center and the CTI program has enriched my academic experience in every way. I found a community of intellectually driven students and engaging professors. The center also provided countless opportunities to students looking to deepen their knowledge of the great books, like the book club and the Jefferson Scholars program.”

— Charlotte Hockens, Government Major

Jefferson Scholars Program

The Jefferson Scholarship is awarded each semester on a competitive basis to honors students who are pursuing the Certificate Program in Core Texts and Ideas. The scholarship provides $300 to allow students to begin building a personal library of great books as well as to buy tickets to cultural events such as plays, classical music, and operas. Scholars also have the opportunity to take part in lunches with faculty members, receptions with visiting scholars, coffee hours, and other events planned by the scholars themselves.

“I am absolutely thrilled to be a Jefferson Scholar again. I can honestly say that it was like Christmas getting my big box of books last semester.”

— Sam Remmert, History Major
The Jefferson Lecture Series

Distinguished scholars who are eloquent speakers, from the University of Texas and from around the country, deliver campus talks on great books and their abiding themes. The lectures are open to the public and are available in DVD and CD format at our website.

Past Lectures Have Included:

- “Homer and the Foundation of Classical Civilization”
  by Peter Ahrensford, Davidson College

- “Milton’s Satanic Verses”
  by John Rumrich, University of Texas

- “Will Not the Judge of All the Earth Deal Justly? Abraham’s Confrontation with God over the Fate of Sodom”
  by Clifford Orwin, University of Toronto

- “A. Lincoln, Philosopher”
  by Allen Guelzo, Gettysburg College

American Shakespeare Center Tour

The Jefferson Center is a co-sponsor of the American Shakespeare Center’s annual performances at UT. Based at the Blackfriars Theater in Staunton, Virginia, the American Shakespeare Center is dedicated to making Shakespeare, the joys of theatre and language, and the communal experience of the Renaissance stage accessible to all. Recent performances at UT have included Romeo and Juliet, As you Like it, and Measure for Measure. Jefferson Center faculty affiliates from the Department of English have recently been leading discussions of the plays following each performance.

Join Us

All of our Jefferson Center lectures at the University of Texas at Austin are free and open to the public. For a schedule of upcoming lectures, please visit: www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/coretexts/
For past lectures, please visit: www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/coretexts/events/webcasts.php
Executive Seminars

While the Jefferson Center’s primary purpose is undergraduate education, we believe, as Jefferson did, that the study of the great books is valuable throughout one’s life. Hence we are committed to promoting the study of the great books more widely, outside the university. Our executive seminars, held in several Texas cities, seek to realize this goal through monthly sessions in which adults from the community gather to read and discuss core texts under the guidance of an affiliate of the Center. Readings are typically drawn from American political thought and the tradition of political philosophy out of which it grew.

The Executive Seminar is a marvelous experience. The readings are well chosen and the Center’s experienced leader keeps the discussion moving. I love the back and forth of the conversation—the unpredictability of it all, new insights and perspectives, a chance to be persuaded by the author and the other members. It’s amazing how much satisfaction one can get from a few hours of reading and spirited discussion. It is quite habit-forming.”

— Kent Guida, Houston Executive Seminar Participant

Join Us

For information on joining our Executive Seminar series in major Texas cities, please contact Co-Director Thomas Pangle at tpangle@austin.utexas.edu.
“And Yet the Books”

And yet the books will be there on the shelves, separate beings,
That appeared once, still wet
As shining chestnuts under a tree in autumn,
And, touched, coddled, began to live
In spite of fires on the horizon, castles blown up,
Tribes on the march, planets in motion.
“We are,” they said, even as their pages
Were being torn out, or a buzzing flame
Licked away their letters. So much more durable
Than we are, whose frail warmth
Cools down with memory, disperses, perishes.
I imagine the earth when I am no more:
Nothing happens, no loss, it’s still a strange pageant,
Women’s dresses, dewy lilacs, a song in the valley.
Yet the books will be there on the shelves, well born,
Derived from people, but also from radiance, heights.

— Czeslaw Milosz

Join Us

The Jefferson Center Visitors’ Advisory Committee is composed of friends of the Jefferson Center who meet twice a year to advise the directors on promoting awareness of the center and reaching out to potential donors across Texas.

For more information please contact Josh Lodolo at 512-232-8042 or josh.lodolo@austin.utexas.edu.
Contact Us

Thomas Jefferson Center
For the Study of Core Texts and Ideas
The University of Texas at Austin
1 University Station C4100, Austin, TX 78712

Lorraine Pangle, Co-Director:
lorrainepangle@austin.utexas.edu

Thomas Pangle, Co-Director:
tpangle@austin.utexas.edu

Josh Lodolo, College of Liberal Arts, Development Office:
josh.lodolo@austin.utexas.edu

For More Information:
Phone: 512-471-6648
Website: www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/coretexts
Email: cti@austin.utexas.edu

“Fix reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion.”
— Thomas Jefferson