Our fall seminar is an opportunity to develop the inquiry into human life and human endeavor that begins in our humanities classes and to expand that inquiry across a range of disciplines. We seek to find and explore the crucial questions or investigations that span the disciplines and also underlie our pursuit of all worthwhile activities. The fall seminar is thus devoted to the common ground and common themes of knowledge. In the spring, we will examine the ways in which different disciplines approach these questions differently. Most Fridays, you will have a short reading assignment, which is either already linked below or will be posted ahead of time on the seminar stellar site. Also posted on the stellar site each week will be a question for you to address in a paragraph or so (no more than one page), which you will hand in at the start of the seminar. We’ll begin with lunch and then, after about 40 minutes, begin the discussion. Concourse faculty will lead the discussion, but we want you to be active participants. Come hungry – physically and intellectually!!

I. Asking Questions

September 11
What is education (do we live in a cave?)?
Reading: selection from Plato’s Republic

September 18
What is happiness?
Reading: Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, prologue (section 5)
Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Book I, chapter 7
TED talk: http://www.ted.com/talks/dan_gilbert_asks_why_are_we_happy.html

September 25
CAREER FAIR DAY – CONCOURSE COMMUNITY PICNIC

October 2
Modern Science: what is the good, the bad, and the ugly?
Reading: Yuval Levin, “The Moral Challenge of Modern Science”
Reading: Primo Levi, The Periodic Table (Hydrogen, Potassium, and Iron)

October 9
Technology and the good life: can we have and eat the cake?
Mark Helprin, “The Acceleration of Tranquility,” Forbes Magazine

II. Pursuing Answers

October 16
Definitions, Models and Truth
Readings: Andrew Abbott, Method and Discovery
Plato, Republic (excerpt)

October 23 (family weekend)
MIT Chaplains (on failure and regret)

October 30
Evidence and Proof
Reading: Euclid, Book IX Proposition 21
Deirdre McCloskey: “Once Upon a Time There Was a Theory”
Plato, Republic (excerpt)

November 6
What is Knowledge?
Reading: "Theaetetus" by Plato, 145c-148e
Excerpts from Francis Bacon ("The Great Instauration" and "Novum Organum")
"When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" by Walt Whitman
Excerpts from the Feynman Lectures (Vol 1, Ch 38-6)

November 13
The Limits of Knowledge (What don’t we know?)
Readings: Bible (selections)
David Bentley Hart, The Beauty of the Infinite (excerpt)
Sean Carroll, “Quantum Field Theory and the Limits of Knowledge”

III. And Still More Questions…

November 20
What was a ‘book' in the Renaissance? What is a ‘book' today?
Prof. Jeff Ravel, History

November 27 – NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)

December 4
The Civic and the Political
R. Winters