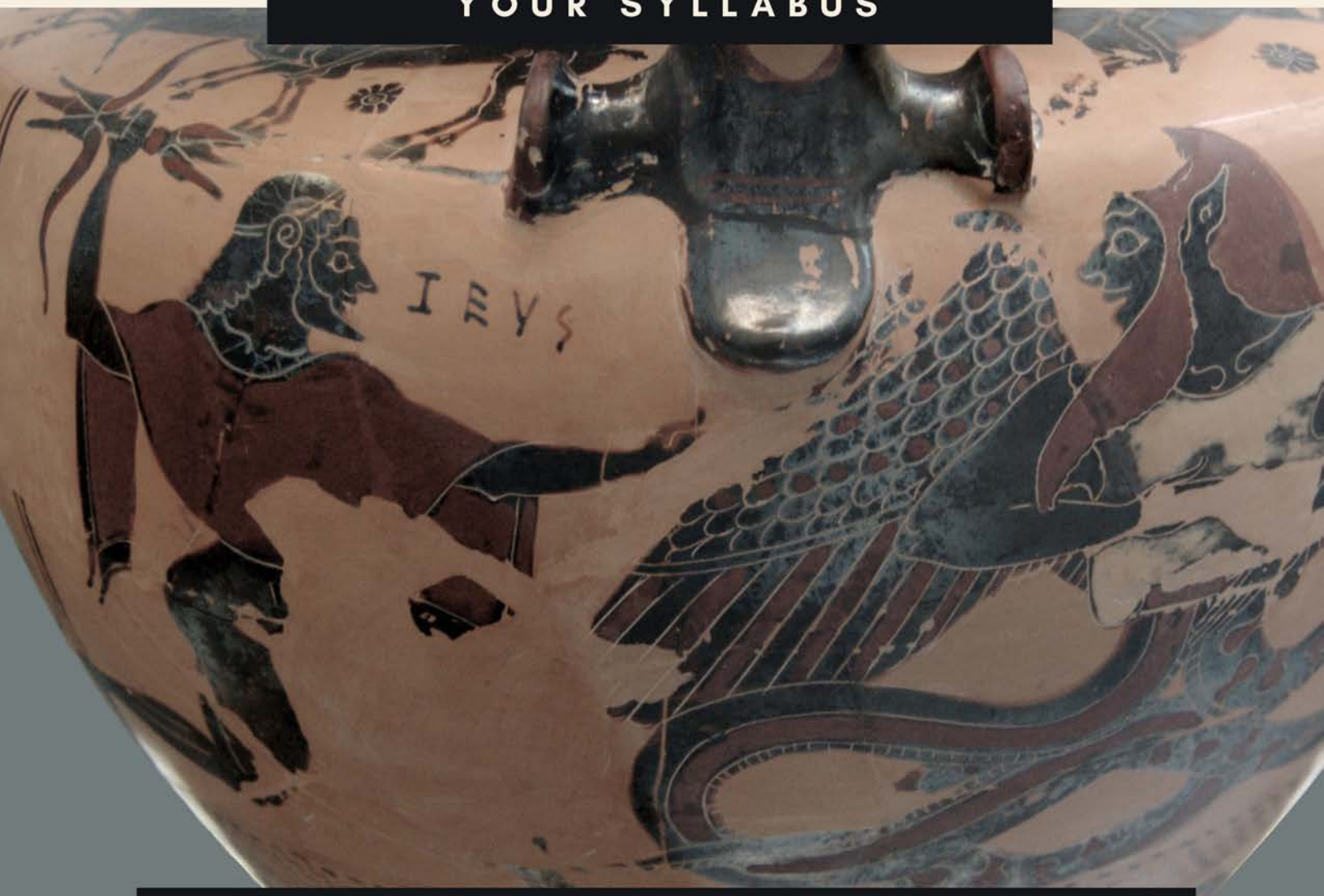
HUMANITIES SEMINARS PROGRAM // SUMMER 2026

THE GREEK GODS

LIFE, DEATH, DANGER & DESIRE

YOUR SYLLABUS



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MAY 28, JUNE 4, JUNE 11, JUNE 18, JUNE 25, JULY 2 [2026]

COURSE OVERVIEW & GOALS

Zeus, Hades, Hermes, Apollo, Dionysus, Demeter, and Aphrodite. The myths and legends of the Classical Greeks and Romans have captured imaginations for thousands of years, and at the center of those stories are the mighty gods of Olympus. In this course, we'll consider these gods, and use ancient Greek and Roman poems and plays, supported by examinations of art works, to trace what ancient accounts about these mighty figures can tell us.

We'll not only trace out the basic spheres of influence and iconographical traits of these divinities, but also the way these gods' stories are rooted in Greek religious practice and conceptions of humanity's place in the world. Our explorations will survey the Greeks' debts to their neighbors to the east, the ways in which divine myth was harnessed for political commentary, and what these conceptions of the gods help us understand about Greek and Roman ideas about love, life, and death.

ABOUT YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Dr. Robert Groves has been a professor of Classics at the University of Arizona since 2013. He earned a BS in Classics from the University of Wisconsin and an MA and PhD from University of California-Los Angeles.

Mythology was Dr. Groves' gateway to Classics, but his Ancient Greek course in the fall of 1999 ignited a love of language that has driven him to learn Greek, Latin, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Spanish and 2 forms of Ancient Egyptian.

His research and teaching interests include many aspects of the classical world, including Greek and Latin language and linguistics, Greek and Roman literature (broadly), the ancient novel, Greek history, ancient political theory, and American theatrical receptions of the Classics.

Dr. Groves is also an amateur singer, actor and trivia enthusiast, who acts, directs and occasionally sings in stagings of ancient and modern plays at the meetings of the Society for Classical Studies. He also regularly performs with (and writes scripts for) Reveille Men's Chorus in Tucson, and appeared on 3 episodes of "Jeopardy!"

OUR TEXTS

Recommended Purchases:
While there are MANY ways to accesss these texts in English, including free and online versions, students who are looking for high quality, modern translations that are modestly priced, I would recommend the following:

- ***The Greek Plays*** (2017), Lefkowitz and Romm, eds.
- **Anthology of Classical Myth: Primary Sources in Translation** (2nd Edition, 2016), Trzaskoma et al, eds.

If you prefer to use alternate texts for any reason, please obtain a text of the following Ancient Greek texts in English translation (or another language if you prefer):

- The Homeric Hymns
- Hesiod's *Theogony* & *Works and Days*
- The following Greek Tragedies:
  - Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*
  - Euripides' *Hippolytus*
  - Euripides' *Bacchae*
- We will also be reading relatively short sections of Homer's *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, Vergil's *Aeneid*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Vergil's *Georgics*, and Near Eastern creation stories. I will provide these smaller sources as PDF files on our course webpage, but if you prefer to obtain a physical copy you are welcome to do so!

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS & READINGS

Week 1 (5/28) -- Meeting the Gods & Hymning Them
Preparation: Please Read the Short Homeric Hymns and Homeric Hymns 3&4.
Class Topics: In this first session, we'll establish the basic facts about the study of Greco-Roman myth, including the basic features and domains of the Gods, and we'll think about the ways in which the "Homeric Hymns" give us insight into the Greeks' religious and literary practices.

Week 2 (6/4) -- The Creation of the Universe
Preparation: *Hesiod's Theogony*, Selections of Near Eastern Sources
Class Topics: Today we'll work to understand the most important Greek version of the creation story, including what it reveals about conceptions of the universe, and we'll also consider how the Greeks wound up with this story, and how it compares with some of their predecessors & neighbors.

Week 3 (6/11) -- Humanity & The Gods
Preparation: Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, Selections from Hesiod's *Works and Days* and Homer's *Iliad*
Class Topics: The famous stories of Prometheus and Pandora will frame our conceptions of the relationship between humans and the divine, including the ways in which authors used mythological stories to engage in political commentary, and reconsider social and religious practices.

Week 4 (6/18) -- The Power (& Dangers) of Love
Preparation: Euripides' *Hippolytus*, *The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*
Class Topics: Love, passion, sex, and desire played as big a role in the lives of the ancients as in our own, and the myths surrounding the goddess Aphrodite help us understand the way in which, for the Greeks, sexual desire was seen as among the most powerful forces in the universe, in ways that were equally exciting and dangerous.

Week 5 (6/25) -- Death and the Underworld
Preparation: Homer's *Odyssey*, book 11; Vergil's *Aeneid*, Book 6; Selections from Vergil's *Georgics* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.
Class Topics: The universal experience of death is among the truths most central to the ancient conception of the human experience. As we explore the myths surrounding death, we'll briefly visit Hades to see how the Greeks and Romans looked to the afterlife to engage with the past, to create the future, and to try--in vain, or maybe not!--to defeat the inevitable.

Week 6 (7/2) --The Mysteries of Life
Preparation: *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Euripides' *Bacchae*
Class Topics: In this final session, we'll move from death to life, and explore two gods central to human life, brimming with danger and destruction, but also, perhaps, the keys to happiness here on earth, and beyond: Demeter and Dionysus. As we consider these gods, we'll intermingle Greek and Roman religious practice with powerful symbolic storytelling and consider the role of myths in ancient lives as well as our own.