

## **Questions for Professor Erussard**

### **1. What is the specific assignment?**

PAPER ONE: 1500 words.

The following historical individuals have had a monumental influence on the development of Western ideas about political organization, civic virtue, the ideal state:

1. Lycurgus of Sparta
2. Solon of Athens

Even though he is not a documented historical figure, Gilgamesh, as he appears in the epic, expresses a quest for ideals and you may choose to include him in your discussion.

In your opinion, who defends the best ideals, is most beneficial to his city-state and to posterity? Defend your statements with precise points and with textual evidence. Compare the character you choose with the other(s) that represents very dissimilar convictions and actions.

### **2. How does the assignment fit with the goals of your course?**

In this course, we explore the essential contours of the human experience during the European foundation of what has come to be called "Western Civilization." One of the fundamental aspects is the concept of the political and social organization of the perfect state. By studying and comparing two drastically different Greek thinkers, the students are acquainted with the complexities of political issues.

### **3. Why does this student's essay stand out for you as strong writing?**

This essay is well developed, thoughtful and original; the ideas are supported by well-selected textual evidence and the quotations are introduced or integrated properly within the essay. The prose is grammatically correct, fluent and graceful.

## **Questions for Peter Marciano**

### **1. How did you go about completing this essay? What steps did you follow?**

The first step I took when I started this essay, and how I start all papers, was to go through the description of the assignment that Professor Erussard gave the entire class. I underlined key phrases such as "textual evidence", "precise points" and "compare the character" which are the elements I need to fulfill to prove my point. I did not know what my point would be until I finished all my reading and analysis because this was an opinion paper. I did the reading and it was long and meticulous but well written and translated; translations can be difficult because some words and phrases do not always have the same meaning in English so when something was confusing or even moderately unclear I looked up other definitions, translations and even the etymology of the word which seems tedious but is extremely helpful. While I read, I underlined constantly which made it easy for me to go back and pull of examples from the text when I was writing the paper. After I finished reading, I made my opinion that Lycurgus of Sparta had a more positive influence on political organization, civic virtue and the ideal state than Solon of Athens. I wrote the paper in a way that addressed Lycurgus and Solon at

the same time so I was directly comparing and contrasting them instead of writing about each of them individually which just makes the writer's job harder and the reader's job longer. The last part of my paper draws on the epic of Gilgamesh; it is always useful to find parallels between the topic of the paper and topics of previous class readings and discussions. I developed a title to the paper that pulls the reader's attention in. Then I read the paper and corrected all the careless mistakes and put it out of my mind for a day and then returned to it and reworded and reorganized parts of the essay. Press SAVE and PRINT and hand it in.

## **2. What was the most challenging aspect of this assignment?**

Most of the information in the paper came from *The Lives of Famous Greeks and Romans* by Plutarch and I will say that it is not easy reading. Plutarch is very easy to understand but he goes on little tangents about mythologizing certain aspects of Lycurgus' and Solon's lives and he has very strong opinions about both of them. Plutarch likes Lycurgus more than Solon and he makes that very clear in the writing by his tone and diction. The hardest part of this essay was to distinguish between my opinions and Plutarch's; I was unsure if I liked Lycurgus because of Plutarch's preference or if I had come to the decision on my own. At first it was hard to say whether or not the author's voice influenced me but when I returned to the essay a day later to edit it more, I came to the conclusion that I came up with my opinion on my own because although Plutarch expresses his opinions, he also made me so aware of them that I ended up ignoring his side notes and concentrating on the facts and examples he describes. Distinguishing the speaker's voice from actual information is crucial to any essay because the author does not have to express the absolute truth (if there even is one), he/she expresses their version of the truth.

## **3. How does this essay connect to your work in the course as a whole?**

The opinion I formed and the information I learned from the reading and the paper connects to everything that followed in the class. There is always a line of causality that one can follow over the course of a semester and sometimes a year. The story of Gilgamesh related to this paper because it shared common tropes and the ideas of the ancient Greeks have influenced everything that has happened since them. The laws of these two men are the foundations of democracy and a person must be able to find the connections between them and the development of the Hebrew and Christian traditions and then the beginnings of Medieval Period and of course the Renaissance, which is the rebirth of classical antiquity, i.e. the Greek. I think many students do not see the line of causality which is so often put right in front of their noses. In one year you can take Shakespeare's *Histories and Comedies* and Shakespeare's *Tragedies*, and *The Age of Michelangelo and Art and Architecture in Baroque Rome* and of course, *European Studies I and II* which are really designed to give students that cause and effect perspective.

## **4. What is the most important thing you learned from doing this essay?**

I put a lot of time and effort into this essay and it paid off, not in the sense that I got a good grade (although I did) but in the sense I got that I accomplished something. A paper can nag at you for so long and you procrastinate for weeks and finally you rush through it

to get it done and nothing was learned and you probably get a lower grade than you could have gotten. I learned a lot from this paper and I am just talking about the content of the essay and how I wrote it; I learned a lot because I enjoyed the class and the topic. Once you declare your major or if you get into a class you really wanted to take, then you know the feeling to which I am referring. European Studies and any class offered in the English Department gives me that emotion. I may be nerdy sometimes but some students know what I am talking about; you know it has happened to you if you talk about having fun working on a project or paper. It is not just an accomplishment, it is a sense of triumph.