

An Open Letter to Students Seeking to Enroll in Ethics and Oriental Religions, Fall, 2005

You are shopping today, well, so am I! Let me put my shopping in perspective. I began teaching Philosophy at ARC (one year at Sac City) September 1972 when I went to work for the State Department of Education, however, I began teaching full time at Loyola High School, L.A. in September of 1957, forty-eight years ago; then I taught at various colleges until I left the University of Santa Clara in 1972 to work for the State of California. So, I have been a part-time instructor here at ARC thirty-three years.

So, I have been here much longer than most of you have been alive, perhaps teaching longer than your parents have been alive. Now, two things I have noticed these last ten years: first, student skills and learning interest have deteriorated precipitously; secondly, my patience has worn thin. An example from last semester illustrates both. A young male student approached me after I handed back the first discussion paper in Ethics' class. I asked him if I could help him. He said "yes" – perhaps I need to describe the context: I had just handed back forty-eight first discussion papers. I had only given six grades to six papers; the remainder all had "rewrite" typed below the pages of my corrections. I asked him: "how may I help you?" He stated: "I do not like what you did to my paper"; I retorted, "I do not like what you did to the English 'language'", since I had made some forty corrections. He responded: "You don't understand: I like the way I write; it gives me pleasure". I merely pointed to the classroom door and asked: "Do you see that?" He said, "Yes, the door?". I said: "good, use it".

These last five years at ARC have seen dramatic changes. I have found that so many students merely seek to take a course to slide through and/or get an "easy" grade insensitive to any interest in learning or resentful of any challenge and I have no patience with this – I am too old; my love of learning is too great; my remaining days are limited in number and therefore, I do not want to waste my time - how much longer I shall teach here, I do not know. I take it a semester at a time. So, if any of you qualify as disinterested in learning or uninterested in being challenged: Do you see that door? Well and good, USE IT. Now, here is what this course requires: this course requires two things: first a competent command of the English language, specifically, grammar and punctuation – if you are incompetent in English expression but are interested in working hard to improve under my demanding direction, then stay and be prepared to sweat academically; secondly, a persevering effort to read and understand the texts studied within the course syllabus. So those are the kind of students I am shopping for; now, you decide if I am the kind of teacher you can love to hate. The decision is yours, but note that my demands are inflexible. You decide whether or not you want to work to learn.

This course requires two discussion papers so students may communicate their learning to each other. The course also gives a mid-term whose sole purpose is to determine whether or not the student is reading and understanding the texts as are listed in the syllabus. The purpose of the mid-term is to separate the student chaff from the student grain. The structure of the mid-term and the discussion papers is to separate the serious student from the curious student.