“Self-culture [is] the care which every man owes to himself, to the unfolding and perfecting of his nature […] Little is to be gained simply by coming to this place once a week, and giving up the mind for an hour to be wrought upon by a teacher. Unless we are roused to act upon ourselves, unless we engage in the work of self-improvement, unless we purpose strenuously to form and elevate our own minds, unless what we hear is made a part of ourselves by conscientious reflection, very little permanent good is received.”

—William Ellery Channing, *Self-Culture* (1838)

“To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live, according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust. It is to solve some of the problems of life, not only theoretically, but practically.”

—Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (1854)

“If one works out the thoughts, the perceptions that press upon him with the demands for completion, as they lead to one another, in time the actual themes of his philosophy may have a chance to define themselves. Such a philosophy will not be set up like the solution of a puzzle, worked out with all the pieces lying there before the eye. It will be more like the clarification of what we know in our bones.”

—Henry Bugbee, *The Inward Morning* (1958)

“I write because life does not appease my appetites and hunger. I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you. To become more intimate with myself and you. To discover myself, to make myself, to achieve self-autonomy.”

—Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981)

**Professor:** Dr. Alexander V. Stehn (please call me Prof. Stehn, Dr. Stehn, or Alex)

**Office hours in ELABS 359:** MW 3:05-4:15pm (or email alex.stehn@utrgv.edu for an appointment)

**Course Description:** This course will study seven different American intellectuals who understood philosophy as the task of cultivating themselves, their relationships, and their understanding of the world in order to live better lives, improve their communities, and make the world a better place. Since these American thinkers approached philosophy as a transformative practice, we will practice philosophy in the same spirit as we study their works and think about the relevance of their legacies for us.

Beginning with Benjamin Franklin, whom David Hume called America’s “first Philosopher,” we will consider the dispute over what it means to “make something of oneself” in an American context. Next, we will turn to the philosophy of Frederick Douglass to consider the myth of the “self-made man” considering the history and present-day reality of racial inequality in America. We will then study the way that transcendentalists like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Margaret Fuller tried to revive the moral, spiritual, and cultural aspects of self-making in a 19th-century context that threatened to reduce everything to mere money-making. Next, we’ll consider the question of vocation—i.e., the question of what we should do with our lives—using the understudied philosophical journals of Henry Bugbee, whom W.V.O. Quine called “the ultimate exemplar of the examined life.” The course will culminate with UTPA alumna Gloria Anzaldúa, whom we will read through the lenses of self-culture, community-building, and world-changing.

**Required Books:**

- Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* [ISBN: 978-0486284996]

Other readings will be made available electronically on Blackboard.

**Recommended Books** (for those interested in reading more secondary scholarship):

- Daniel Walker Howe, *Making the American Self*
- Edward Mooney, *Lost Intimacy in American Thought*
- John Lysaker, *Emerson & Self Culture*
- AnaLouise Keating & Gloria González-López (eds.), *Bridging: How Gloria Anzaldúa's Life and Work Transformed Our Own*

**Book Group Book** (meets at 8pm every Friday at Moonbean’s on 10th; author coming to UTRGV!)

- Daniel Campos, *Loving Immigrants in America: An Experiential Philosophy of Personal Interaction*

**Grading Breakdown:**

10%—Attendance
10%—Class Participation
15%—Provocation
20%—Two Reading/Living/Writing Assignments (10% each)
20%—Philosophical Journal
25%—Final Project

**Attendance:** Since you have enrolled in this class, I expect you to commit to regularly attending and participating fully in it, just as I commit to coming well-prepared to guide worthwhile class discussions. You should **commit to missing a maximum of 4 classes**, except in the most serious and exceptional cases (e.g., prolonged sickness that requires extensive hospitalization). By keeping this commitment, you will earn the full 10 points for the attendance portion of your final grade; **students who miss more than 4 classes will lose 1 grade point for each absence**. Please note that I do not drop students for nonattendance.

**Class Participation:** Upper division PHIL classes demand thoughtful discussion based on careful reading. **Before each class, you are expected to carefully read the assigned text** while reflecting upon what it means and why it matters, so that you will be ready to actively participate in class. **Writing regularly in your Philosophical Journal** (discussed further below) will help make this possible. At the very least, **students are welcome to attend class when they bring a copy of the assigned reading.**

There are also ways of participating outside of class, including speaking with me during office hours or sending me your thoughts via email. Blackboard can also be used for commenting on the readings, asking general questions, and having discussions that extend beyond class. **I will determine your participation grade after consulting the self-evaluation you will complete at the end of the course.**

**Provocation:** In his 1838 Divinity School Address, Emerson said, “Truth cannot be received at second hand. Truly speaking, it is not instruction, but provocation, that I can receive from another soul.”

**Beginning in the 2nd week of class, students will work in pairs to provoke roughly the first 20 minutes of class discussion** about the meaning, value, and truth of the assigned reading. Practically speaking, this will usually mean: 1) reading and thinking about the material with great care in conversation with your provocation partner, 2) preparing a 5-minute presentation that highlights some important issues raised by the text, 3) making at least one philosophical claim about the reading’s meaning, value, or truth, and 4) posing a few thoughtful questions to your classmates in order to
generate a fruitful class discussion. Writing in your Philosophical Journal (discussed below) will also help you as you prepare your provocations.

**Philosophical Journal:** For ancient philosophers, the ethical task of caring for oneself (i.e., self-culture) was intimately related to the philosophical injunctions to “know thyself” and “study nature”. Like their ancient philosophical counterparts, many of the American philosophers that we are focusing on in this course—e.g., Emerson, Thoreau, Bugbee, and Anzaldúa—kept extensive journals as part of their ongoing moral/spiritual/intellectual practices of self-culture. Thoreau’s journals, which he wrote in almost daily for 24 years, consist of roughly 7,000 pages or 2-million words!

In this course, we will follow in the footsteps of these representative thinkers by keeping a philosophical journal. Think of this journal as a technological device that you may use to: 1) record the most important things you’ve read/heard/thought; 2) further develop your reflections upon these things; 3) explore who you were, who you are, and what you’d like to become in more depth than is usually possible in your hectic daily life; 4) cultivate your actions and character in light of these reflections; 5) think philosophically about the place you live and your experiences of the world; and 6) practice self-culture and keep track of your own self-making as the course progresses. Sometimes, I will give you specific topics or assignments to address in your journal, but your aim should be to develop the habit of regularly writing in your journal to practice self-culture, better understand the world, and philosophize. At the end of the semester, you will turn in your journal (or a curated sample of your entries, if you wish to maintain more privacy).

**Reading/Living/Writing Assignments:** After briefly attempting to live out or practice elements of the philosophies of Franklin and Thoreau, each of us will write an essay reflecting upon what we learned about the philosopher, ourselves, self-culture and/or the world in the process.

**Final Project:** By the end of the semester, we will have read many kinds of personal writing, e.g., autobiography, public lectures, journal entries, essays, poetry, *autohistoria-teoría*, etc. Your final project should somehow present, in your own style and voice, an understanding of American Philosophy & Self Culture that is inspired by the readings and class discussions. You might:

1. Write something that narrates how you have (or have not!) theoretically and practically engaged in the process of self-culture, self-improvement, self-transformation, or *haciendo caras*.
2. Engage in a substantial practice of self-culture informed by one or more of the thinkers we have studied, and write an essay reflecting upon your practice.
3. Make some art or engage in a creative performance, and write an essay reflecting upon it.
4. Conduct your own research on an issue related to American Philosophy and Self-Culture that wasn’t covered during our course, and write a paper about it.
5. Write a paper that deepens your understanding of one of the thinkers we have studied by reading more of their works as well as some relevant secondary scholarly literature.
6. Write a paper that compares or integrates multiple philosophical positions from the course to develop your own personal philosophy of self-culture.
7. Defy this list! Create a new way to express the American philosophical spirit of self-culture.

**Policy on Extensions & Late Work:** All assignments, including papers, are to be completed by the date indicated on the syllabus or announced in class. I do not mind granting extensions, provided that you let me know well in advance about your scheduling conflict. To ask for an extension, email me *(alex.stehn@utrgv.edu)* a minimum of 24 hours before the due date, briefly let me know why you need an extension, and be sure to propose a specific new due date. Otherwise, your request will likely be denied.
Scholastic Integrity: As members of a community dedicated to Honesty, Integrity and Respect, students are reminded that those who engage in scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and expulsion from the University. Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, plagiarism (including self-plagiarism), and collusion; submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person; taking an examination for another person; any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student; or the attempt to commit such acts. Since scholastic dishonesty harms the individual, all students and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced (Board of Regents Rules and Regulations and UTRGV Academic Integrity Guidelines). All scholastic dishonesty incidents will be reported to the Dean of Students.

Learning Objectives for Philosophy Degree: This course may be taken to fulfill a requirement for a B.A. in Philosophy. Students who graduate with a degree in philosophy from UTRGV are expected to have attained a certain level of intellectual development which is characteristic of the intense study of philosophy. The goals for all philosophy classes that count towards the major in philosophy include, in combination with the particular goals for the course, the following objectives:

CRITICAL THINKING AND READING: Students will demonstrate well-developed critical thinking and reading skills orally and in writing.

HISTORY: Students will describe the history of Philosophy, by identifying and distinguishing between the major historical and conceptual divisions of philosophy, the positions within those divisions, and major thinkers who contributed to those periods and specializations.

COMMUNICATION: Students will exhibit well-developed oral and written communication skills; will respond effectively to questions and criticisms of presented material.

ALTERNATIVE POINTS OF VIEW: Students will demonstrate the capacity to accurately present, analyze and evaluate historically underrepresented philosophical concerns, positions and traditions.

PERSONAL, CIVIC, AND/OR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: Students will articulate and evaluate their various activities, identities, values, and goals in order to develop a flexible strategy for ongoing personal growth, community engagement, and/or professional achievement.

Students with Disabilities: Students with a documented disability (physical, psychological, learning, or other disability which affects academic performance) who would like to receive academic accommodations should contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) as soon as possible to schedule an appointment to initiate services. Accommodations can be arranged through SAS at any time, but are not retroactive. Students who suffer a broken bone, severe injury or undergo surgery during the semester are eligible for temporary services. Brownsville Campus: Student Accessibility Services is located in Cortez Hall Room 129 and can be contacted by phone at (956) 882-7374 (Voice) or via email at ability@utrgv.edu. Edinburg Campus: Student Accessibility Services is located in 108 University Center and can be contacted by phone at (956) 665-7005 (Voice), (956) 665-3840 (Fax), or via email at ability@utrgv.edu.

Sexual Harassment, Discrimination, and Violence: In accordance with UT System regulations, your instructor is a “Responsible Employee” for reporting purposes under Title IX regulations and so must report any instance, occurring during a student’s time in college, of sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, domestic violence, or sexual harassment about which she/he becomes aware during this course through writing, discussion, or personal disclosure. More information can be found at www.utrgv.edu/equity, including confidential resources available on campus. The faculty and staff of UTRGV actively strive to provide a learning, working, and living environment that promotes personal integrity, civility, and mutual respect that is free from sexual misconduct and discrimination.

Mandatory Course Evaluation Period: Students are required to complete an ONLINE evaluation of this course, accessed through your UTRGV account (http://my.utrgv.edu); you will be contacted through email with further instructions. Students who complete their evaluations will have priority access to their grades. Online evaluations will be available April 11–May 2.

IMPORTANT NOTE: This syllabus was composed in good faith, with a schedule that will guide us throughout the term. Still, the professor may come to believe that reasonable adjustments are necessary. Any changes will be explained and communicated as far in advance as possible during class time or on Blackboard. Students are responsible for knowing about and adapting to any changes.
Tentative Schedule: (*Indicates text available on Blackboard*)

**Week 1:**  Introduction  
Wed, 1/17  American Philosophy & Self-Culture  

**JOURNAL:** What does it mean to "make something of yourself"?

**Week 2:**  Benjamin Franklin: Making the American Self  
Mon, 1/22  Franklin, *Autobiography* [esp. iii; 1-2; 38; 43-47; 53] & "Plan of Conduct"* & The Way to Wealth"*  
Recommended: Howe, "Benjamin Franklin, Jonathan Edwards, and the Problem of Human Nature"*  
Recommended: Cawelti, *Apostles of the Self-Made Man* (Ch. 1 on Franklin)*  
Recommended: Lemay, "Franklin's *Autobiography* and the American Dream"*

Wed, 1/24  Franklin, *Autobiography* [pp. 55-76]  
Recommended: Schneider, "The Significance of Franklin’s Moral Philosophy"*

**ASSIGNED:** Reading/Living/Writing Assignment #1

**Week 3:**  Frederick Douglass: How an American Slave Became a "Self-Made Man"  
Mon, 1/29  Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* [up to p. 43]  
Recommended: Zafar, "Franklinian Douglass: The Afro-American as Representative Man"*

Wed, 1/31  Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* [finish]  
Recommended: Howe, "Self-Made Men: Abraham Lincoln & Frederick Douglass"*

**Week 4:**  An Initial Attempt to Define Self-Culture  
Mon, 2/05  Channing, "Self-Culture" (1838) [pp. 5-31]*  
Recommended: Howe, "The Emerging Ideal of Self-Improvement"*

Wed, 2/07  Channing, "Self-Culture" (1838) [pp. 31-53; 62-66]*

**DUE:** Reading/Living/Writing Assignment #1

**Week 5:**  Emerson's Practice of Self-Reliance  
Mon, 2/12  Emerson, "Self-Reliance"*

Wed, 2/14  Emerson, Introduction to *Nature* & "The American Scholar"*

**Week 6:**  Thoreau's Radical Economics  
Mon, 2/19  Thoreau, *Walden* ("Economy," 1-38)  
Recommended: "Introduction by Ralph Waldo Emerson" (xi-xxxi)


**Week 7:**  Thoreau's Work of Self-Cultivation  
Mon, 2/26  Thoreau, *Walden* ("Where I Lived, and What I Lived For")

Wed, 2/28  Thoreau, *Walden* ("The Bean-Field" & "The Village")

**Week 8:**  Thoreau's Philosophical Legacy  
Mon, 3/05  Thoreau, *Walden* ("Higher Laws" & "Conclusion")

Wed, 3/07  Thoreau, "Life Without Principle" (745-769)

**ASSIGNED:** Reading/Living/Writing Assignment #2
SPRING BREAK (March 14-18)

**Week 9:**  Bugbee's Ethics of Self-Culture  
Recommended: Rodick, "Finding One’s Own Voice: The Philosophical Development of Bugbee"*  
**Wed, 3/21**  Bugbee, *The Inward Morning* (Sept 26 - Oct 18 = pp. 54-78)  
**DUE: Reading/Living/Writing Assignment #2**

**Week 10:**  Bugbee's Experiential Philosophy of Awakening & Wilderness  
**Mon, 3/26**  Bugbee, *The Inward Morning* (July 8-9; 12; 23-28; 30-31 = pp. 78-84; 88-91; 107-121; 124-129)  

**Week 11:**  Bugbee's Philosophical Legacy & Intro to Anzaldúa  
**Mon, 4/02**  Inward Morning (Sept 26-27; Oct 4; 17-30; Nov 2-5 = pp. 198-202; 208-209; 214-227; 229-232)  
**Wed, 4/04**  Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (Preface-Ch 2)  
Recommended: *Interview with Anzaldúa (267-284)*

**Week 12:**  Anzaldúa's Borderlands & The Awakening of Mestiza Consciousness  
**Mon, 4/09**  Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (Ch 3-5)  
**ASSIGNED: Final Project (Recommended: *Lamott, "Shitty First Drafts"*)**  
**Wed, 4/11**  Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (Ch 6-7)

**Week 13:**  Making Face, Making Soul, Making Heart / Haciendo Mundo Nuevo  
**Mon, 4/16**  Anzaldúa, "Speaking in Tongues"* & "Haciendo caras, una entrada"*  
**Wed, 4/18**  Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* (Preface - Ch 1)  
Recommended: Editor's Introduction (ix-xxxvii)  
**DUE: Philosophical Journal (representative sample of entries also acceptable)**

**Week 14:**  Self-Culture and Self-Writing  
**Mon, 4/23**  Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* (39-41; Ch 4)  
**Wed, 4/25**  Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* (Ch 5)  
**DUE: Working Draft of Final Project**

**Week 15:**  Course Wrap-Up  
**Mon, 4/30**  Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* (Ch 6)  
**Wed, 5/02**  Course Review: Putting Everything Together

**Final Project**  
**Mon, 5/09**  Due by 3pm (upload to Blackboard or give to Dr. Stehn in ELABS 359 from 1-3pm)