GENERAL INFORMATION

What happens in a Basic Program online discussion course?
When you take a Basic Program online discussion course, you’ll get the same information, same rigor, same instructors as you do in onsite discussion courses. The difference is that you’ll interact with others in an online virtual classroom rather than at an onsite physical one. Like our onsite discussion courses, the Basic Program’s online discussion courses emphasize close reading, critical thinking, and discussion. The amount of reading homework in preparation for each live, interactive online class session will vary depending on the course. There are never any writing assignments or examinations. All courses are open to adults and mature teens. All readings and discussions are in English.

Are there prerequisites for Basic Program online discussion courses?
Basic Program online discussion courses are open to all, and do not require students to have specialized prior knowledge or experience.

Do I ever need to come to campus physically?
No. You will have face-to-face contact with your instructor and the other students during the live, interactive (“synchronous”) classroom sessions made possible by an Internet “web conferencing platform” called Zoom.

What is the time commitment for an online discussion course?
Like the rest of the University of Chicago, the Basic Program operates on a quarter system. Courses in the Autumn, Winter, and Spring quarters are 10 weeks long. Summer courses vary in length but are usually between 4 and 8 weeks long. Special September mini-courses are 3 weeks long. Most online courses have 90 minutes class sessions, but some have class sessions that last 3 hours and 15 minutes (consisting of two 90-minute sections separated by a 15 minute break in the middle). We request that you log in to the online classroom 15 minutes prior to the start time so that you are ready when class begins.

Do I have to be a computer expert to participate in a Basic Program online discussion course?
No, not at all. You do need some basic computer skills, such as the ability to conduct a basic search on the web using a browser, and to download software from the Internet. It may take a few minutes when you get started to learn how to use the online classroom, but there will be good instructions along the way for using the technology until you get used to it.

What is Zoom?
Zoom is a leading “web conferencing platform” that allow individuals around the world to conduct live, virtual meetings — all free of charge to the participants.
Is there any orientation to using the online virtual classroom?
Yes. An online course orientation session will be held immediately prior to the first class — see your registration confirmation email for details. You can also:
- View a short video overview about Basic Program online discussion courses; the video is available at Basic Program website, the Basic Program Facebook page, and the Basic Program YouTube channel;
- Watch training videos at Zoom.us. Zoom also runs free live webinars and demos daily; and,
- Check our calendar for upcoming online information sessions.

Will I need to buy books?
Yes, you will need to buy the required texts for the course. The books needed will be listed on the syllabus for the course, which you will receive once you register. You can purchase the books online or wherever is convenient for you.

How do I register and access the materials for my online discussion courses?
Registration for Basic Program online discussion courses is exactly the same as registration for Basic Program onsite discussion courses and events:
- Online in the Basic Program section of the Graham School website;
- In person at the Gleacher Center office; or,
- By telephoning the Registrar at (773) 702-1722.

Course materials such as the syllabus will be posted to the class page on the Graham School website where you can download them.

What do I do if I have to miss a class session?
If you cannot attend a class session, please email the instructor ahead of time if possible to let them know you will not be there. If you would like to view the recording of the missed class session, the instructor can give you a private link to the Graham School YouTube video of the class session.

Where can I find the instructor’s contact information?
The instructor’s contact information can be found on the syllabus for the course, and in your registration confirmation email.

Where is the link for the online virtual classroom?
The link for the online virtual classroom will be sent to you in a welcome email after you have registered for the course. Once you have downloaded the Zoom software, you can also join the virtual classroom from the Zoom control panel, or on the Zoom.us webpage by entering the Zoom “meeting ID number”.
TECHNICAL INFORMATION

What kind of equipment and software do I need in order to take an online discussion course?

1. Access to a modern computer, tablet or mobile device (Mac, PC, Android, iOS, and Amazon Fire are all supported). You can access the online classroom via a mobile smartphone, but the video quality will not be good and it is not recommended. If necessary you can also access the classroom via telephone for audio-only participation if your video connection is not working (telephone charges may apply).

2. Reliable, high-speed Internet access via a hardwired Ethernet or a wireless WiFi connection. It is strongly recommended that you use a hardwired Ethernet connection if at all possible. If you must use a wireless WiFi connection, it is important that you have a strong WiFi signal at your location. In either case, it is also important that no one at your location is simultaneously using the same Internet connection for high-bandwidth activities (such as streaming videos from Netflix, etc.)

3. A headset with a boom microphone or earbuds with an inline microphone (such as you would use for a smartphone). Most computers and tablets have built in speakers and microphones, but these will generally result in a poor experience both for you and for your classmates.

4. The free Zoom software – this will download automatically the first time you access the online virtual classroom.

5. A recent version of a reliable Internet browser, such as Firefox, Chrome, Edge, etc. Zoom works with most browsers.

SETUP TIPS

Setting up your part of the online virtual classroom:

1. It is important to have a quiet space with a strong internet connection so that you minimize distractions during the class. Remember that everyone will be able to see you and anything else in your webcam’s field of view, and they will be able to hear whatever comes through your microphone.

2. It is a good idea to access the Zoom online classroom before your class actually begins so that you can get familiar with it and configure your audio and video settings. The classroom is set up so that you can join it at any time (even when class is not meeting). When you join the classroom, you should make sure that under video settings, you check the box that says “Always show name on video window”. That way people’s names will show under their video box. In the Zoom window, check the “gallery view” box in the top right hand corner. That will structure the screen so that each participant appears in the main window. You should also open the Chat window, so that if you run into any problems, the instructor can address them via chat. During class, it is good practice to mute your microphone when you are not talking to minimize background noise. You can mute the microphone by clicking the microphone icon at the bottom of the Zoom screen. A red line appears across it when your microphone is muted. You may want to practice muting and unmuting your microphone to get into the habit of unmuting when you want to talk.
3. In general, it is a good idea to join the online classroom 10-15 minutes before the scheduled start of each class session so that there is time to resolve any unexpected technical issues before class begins.

TROUBLESHOOTING COMMON PROBLEMS

I can’t hear the audio
First make sure your headphones are plugged into the proper jack. Check that the master volume setting on your computer is not muted and that any physical volume control on your headphones is set properly. To test your audio, click on the up arrow next to the microphone icon in the lower left corner of the Zoom screen, then click on “Test computer Mic & Speakers”, and then on “Test Speaker”. You can also reach this screen by clicking on the Settings gear icon on the Zoom control panel and then clicking on the audio icon at the top. If your audio is still not working during an active class session, contact the instructor via the chat box for a solution.

My microphone is not working
First make sure your microphone is plugged into the appropriate jack. Make sure that you do not have your microphone muted, either on the physical microphone/headset itself or on your system settings for your computer/device or on the Zoom controls (the microphone icon in the lower left corner of the Zoom window should not have a red line through it.) Run the audio set up check by clicking on the Settings gear icon on the Zoom control panel and then clicking the audio icon at the top. If your microphone is still not working during an active class session, contact the instructor via the chat box for a solution.

My video is not working
Make sure that your camera is not covered or obscured on your computer. Make sure that the video is not turned off by clicking the “Start Video” camera icon at the lower left of the Zoom window. You can check your video settings by clicking the Settings gear icon on the Zoom Control panel, and then clicking on the video icon at the top. If your video is still not working during an active class session, contact the instructor via the chat box for a solution.