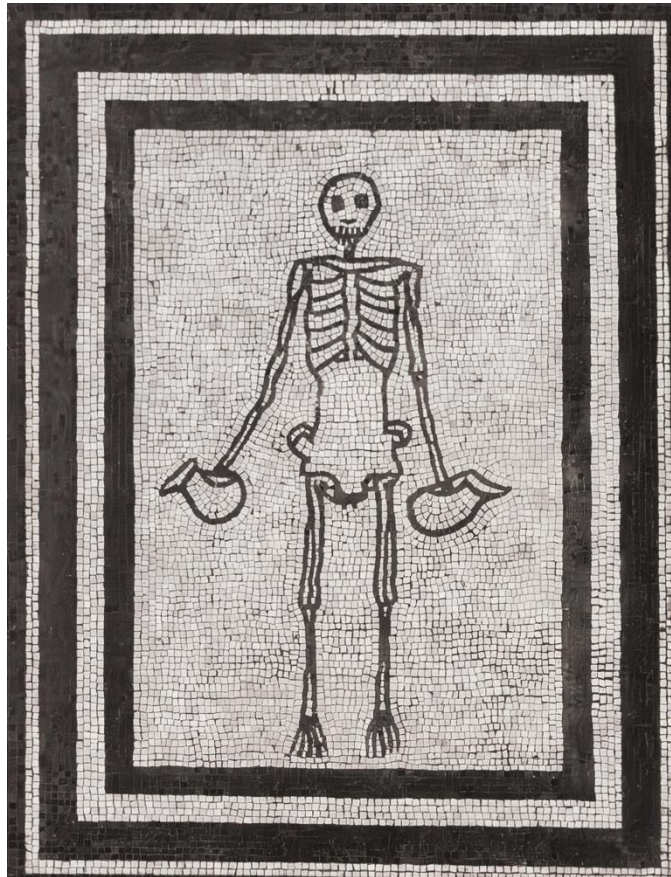


IDH 2930, sec. 25052 – (Un)Common Read (Fall 2025)

**DE BREVITATE VITAE (On the Shortness of Life)**  
*How to Have a Life: An Ancient Guide to Using Our Time Wisely*

HVR1 114, 5:10 pm – 6 pm



**Instructor Name:** Sara Agnelli

**Instructor Email:** [saraclassics@ufl.edu](mailto:saraclassics@ufl.edu)

**Course meeting times:** Monday (5:10 PM - 6 PM), [Honors Village Res. Complex](#) (HVR1), 114

**Office Hours:** Wednesdays, 10 AM, [Keene-Flint Hall](#) (FLI), 19

**Course website:** [elearning.ufl.edu](http://elearning.ufl.edu)

**Course credit hours:** 1

## Course Overview

Who doesn't worry sometimes that smart phones, the Internet, and TV are robbing us of time and preventing us from having a life? How can we make the most of our time on earth? In the first century AD, the Stoic philosopher Seneca the Younger offered one of the most famous answers to that question in his essay "On the Shortness of Life"—a work that has more to teach us today than ever before. In *How to Have a Life*, James Romm presents a vibrant new translation of Seneca's brilliant essay, plus two Senecan letters on the same theme, complete with the original Latin on facing pages and an inviting introduction.

With devastating satiric wit, skillfully captured in this translation, Seneca lampoons the ways we squander our time and fail to realize how precious it is. We don't allow people to steal our money, yet we allow them to plunder our time, or else we give it away ourselves in useless, idle pursuits. Seneca also describes how we can make better use of our brief days and years. In the process, he argues, we can make our lives longer, or even everlasting, because to live a real life is to attain a kind of immortality.

A counterweight to the time-sucking distractions of the modern world, *How to Have a Life* offers priceless wisdom about making our time—and our lives—count.

## Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Critically interpret Seneca's *On the Shortness of Life* and related writings within both ancient and modern frameworks.
- Conduct close readings of ancient philosophical texts, demonstrating attention to language, argument structure, and rhetorical strategies.
- Analyze different cultural perspectives on the value of time across historical and cultural contexts.
- Evaluate and compare the ways in which time is valued, wasted, or made meaningful in ancient Stoic philosophy and in contemporary life.

## Required materials

Seneca. *How to Have a Life: An Ancient Guide to Using Our Time Wisely*. Edited by James S. Romm, Princeton University Press, 2022.

All other readings and materials will be available on Canvas, in the Files section of the course website. While the total number of pages may not be extensive, the readings must be approached with care and close attention. Since they will serve as the foundation for much of our class discussions and assignments, it is essential that you stay current with the reading schedule, dedicating sufficient time and effort to fully understand the material. The assigned

texts will include reviews and scholarly articles offering interpretations and analyses of Seneca's *On the Shortness of Life*, as well as book chapters and essays that provide historical context and broader reflections on time from antiquity to the present day. Some readings will be more theoretical and demanding; others will be more accessible. You are expected to come to class prepared not only to accurately summarize the main points of each assigned reading but also to engage in thoughtful, critical discussion of their arguments. If you encounter difficulties with the readings, please do not hesitate to make an appointment with me or stop by during office hours.

Students are encouraged to employ critical thinking and to rely on verifiable sources to interrogate all assigned readings and subject matter in this course as a way of determining whether they agree with their classmates and/or their instructor. No lesson is intended to espouse, promote, advance, inculcate, or compel a particular feeling, perception, viewpoint or belief.

## **Organization of the Class**

This is a discussion-based course where participation is vital and will be significantly factored into the final grade. Students are strongly encouraged to participate actively in class discussions by asking questions, drawing attention to passages in the readings, or offering possible interpretations.

### Attendance, Class Participation & Homework Preparation (60%)

Your presence in class is essential, and attendance is mandatory. Your regular and punctual attendance is expected. Attendance will be taken at each class meeting. Unexcused absences will result in an automatic zero for the missed class. Class will begin promptly, and late arrivals are strongly discouraged; repeated tardiness will be counted as an absence.

The core of this class will be the in-class discussions, where your active participation will not only be graded but will also serve as a fundamental component for the success of the course. *I firmly believe that, more than an individual performance, a university class is a collective effort to enhance the knowledge of everyone, and we should all share responsibility for its success.* Please be an active participant in this class!

Requirements for class attendance, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies, which are available at:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>

## 2. Creative Writing Project (40%): "To Think of Time"

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To think of time—of all that retrospection!  
To think of to-day, and the ages continued henceforward!

Have you guess'd you yourself would not continue?  
Have you dreaded these earth-beetles?

Have you fear'd the future would be nothing to you?

Is to-day nothing? Is the beginningless past nothing?  
If the future is nothing, they are just as surely nothing.

Whitman (1892), *To Think of Time*

**Reflective Poem on Time and Meaning:** Write a poem that explores your relationship with time: how you value it, how you waste it, and how you make it meaningful.

In this project, you will write a poem that examines your personal relationship with time. The purpose is to encourage deep reflection on how you experience, use, and give meaning to the time available to you.

Compose a poem that explores three dimensions of time in your life:

1. How you value time – moments you treasure, prioritize, or hold as significant.
2. How you waste time – habits, distractions, or choices that cause time to slip away.
3. How you make time meaningful – the ways you transform time into purpose, joy, or fulfillment.

## Evaluation

Evaluation method in this course is consistent with [UF's policies on grading](#). Grades are calculated on a numeric scale, as below:

|    |        |    |          |
|----|--------|----|----------|
| A  | 93-100 | C  | 73-76    |
| A- | 90-92  | C- | 70-72    |
| B+ | 87-89  | D+ | 67-69    |
| B  | 83-86  | D  | 63-66    |
| B- | 80-82  | D- | 60-62    |
| C+ | 77-79  | E  | below 60 |

A grade of 59 or below is a failing grade (E). A minimum final grade of C is required for General Education Credit.

## Cell phones and Computers

The use of personal computers and other electronic devices in class is acceptable only for purposes related to class discussion and collaboration. Casual web browsing, emailing, chatting, texting, etc. unrelated to class activities will not be tolerated. Phones need to be

silenced and out of sight.

## **Plagiarism and Cheating**

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code”. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. [Here](#) you can read the Conduct Code. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor.

## **Policies on the use of GenerativeAI in this class**

U-M GPT, ChatGPT, and other similar technologies are advancing rapidly and there are many instances where they will be key tools in your schoolwork and career. For the purposes of this class, we are asking all students to pledge that they will *not* use these technologies. We believe this is key for this learning environment because we want you to learn how to *critically engage* with the material we’ll be discussing, including learning how to search for and identify relevant sources, synthesize these materials, and make recommendations without the aid of technology. Artificial Intelligence cannot do this learning for you. Students who are found to have used GenerativeAI or the like to complete their assignments will receive a grade of zero for that assignment.

## **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the [Disability Resource Center](#). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

## **Statement on Harassment**

UF provides an educational and working environment for its students, faculty, and staff that is free from sexual, racial, ethnic, gender, and religious discrimination and sexual harassment.

## **Online Course Evaluation Process**

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of

instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at: <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens and can complete evaluations through the email, they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluer.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

## **Campus Resources**

### Health and Wellness

- *U Matter, We Care*: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto:umatter@ufl.edu), 352-392-1575, or visit [U Matter, We Care](#) website to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.
- Counseling and Wellness Center: Visit the [Counseling and Wellness Center](#) website or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.
- *Student Health Care Center*: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit the [Student Health Care Center](#) website.
- *GatorWell Health Promotion Services*: For prevention services focused on optimal wellbeing, including Wellness Coaching for Academic Success, visit the [GatorWell](#) website or call 352-273- 4450.

### Academic Resources

- E-learning technical support: Contact the [UF Computing Help Desk](#) at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at [helpdesk@ufl.edu](mailto:helpdesk@ufl.edu).
- [Career Connections Center](#): Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392- 1601. Career assistance and counseling services.
- [Library Support](#): Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources. Call 866-281-6309 or email [ask@ufl.libanswers.com](mailto:ask@ufl.libanswers.com) for more information.
- [Teaching Center](#): 1317 Turlington Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352-392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.
- [Writing Studio](#): Daytime (9:30am-3:30pm): 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138 | Evening (5:00pm-7:00pm): 1545 W University Avenue (Library West, Rm. 339). Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.
- Academic Complaints: Office of the Ombuds; [Visit the Complaint Portal webpage for more information](#).
- Enrollment Management Complaints (Registrar, Financial Aid, Admissions): View the [Student Complaint Procedure](#) webpage for more information.

## **Syllabus Disclaimer**

This syllabus outlines the current course plans and objectives. As the semester progresses,

adjustments may be necessary to enhance the learning experience. Any such changes will be communicated clearly and in a timely manner. These adjustments are not unusual and should be expected.