



Orthodox School of Theology  
at Trinity College

Trinity College  
Faculty of Divinity  
A member institution of the  
Toronto School of Theology  
Federated with the  
University of Toronto



**Course Syllabus**  
**TRT2841**  
**The Theology of Dostoevsky**  
**Trinity College**  
**Toronto School of Theology**  
**Winter/Spring 2018**

***Instructor Information***

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Instructor: Daniel G Opperwall  
Office Location: Larkin Building, Office 317  
Email: daniel.opperwall@utoronto.ca  
Office Hours: By appointment

***Course Identification***

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Course Number: TRT2841  
Course Name: The Theology of Dostoevsky  
Course Location: Larkin Building, room to be determined  
Class Times: Mondays 2pm-4pm  
Prerequisites: None

***Course Description***

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This course will explore the thought and career of Fyodor Dostoevsky. Often discussed for his contributions to 20<sup>th</sup> Century existentialist philosophy (of which he was a pioneer), Dostoevsky also remains one of the most influential voices in Orthodox Christian theology to the present day, presenting a unique approach to the religious questions at the centre of his work. Here, we will explore Dostoevsky especially as a theologian and religious thinker by examining his context in 19<sup>th</sup> Century thought, exploring some of his early fiction and non-fiction, and especially by careful reading of Dostoevsky's most important novels. The course will be formatted primarily as a seminar, with short lectures as necessary. Evaluation will be on the basis of two essays (one short, one long), a brief in-class presentation, and class participation.

## ***Expanded Course Description***

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Fyodor Dostoevsky stands among the giants of world literature, and is considered by many to be the finest novelist of all time. Often discussed for his contributions to 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century philosophical thought (especially existentialism), Russian politics, literary aesthetics, and reflective psychology, Dostoevsky's work is also profoundly and explicitly religious, framed in the context of his Russian Orthodox faith. While Dostoevsky spent much of his early career as a secularist, his best works were composed after his return to religious faith by way of influences like the elders of the Optina monastery and Slavophile thinkers. By the time of his death, Dostoevsky had developed a unique approach to theology, religious anthropology, and spirituality that continues to exert a profound influence on the Orthodox Church and the Christian world more broadly.

In this course we will explore Fyodor Dostoevsky especially as a theologian and religious anthropologist. Dostoevsky's choice to express most of his best insights through fiction make any exploration of his theological mindset both highly challenging and highly rewarding. Join us as we discuss Dostoevsky's most important literary output, including selections from his early work and (most importantly) two of his most significant mature novels. Careful reading and discussion of Dostoevsky's work will take centre stage, with short lectures and secondary readings offered to contextualize his thought and legacy.

This course will deal with Dostoevsky's writings in English translation. There are no prerequisites and knowledge of Russian is not required.

## ***Course Resources***

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### **Required Course Books**

**The following books should be acquired for this course as they will be read in their entirety.**

Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *Notes from the Underground*. Trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. (Vintage Classics, 1994)

Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *The Idiot*. Trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. (Vintage Classics, 2003)

Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *The Brothers Karamazov*. Trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. (Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2002)

\*Please note, students should use *these specific* editions and translations for ease of reference and discussion in class

### **Required Course Readings**

Frank, Joseph. *Dostoevsky: A Writer and His Time*. (Princeton: Princeton, 2009) [Selections only; available on reserve and online through U of T library]

## Course Portal

This course will make extensive use of the University of Toronto's Learning Portal also known as 'Blackboard'.

To access the portal, go to the UofT portal login page at <https://portal.utoronto.ca> and log in using your UTORid and password. Once you have logged in to the portal using your UTORid and password, look for the **My Courses** module, where you'll find the link to the website for all your Blackboard-based courses. (Your course registration with ROSI gives you access to the course website at Blackboard.) Note also the information at <http://www.portalinfo.utoronto.ca/content/information-students>.

Please ensure that you are familiar with how to access the system and navigate through it. The portal will be used in the following ways:

- Keeping an updated version of the course syllabus and calendar
- Providing course readings, bibliographies and other handouts
- Sharing additional online resources
- Communicating class notices and updates
- Issuing assignment guidelines and deadlines
- Accepting assignment submissions
- Providing feedback and grades for all assignments and other course requirements

Auditors who do not have a UTORid should speak to the instructor to receive guest access to the course portal.

## ***Course Learning Objectives***

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Students successfully completing this course will be able to:

- Identify key literary, historical and political influences on Dostoevsky. (Lectures; assigned secondary readings)
- Contextualize Dostoevsky's literature within his theological and anthropological milieu. (Lectures; assigned secondary readings)
- Analyze philosophical, theological and anthropological discourse as presented through fiction, with attention to the unique interpretive problems inherent in studying creative genres. (Class discussion; primary source readings; written assignments)
- Construct coherent descriptions of philosophical, theological and anthropological assumptions and arguments as presented through fiction and creative writing. (Class discussion; primary course readings; written assignments; presentation)
- Communicate more effectively, verbally and in writing, about theological literature by making effective arguments about primary materials, engaging relevant secondary sources, and meeting academic standards for writing and annotation. (Class discussion; written assignments; presentation)

Course Outcomes: Knowledge of the Area of Concentration	Course Elements	Programme Outcomes
<i>Students successfully completing this course will be able to:</i>	<i>This outcome will be achieved through these course elements:</i>	<i>This course outcome corresponds to these aspects of the BD Learning Outcomes</i>
Identify key literary, historical and political influences on Dostoevsky.	Lectures; assigned secondary readings	Religious heritage Cultural context
Contextualize Dostoevsky's literature within his theological and anthropological milieu.	Lectures; assigned secondary readings	Religious heritage Cultural context
Analyze philosophical, theological and anthropological discourse as presented through fiction, with attention to the unique interpretive problems inherent in studying creative genres.	Class discussion; primary source readings; written assignments	Religious heritage Cultural context Leadership
Construct coherent descriptions of philosophical, theological and anthropological assumptions and arguments as presented through fiction and creative writing.	Class discussion; primary source readings; written assignments; presentation	Religious heritage Cultural context Leadership
Communicate more effectively, verbally and in writing, about theological literature by making effective arguments about primary materials, engaging relevant secondary sources, and meeting academic standards for writing and annotation.	Class discussion; written assignments; presentation	Religious heritage Cultural context Leadership

## ***Evaluation***

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### **Requirements**

**The final grade for the course will be based on the following areas:**

- *Short Written Assignment:* Once during the term, students will submit a reflective essay [2000 words; strict cap] on assigned reading for the week. The short essay will focus on the primary source literature, and will not require secondary research. (20%)
- *Presentation:* Once during the term, on the relevant week, students will present their short essay (either formally or informally) to the class, and prepare to initiate the discussion section for that week. (10%)
- *Research Paper:* By the end of exam week, students will submit a research paper [5000 words; strict cap] on a topic to be determined in consultation with the instructor. The paper will focus on the primary source literature, but will be expected to involve substantial secondary research. The final paper will be argumentative and synthetic. (50%)
- *Class Participation:* Students will be evaluated on their preparedness for and contributions to class discussions each week. (20%)

## Grading System

Letter Grade	Numerical Equivalents	Grade Point	Grasp of Subject Matter	Other qualities expected of students
<b>A RANGE: Excellent: Student shows original thinking, analytic and synthetic ability, critical evaluations, and broad knowledge base.</b>				
A+	90-100	4.0	Profound and Creative	Strong evidence of original thought, of analytic and synthetic ability; sound and penetrating critical evaluations which identify assumptions of those they study as well as their own; mastery of an extensive knowledge base
A	85-89	4.0	Outstanding	
A-	80-84	3.7	Excellent	Clear evidence of original thinking, of analytic and synthetic ability; sound critical evaluations; broad knowledge base
<b>B RANGE: Good: Student shows critical capacity and analytic ability, understanding of relevant issues, familiarity with the literature.</b>				
B+	77-79	3.3	Very Good	Good critical capacity and analytic ability; reasonable understanding of relevant issues; good familiarity with the literature
B	73-76	3.0	Good	
B-	70-72	2.7	Satisfactory at a post-baccalaureate level.	Adequate critical capacity and analytic ability; some understanding of relevant issues; some familiarity with the literature
FZ	0-69	0	Failure	Failure to meet the above criteria

### Policy on Late Assignments

The instructor reserves the right to deduct up to 2.5% of the final assignment grade for each week that an assignment is late. Students are generally granted a 'grace week' provided the instructor is informed of any special circumstances before the assignment deadline.

This penalty is not applied to students with medical or compassionate difficulties; students facing such difficulties are kindly requested to consult with their faculty advisor or basic degree director, who should make a recommendation on the matter to the instructor. The absolute deadline for the course is the examination day scheduled for the course. Students who for exceptional reasons (for instance, a death in the family or a serious illness) are unable to complete work by this date may request an extension (SDF = 'standing deferred') beyond the term. An SDF must be requested from the registrar's office in the student's college of registration no later than the last day of classes in which the course is taken. The SDF, when approved, will have a mutually agreed upon deadline that does not extend beyond the conclusion of the following term. If a student has not completed work but has not been granted an SDF, a final mark will be submitted calculating a zero for work not submitted.

## Course Grades

Consistently with the policy of the University of Toronto, course grades submitted by an instructor are reviewed by a committee of the instructor's college before being posted. Course grades may be adjusted where they do not comply with University grading policy (<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/grading.htm>) or college grading policy.

## Policies

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**Accessibility.** Students with a disability or health consideration are entitled to accommodation. Students must register at the University of Toronto's Accessibility Services offices; information is available at <http://www.accessibility.utoronto.ca/>. The sooner a student seeks accommodation, the quicker we can assist.

**Plagiarism.** Students submitting written material in courses are expected to provide full documentation for sources of both words and ideas in footnotes or endnotes. Direct quotations should be placed within quotation marks. (If small changes are made in the quotation, they should be indicated by appropriate punctuation such as brackets and ellipses, but the quotation still counts as a direct quotation.) Failure to document borrowed material constitutes plagiarism, which is a serious breach of academic, professional, and Christian ethics. An instructor who discovers evidence of student plagiarism is not permitted to deal with the situation individually but is required to report it to his or her head of college or delegate according to the TST *Basic Degree Handbook* (linked from <http://www.tst.edu/content/handbooks>) and the University of Toronto *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* <http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/AssetFactory.aspx?did=4871>. A student who plagiarizes in this course. Students will be assumed to have read the document "Avoidance of plagiarism in theological writing" published by the Graham Library of Trinity and Wycliffe Colleges ([http://www.trinity.utoronto.ca/Library\\_Archives/Theological\\_Resources/Tools/Guides/plag.htm](http://www.trinity.utoronto.ca/Library_Archives/Theological_Resources/Tools/Guides/plag.htm)).

**Other academic offences.** TST students come under the jurisdiction of the University of Toronto Code of *Behaviour on Academic Matters* <http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm>).

**Back-up copies.** Please make back-up copies of essays before handing them in.

**Obligation to check email.** At times, the course instructor may decide to send out important course information by email. To that end, all credit students are required to have a valid utoronto email address. Students must have set up a utoronto email address which is entered in the ROSI system. Information is available at [www.utorid.utoronto.ca](http://www.utorid.utoronto.ca). The course instructor will not be able to help you with this. 416-978-HELP and the Help Desk at the Information Commons can answer questions you may have about your UTORid and password. *Students should check utoronto email regularly* for messages about the course. **Forwarding** your utoronto.ca email to a Hotmail, Gmail, Yahoo or other type of email account is not advisable. In some cases, messages from utoronto.ca addresses sent to Hotmail, Gmail or Yahoo accounts are filtered as junk mail, which means that emails from your course instructor may end up in your spam or junk mail folder.

**Email communication with the course instructor.** The instructor aims to respond to email communications from students in a timely manner. *All email communications from students should be sent from a utoronto email address.* Email communications from other email addresses are not secure, and also the instructor cannot readily identify them as being legitimate emails from students. The instructor is not obliged to respond to email from non-utoronto addresses.

## **Course Schedule**

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### **Week 1 – Introduction**

- Course introduction/syllabus presentation
- Life of Dostoevsky
- Early literary influences
- Translations and editions of his work

### **Week 2 – Early Work I**

- Russian politics and history before the 19<sup>th</sup> Century
- Russian Church structure, 19<sup>th</sup> Century
- Early political thought and influences
- *Notes from the Underground*  
*Reading: Notes from the Underground*  
*Selections from Frank*

### **Week 3 – Early Work II**

- Russian politics and history; 19<sup>th</sup> Century
- *Poor Folk*
- Launch of literary career
- *Notes from the Underground*  
*Readings: Notes from the Underground (cont)*  
*Selections from Frank*

### **Week 4 – Shifting Landscape: Middle Thought**

- Religious influences
- Last novellas
- Changing Russian landscape
- *The Idiot*  
*Readings: The Idiot*  
*Selections from Frank*

### **Week 5 – Mature Writings I**

- Slavophiles and their influence
- Acclaim and recognition
- Dostoevsky: novelist
- *The Idiot*  
*Readings: The Idiot (cont)*  
*Selections from Frank*

### **Week 6 – Mature Writings II**

- Genre: reading fiction as theology
- Dostoevsky: philosopher
- *The Idiot*  
*Readings: The Idiot (cont)*

### **Week 7 – Mature Writings III**

- Genre: reading fiction as theology
- Political turmoil in Russia; response and context
- *The Idiot*  
*Readings: The Idiot (cont)*

### **Week 8 – Masterpiece: Brothers Karamazov I**

- Elders of Optina
- Russian Orthodox piety; 19<sup>th</sup> Century
- *The Brothers Karamazov*  
*Readings: The Brothers Karamazov*  
*Selections from Frank*

### **Week 9 – Masterpiece: Brothers Karamazov II**

- World Politics: Russia and the West
- Stirrings of communism
- Dostoevsky: politician
- *The Brothers Karamazov*  
*Readings: The Brothers Karamazov (cont)*  
*Selections from Frank*

### **Week 10 – Masterpiece: Brothers Karamazov III**

- Aesthetics and genre of later work
- *The Brothers Karamazov*  
*Readings: The Brothers Karamazov (cont)*

### **Week 11 – Masterpiece: Brothers Karamazov IV**

- *The Brothers Karamazov*  
*Readings: The Brothers Karamazov (cont)*

### **Week 12 – Masterpiece: Brothers Karamazov V**

- Death and legacy
- Influence on modern Orthodox thought
- Influence beyond the Orthodox world
- *The Brothers Karamazov*  
*Readings: The Brothers Karamazov (cont)*  
*Selections from Frank*

**Please note that this syllabus is subject to change in accordance with the regulations in the TST *Basic Degree Handbook*.**