



# HOUGHTON P.A.C.E.

Greetings!

My name is Chris Stewart. I'll be your instructor for Western Culture in the Age of Science (WCAS), which begins soon. I'm looking forward to working with you over the next few months.

If you've taken an Option course before, you know that the rhythm is unlike a regular P.A.C.E. class, given the lapse of time between sessions. In addition, the material in WCAS is quite different from a regular P.A.C.E. class. You will find some of the reading to be more difficult than you are used to. It's very important to take to heart the comments "**about the reading**" in the course manual, especially the emphasis on the fact that **the goal is not mastery of this material, but something more like familiarity** - to understand what the issues addressed in the reading are, when and why it was written, and the general approach the author takes to addressing his or her concerns. By the end of the course, you'll have a pretty good grip on the forces that have driven the development of the civilization within which we work and live out our lives, and which now reaches around the globe, from around 1600 roughly to the present day, and you'll be acquainted with a diverse sampling of writings from this four hundred year period. If you're like most people, you'll find the "**primary source**" readings for the first week (Locke and Descartes) to be the hardest you'll face. So the good news is, if you survive that, you're in good shape for the rest of the course. Don't get bogged down. Try to see the big picture (what each author is talking about, and what he wants to say about it, in broad terms), and use the thought and response questions to guide you into some of the details.

Every week, you'll be asked to write brief responses to the "**Response Questions**" *in advance of* our discussion of the reading. So don't expect to feel confident about what you say. Just give it your best shot, and attend to the quality (mechanics and expression) of your writing as well. How you say what you say is at least as important as what you say. The basic strategy is that you wrestle with the reading a bit in advance of our discussion, we discuss it when we meet (after I've reviewed some of the highlights from each time slice we cover), and then you make one more pass through it when you prepare a short essay on it (the theme of which will be assigned) before you start on the material for the next class. If you apply yourself, by the end of all that, you'll be feeling much more

confident. So the key is to focus (as I will) on where you end up after all that, not where you start.

This class represents a great opportunity to sit back and ask some really big questions about our civilization, and to develop a much wider and deeper appreciation of the context of everything we do. I'm looking forward to meeting you, and if I can be of service to you as you prepare for our first class, feel free to contact me.

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