



University of Colorado at Boulder

Sewall Residential Academic Program

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Re: Common Reading to Complete BEFORE classes start

Dear Sewall Student:

Welcome to Sewall! This letter includes a common reading that we ask all Sewall students to read and think about before the start of classes. This will be the first reading discussed in most courses taught at Sewall this year. No matter what Sewall course you are enrolled in for the Fall semester, please complete the assignment below *now* – before classes begin – and plan to bring your responses to the questions below with you to your first Sewall class.

All Sewall classes teach and practice analysis. As explained in *Writing Analytically*, a required text for all Sewall classes, analysis “finds questions where there seemed not to be any and it makes connections that might not have been evident at first” (4). Sewall’s common reading encourages us to analyze something we usually take for granted ... our values or morals. Our goal in focusing on morals is not to tell you what to think and believe, but to help you to be as explicit as possible about what you think and believe, so that you can talk constructively and effectively with people who may not agree with you. We hope this reading gets you thinking and questioning, and we look forward to hearing your ideas in class.

Step 1: Take an online questionnaire

Before you read the enclosed article, please take the “Moral Foundations Questionnaire” found at this website: www.yourmorals.org. You will remain anonymous when you take this, but you will need to complete a free registration on this website in order to take the questionnaire. The “Moral Foundations Questionnaire” is the first one on the list of studies they are running. At the end of the questionnaire you will be able to see the “results” from your questionnaire. Please print off that results page.

Step 2: Read the handout

Enclosed is a selection from an article about Prof. Jonathan Haidt’s research into political morality. This article further discusses the ongoing research that informs the morality questionnaire you took, and it will provide useful background to the scores you got from your answers to the questionnaire.

Step 3: Write down your reflections

After you finish the reading, please reflect on and write down your responses to these questions.

1. What do you notice from the article “Morals Authority?” What catches your attention? What do you find most interesting, strange, significant or revealing? Write down a list of *anything* you notice about this reading.
2. Look back over your list and choose one or two items that you find *most* interesting or revealing.
3. Write out a brief commentary on *why* you find the items you chose most interesting or revealing. In doing this, try to move from making observations about the article (noticing something) towards making interpretive claims about the article.

Please bring your copy of the morality questionnaire and your reflections with you to your first Sewall class. We look forward to meeting you soon!