Invitation and Promise

This syllabus is an invitation to join in a triple-barreled journey on the subject of “justice.” Why “triple-barreled”? On the one hand, you will be entering into a conversation that is thousands of years old—namely the question of what is “justice,” and how (and to what degree) an entire society might be organized to realize justice. Exploring this question means looking at a variety of theoretical conceptions of justice. This semester we will focus on five major paradigms for thinking about justice, each of which is intellectually formidable and continues to be influential to this day: justice as fit (Plato), justice as utility-maximization (J.S. Mill), justice as ideology (Marx), justice as fairness (John Rawls), justice as recognition (Iris M. Young).

On the other hand, our engagement with the topic of “justice” is not simply theoretical. It is motivated by practical concern with the lives and well-being of citizens in the here and now. The United States in 2012 has many well-documented problems, including the highest level of poverty recorded in over 40 years, high unemployment and under-employment, stagnant wages for most workers, levels of income and wealth inequality which are extraordinarily high by international standards, stagnant or declining class mobility, educational inequality, homelessness, insufficient access to health care, and enduring racial inequalities, among others. Many of these problems exist in heightened form in the city of Richmond, which currently has a poverty rate (nearly 30%) roughly twice the national average, including a child poverty rate of approximately 40%. Many of those problems are also related to the social, political, and economic organization of society, which means they are questions of justice.

We will engage these practical concerns in two ways. First, we will examine some of them in readings and classroom discussions, with a particular focus this semester on poverty, the nature of the labor market in contemporary American capitalism, and the prison-industrial-incarceration complex in the U.S, drawing on four texts: Peter Edelman’s So Rich, So Poor, John Steinbeck’s novel Grapes of Wrath, Nelson Lichtenstein’s Retail Revolution, and Michelle Alexander’s The New Jim Crow. This part of the course is the second barrel on our journey.

Second, you will also engage these practical concerns directly through your work with community organizations in and around the city of Richmond. Most of you will be working in high-poverty neighborhoods, with children or adults who have multiple forms of social and economic disadvantage. This community work has several purposes: to expand your awareness
of acute social problems, to promote your personal growth and development by placing you in challenging circumstances and encouraging you to form meaningful relationships across demographic differences, and to make a meaningful contribution to the work of the organizations you are serving. You are not going out into the community to “solve” problems, but rather to first, learn more about them, and second, engage and address those problems in a spirit of collaboration with other organizational staff and volunteers and with those whom you are serving. This community-based learning is the third barrel on our journey.

If you accept this invitation, and especially if you fully engage all three barrels of the journey, you have an excellent chance of realizing the promise of the course: considering some of the great and enduring questions of human life on an intellectual plane at the same time you come to a more vivid awareness of why these questions are so important—for other people, and also for yourself. This class unabashedly aims to expand invitees’ range of empathy, and to foster what John Rawls called the second “moral power”—a sense of justice. For some invitees, it also might ignite what philosopher Robert Solomon termed a “passion for justice”—a lasting and stable desire to make confronting injustice a major part of one’s life.

**General Expectations**

This is a very demanding course. It involves both intensive reading and substantial direct involvement in the community, as well as periodic writing assignments. You will not be able to do well in the course unless you make it a major priority.

I have several expectations for students in the course. The first is that you show up at least one minute early for each class, and stay until the end (even if occasionally the discussion runs one or two minutes over time). Bathroom breaks are disruptive and disrespectful; wait until after class unless it is an emergency. No laptops should be used in class, for any reason. Taking of notes is encouraged, but you need to be prepared to participate at any time.

Attendance at all classes is mandatory. It is equally important, however, that you come prepared for class. This means several things. First, you should have done the assigned reading prior to class. Second, you should bring the relevant text with you to class. Third, you should be sufficiently rested and fed to be alert and ready to participate during class. Sleeping or nodding off in class will be regarded as equivalent to an absence. Fourth, you should have a notebook devoted to this class only, both for taking notes and for keeping any and all handouts over the course of the semester.

The reading load for this class will strike some of you as high relative to other courses at the University of Richmond. It is a substantial amount of reading, and doing the reading in a thoughtful fashion will require a substantial investment of time and effort on your part. Generally speaking, you should always be carrying a book with you (whether for this class or another) and reading should be your default activity during the week as a college student.
This class will be a lot of work but I can make three promises to you. First, the quantity of reading is quite comparable to what your peers taking courses on “Justice” (or political philosophy) at other high-caliber colleges and universities are required to do. Second, compared to many of those courses, the readings in this class represent a diverse set of genres: philosophical texts, novels, first-person nonfiction, short-form and long-form journalism.

Third, if you make an investment in this material, the intellectual and (possibly) personal rewards will be rich. You have the opportunity to engage in detailed examination of the question of what “justice” is and what makes for a just society, drawing on some of the most important thinkers in the Western tradition. You also will have the opportunity to relate these philosophical texts to contemporary issues of social justice and structural features of American society. Further, we will read work of two of the great authors in twentieth-century American literature, James Baldwin and John Steinbeck. By the end of the class you should have acquired the tools not only to engage in further philosophical enquiry about the nature of justice, if you so choose, but also the ability to critically analyze other contemporary issues from the standpoint of social justice, and the ability to think critically and creatively about how to respond to social injustice. This is an unusual opportunity to think about all these questions together, in a serious way—at the same time that you are engaged firsthand in the community.

Expectations Regarding Community Work

It is critical that you establish a connection with your service site as soon as possible, that you begin your service work no later than the first week of September, and that you continue to be engaged regularly through the end of the semester. You are free to make the arrangements with your site supervisor that best fit your schedule and theirs, but whatever arrangements you make you should honor. Last-minute cancellations are disruptive and aggravating to the sites. Show up when you are supposed to show up and be sure to communicate clearly with your supervisor.

Your primary purpose while at the service sites is to be useful and helpful to the organization you are working with and the population the organization serves. From a pedagogical point of view, the aim of the service work is to directly expose you to ongoing social problems in the Richmond community. In almost all cases, these social problems are linked to questions of social justice: inclusion and exclusion, educational and economic inequality, meeting special needs. The reading we do in class will, over the course of the semester, help provide a deeper context for thinking about what is going on at your service site: why the social problem you are addressing exists, what questions of justice are implicated in the problem, and why and how the problem is or is not being addressed. This does not mean that all the readings directly connect to the kind of work you are doing in your service site. It also does not mean that the purpose of the readings is to show you how to be a more effective volunteer.

We will talk about that question in the classroom from time to time, and you are invited to speak with me directly about that question at any time outside of class. If you wish to read a thoughtful
reflection on community service, the book *The Call of Service* by Robert Coles is highly recommended. See also the attachment “Reflections on Doing Community Work as a UR Student.”

**Short Explanation of the Course of Study**

This may be difficult and at times incomprehensible at the start of the course. But give it a try anyway. Then come back and re-read this near or at the end of the course.

“Justice” is a term with many meanings and many possible applications. This class is intended to explore many of these meanings and definitions, but it has a particular focus: social justice. We are not concerned in this class, primarily, with questions of criminal justice, for instance. Nor are we primarily concerned here with “just war theory.” Even within the framework of social justice, our ambit is limited. In this course, for instance, we will devote very little attention to questions of “global justice,” at least in the formally assigned readings.¹

“Social justice” is a distinct mode of enquiry from personal ethics. That is to say, when discussing social justice we usually are not primarily talking about the individual character attributes of particular people. Rather we are talking primarily about institutional arrangements: the way the primary institutions of society are organized, and how these impact the lives and “life chances” of each person within society.

These institutions include primarily the distribution of property and property rights; the law and courts; the form of government and the structure of political life; the mode of economic organization; rules regulating economic transactions; rules regarding the provision and distribution of health care and other care needs; and the educational system. They also may include the family, nongovernmental organizations, and religious institutions. In talking about social justice we are mainly examining how these institutions function and the ways in which they can be “just” or “unjust.”

The underlying assumption is that systemic social injustices are rarely a product of individual volition: correcting injustices is not simply a matter of convincing people to be nicer to one another. Individuals always find themselves embedded in particular social roles and identities only partly of their own choosing, and their actions and outlook on the world are shaped profoundly by institutional structures. If we regard it as unjust that some children in a given society are denied food, providing food to identified needy children, while admirable on humanitarian grounds, does not necessarily correct the injustice: that would require

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¹ This is worth bracketing explicitly, because there are good reasons to believe that questions of global justice carry a special moral urgency in the early 21st century. They require a special analysis, however, that is beyond the parameters of this course—although these readings will provide much material that is relevant to such an analysis.
implementing a system that assured that no children went without food in the first place. How to do that (i.e. who pays for it; how it is to be implemented) is an institutional question.

This does not mean, however, that questions of individual ethics are irrelevant in discussing social justice.

First, there is a long-running debate in political philosophy about whether, or to what extent, a just system of social institutions should (or must) aim to produce individual characters of a particular kind: that is, whether we should explicitly direct our institutional structures to encourage the nurturance of particular kinds of people with particular kinds of habits and desires. In this course we will be reading two thinkers with almost polar opposite answers to this question: Plato (who proposes a comprehensive educational program aimed at generating leaders of a very particular kind), and John Rawls (who argues that just institutions should not try to inculcate any particular way of life or any particular view of life’s purpose). But even Rawls thinks that what individuals believe and how they are motivated to act is important: their pursuit of individual aims should be (needs to be) regulated by a sense of justice.

Second, in many cases, there may continuity between concern for a particular problem or issue at an individual level and subsequent institutional analysis. Through volunteer work at a homeless shelter I may become concerned with the problems of particular homeless people and come to take an interest in their well-being. If I keep at it, I may become acutely aware of the limitations on resources available to help homeless people meet their needs and achieve economic and residential stability. This in turn might lead me to examine our public policies with respect to homelessness and affordable housing. That inquiry in turn might make me question why our society does not invest more in preventing homelessness, and lead me to question the overall distribution of resources in our society. Once we have reached this level of inquiry, we are clearly no longer talking about individual ethical questions (do I have a responsibility to help the homeless I see, and if so, how?) but about institutional questions: questions of social justice. But the origins of our interest in social justice (in this case, and probably almost all others) trace back to our individual concern for some particular person or persons (which may include ourselves).

On the flip side, the denial of social injustice and indifference towards, rationalization of, or ignorance of social injustice may be major impediments to attempts to correct such injustices. Indeed, one of the great evils of fundamentally unjust institutional arrangements is that they often encourage relatively privileged people to be indifferent or even callous towards the suffering and needs of others.

Third, and closely related to the above points, efforts to correct social injustices require the exercise of human agency. Often, agents must be willing to take great risks or bear enormous costs in order to confront existing injustices. Relatively powerless people run the risk of ostracism, economic sanction, imprisonment, even death when they challenge very powerful people and institutions. In other cases, persons in positions of power can make decisions which
tend to perpetuate, exacerbate, mitigate, or eliminate pervasive injustices. The actions of these agents may be informed by self-serving calculations, but they also might be informed by what Rawls terms the “sense of justice”—a sense of what a just society should and should not be. Put another way, the sense of what is just and unjust often shapes or influences human agency, whether such agency involves the exercise of power or protest or resistance to it.

For all of these reasons, it is neither possible nor desirable to make an airtight separation between a focus on social institutions and their effects and a concern with the beliefs, motivations, and actions of individual persons. Nonetheless, placing a primary focus on institutional structures and the way they pervasively shape life chances and also (often) the kinds of motives and beliefs people have is an appropriate if not essential step in studying social justice. To use a sports metaphor, what we want to focus on first are not the actions of the players, but the rules of the game itself.

**Justice and the Study of Leadership**

One final preliminary comment: how does this course relate to the study of leadership? This is worth noting up front, because unlike most other Jepson courses, we will not be doing many readings that are explicitly about leadership understood as individual leaders interacting with a community or an organization.

There are four points of connection worth noting. First, by exposing you to and compelling you to reflect upon some of the social inequalities characteristic of contemporary American society, the class is intended to deepen your understanding of the society we live in and hence the context in which leadership takes place in the United States. Second, in discussing competing accounts of social justice we are also engaged in a discussion of the ends of leadership: what is leadership for? What are we, or what should we, be trying to accomplish when we act as leaders? One very plausible answer to those questions is that we should be striving to build a just society. But if that is our aim, we need to have a fairly clear sense of what exactly we mean by the idea of a just society (given that there will never be universal agreement on that point!)

Third, to discuss questions of social justice, and in particular the question of what a just system of social institutions look like, is in the same breath to discuss the question of how leadership should be organized. Should society’s key decisions be made by a permanent class of well-trained leaders who are experts in promoting the common good? Must a just society be democratic? Is democracy co-extensive with social justice, an instrument to promote social justice, a threat to social justice, or all of the above? A holistic account of social justice necessarily involves some conception of who should rule—the question of leadership.

Fourth, over the course of the semester we will take up various examples of leadership for social justice. If one does not happen to be living in an ideally just society, how can one act so as to call attention to and correct social injustices? What obstacles might such efforts face? This class will provide many examples to consider, particularly in the novel *Grapes of Wrath*. 
General Course Requirements

1. Attendance at all class periods; preparation for class and active participation. You are expected to make your best possible effort to do all the class reading before class; for most class periods, discussion/reflection questions on the reading, and/or a reading guide, will be sent out in advance.

2. Completion of 26 hours of community service at a single approved site (no exceptions).

3. Participation in two off-campus field trips to engage in community observation:
   - September 3 tour of downtown with UR President Ed Ayers, and a tour of the Richmond City Jail during the week of November 26-30.

4. Attendance at any two of three approved on-campus events relevant to the course this semester. These events include: 1) Poverty Simulation, Center for Civic Engagement, 6 pm to 8 pm (food provided). Monday Sept. 17; 2) Center for Civic Engagement Brown Bag on Anti-Poverty Strategies in Richmond, led by Thad Williamson, Friday Sept. 21, 12:30-2 pm (food provided); 3) Weinstein-Rosenthal Forum on Faith, Ethics, and Global Society, Monday, November 15, at 7pm in Ukrop Auditorium – Queally Hall. From Hurt to Hope: Healing and Forgiveness in Richmond and Beyond, Rev. Ben Campbell and Rev. John Linney. Notify me by Sept. 5 if you will attend the poverty simulation.

5. Make weekly entries in an online journal, on Blackboard. Each entry should be at least 150 words (one well-formed paragraph); longer entries are encouraged if you have more to say. Topics you may write about: what is going on at your service site; reactions to and questions about the course readings; reactions to and questions about classroom discussions; connecting course material to current events; reactions to class-related events. These are not formal papers; use of the first-person is fine. Keep in mind your entries will be visible to other students. Online journals will receive a grade according to the depth of thought and effort reflected in the entries as well as the consistency with which they are kept up. Weekly entries are due every Saturday at 5 p.m.

6. Completion of two eight-page papers and one six-page paper due October 12, November 16, and December 7. Note that each due date is a Friday. You are welcome (but not required) to submit an outline and abstract in advance to get feedback and be sure you are on the right track. I will look at and return comments on outlines of papers that are submitted by 5 pm the Wednesday (hard copy preferred) before each final paper due date. I will also have extended office hours each Wednesday afternoon those weeks.

7. Completion of a final exam. The final exam will have three components: a closed book True/False section covering the entire course; an open book essay section covering class readings (you are permitted to bring class texts for this part of the exam); and a reflective analysis on your service site experiences this semester.

8. Completion of all course paperwork in a timely manner, in accordance with deadlines provided by Dr. Soderlund. Key dates: site contracts due Friday Sept. 14; hours log and site evaluations due Friday December 7.
Course Grade Determination

Class attendance, preparation and participation 15%
Online Journal 10%
Essays #1 and #2, 20% each
Essay # 3, 15%
Final Exam 20%

General Grading Standards

“A” work is well-written, well-argued, and thoroughly conversant with the source material, containing no major inaccuracies or contradictions, and illustrating subtlety and nuance of argument. “A” papers consist of interesting, substantial thoughts well-packaged in technically proficient writing.

“B” work attempts to forward an argument and shows good familiarity with and understanding of the source material, and is generally well-written. There are generally two genres of “B” work: papers that have some of the qualities of an “A” paper, but also contain serious flaws; and papers that contain no serious flaws, but also lack originality or depth of perceptiveness, or simply fail to be persuasive.

“C” work makes an attempt to complete an assignment but contains substantial flaws, either of writing quality, inadequate comprehension of the material, unsupported arguments, and/or logically contradictory or implausible arguments.

“D” and “F” work refers to papers that are seriously inadequate and fail to meet the basic requirements of the assignment.

Late Papers; Related Policies

Late papers are deducted one-third of a grade for each 24 hours they are late. After one week, late papers are assigned a zero. Do not ask for extensions; there are three deadlines for written work to make, you’ve been given the dates well in advance, and you should be able to plan your life so as to meet them. There are no appeals of assigned grades on written work, but you may request a fuller explanation if you are unsure why you received a given grade.

Attendance Policy

Each unexcused absence will lead to 2% being taken off your final grade. No exceptions. Why? Because every class matters. A head count will be taken at the start of each class and if anyone is missing an attendance sheet will be distributed. Falling asleep in class will lead to at least 1% being deducted. Repeated tardiness may also lead to a grade penalty.
Plan of Study

Note: When appropriate, copies of class lecture notes/outlines, discussion questions, and study guides for each set of readings will be posted online via Blackboard.

Unit One: Background on Richmond and on Poverty in the United States

Monday August 27. Introduction; Richmond as a Site to Study Injustice

Read prior to class (distributed as PDF): Class syllabus; Edward Ayers, The Promise of the New South, Chapter Six, “In Black and White.”


FIRST ONLINE JOURNAL ENTRY DUE SATURDAY SEPT. 1, 5 pm

Monday September 3. Overview of Poverty in the U.S. Peter Edelman, So Rich, So Poor: Why It’s So Hard To End Poverty In America, Introduction and Chapters 1-3 (pp. 1-80)

MANDATORY CLASS EVENT

Tour of the “Liberty Trail” in Downtown Richmond guided by University President Dr. Edward Ayers, 6:30 pm to 8 p.m. Transportation to be arranged.

Wednesday September 5. Poverty in the U.S. II; Poverty in Richmond

Edelman, So Rich, So Poor, Chapters 4-6 (pp. 81-162); Executive Summary of the Mayor’s Anti-Poverty Commission Report.

Unit Two: Plato’s Republic and Justice as Fit


Wednesday September 12. Republic, Books II and III.

Monday September 17. Republic, Books IV and V

September 17: Approved Class Event: Poverty Simulation, Center for Civic Engagement, 6 pm.

Wednesday September 19. Republic, Books VI and VII

September 21: Approved Class Event: Brown Bag on Poverty in Richmond, Center for Civic Engagement, 12:30

Monday September 24. Republic, Books VIII and IX

**Unit Three: John Stuart Mill and Justice as Utility-Maximization**

Monday October 1. John Stuart Mill, On Liberty, Pt. I. **In-class visit to UR Museums to see Dorothea Lange photography exhibit on poverty during the Depression.**

Wednesday October 3. John Stuart Mill, On Liberty, Pt. 2


**Paper Outlines (Optional) Due October 10, 5 pm.**


**OCTOBER 12: PAPER #1 (eight pages) DUE, 5 p.m. Hard Copy and Email.**

**FALL BREAK; NO ONLINE JOURNAL ENTRY REQUIRED** [Recommend that you start reading Steinbeck, Grapes of Wrath, on break]

**Unit Four: Marx and the Radical Critique of Capitalism**


Monday October 22: John Steinbeck, Grapes of Wrath, Pt. 1

Wednesday October 24. John Steinbeck, Grapes of Wrath, Pt. 2.

**Unit Five: John Rawls and Justice as Fairness**

Monday October 29. John Rawls, A Theory of Justice, Chapter 1 and 2

Wednesday October 31. John Rawls, A Theory of Justice, Chapters 3 and 4

Monday November 5. John Rawls, A Theory of Justice, Chapters 5; Thad Williamson and Martin O’Neill, “Property-Owning Democracy and the Demands of Justice” (distributed as PDF)


Monday November 12. Nelson Lichtenstein, The Retail Revolution, Chapters 1-4

**Paper #2 Outlines (Optional) Due November 14, 5 pm.**

Wednesday November 14. Nelson Lichtenstein, The Retail Revolution, Chapters 5-9

NOVEMBER 16: PAPER #2 (eight pages) DUE, 5 p.m. Hard Copy and Email.

Unit Six: Iris Marion Young and Michelle Alexander: Justice as Recognition, Injustice as Incarceration

Monday November 19. Iris Marion Young, Justice and the Politics of Difference, Chapters 2 and 3

THANKSGIVING BREAK—NO ONLINE JOURNAL ENTRY REQUIRED

Monday November 26. Iris Marion Young, Justice and the Politics of Difference, Chapters 5 and 6

Wednesday November 28. Michelle Alexander, The New Jim Crow, Chapters 1 and 2

CLASS VISIT TO RICHMOND CITY JAIL, Nov. 28, 29, Nov. 30. EXACT TIME/DATE TBA

Monday December 3. Michelle Alexander, The New Jim Crow, Chapters 3 and 4

Paper #3 Outline (Optional) Due December 5, 5 p.m.

Wednesday December 5. Michelle Alexander, The New Jim Crow, Chapters 5 and 6; re-read excerpts of Baldwin, “The Fire Next Time”

DECEMBER 7: PAPER #3 (six pages) DUE, 5 p.m. Hard Copy and Email.

FINAL ONLINE JOURNAL ENTRY DUE Sat. December 8, 5 p.m.

FINAL EXAM SCHEDULE

9 am section: Thursday December 13, 9 am

10: 30 am section: Tuesday December 11, 2 pm

You are permitted to take your exam in either slot, but if switching out of your section time, you must notify me by the last day of class, December 5.
Some Thoughts on the Challenges of Serving the Richmond Community as a UR Student

An integral part of the Justice and Civil Society course is your service in the community with an organization serving disadvantaged populations. Each of you will have a unique experience, and each of you will make connections between those experiences and the course material in a unique way. Our hope is that the experience of serving the community will both a) help you perceive that some of the problems of American society we will be discussing in class are very real and b) help you understand why the debates about what “justice” is we engage in matter.

Almost of all you are going to be crossing lines of privilege in going out into the community. The University of Richmond is a privileged community. It is located in one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the city of Richmond. The university has superb facilities, and a large endowment. It provides a comfortable living environment that meets or exceeds student’s needs. The true annual cost per student of a UR education is nearly $60,000, which is over 50% higher than the value of the median income of City of Richmond residents. The annual budget for the university, which educates 3048 undergraduates and 650 graduate students a year, is about 80% of the size of the annual operating budget of Richmond Public Schools, which educates over 20,000 children a year.

Because Richmond is located on the western border of the city, and because very few Richmond Public School graduates go on to attend UR, many residents and in particular many young people in the city have very limited knowledge of the university. Many have never set foot on UR’s campus. You may encounter people, especially children, who have never heard of UR. More likely, you will encounter many people who have limited knowledge and perceptions of UR, not all of which may be fair or accurate. Being cognizant of the wide gap between the circumstances of life at UR and life in much of the rest of the city is one challenge you will face.

The vast majority of Justice students also will be working with individuals who have much fewer material resources than what you had growing up. Nearly two-fifths of the city’s children live in poverty. Adequate healthy food is an ongoing issue for many of those children. Many other low-income children in the city also have experience with violence, family instability, relatives in prison, relatives with substance abuse problems, relatives with depression and other mental health problems, and the like—all of which compound the impact of material deprivation. But these same children are also likely to know all about the NFL, video games, pop culture, cell phone apps and the like, and to aspire to desiring the same things other American children want. It is likely you will be able to find points of connection with those who you are working with at the same time that there are deep differences. Learning how to negotiate this contradictory situation, overcome distrust, and build meaningful relationships is a major challenge. It is not a challenge many of you will fully meet in the confines of a single semester. Building relationships across class lines is difficult work. There’s only one way to get better at it: (thoughtful) practice.
A majority of Justice students will also be crossing racial lines in your community work. This is an additional challenge. A considerable number of Richmond’s neighborhoods are hyper-segregated, and some black children in the city live and go to school in virtually all-black environments. Some of these children are likely to make a lot of initial assumptions about you based on race, or to have additional distrust on account of race. Conversely, sometimes students of color from UR have been called “white” by children in the city, because they associate race with a set of additional attributes and behaviors; this is a way of saying “you don’t fit in, you’re not one of us.”

A final challenge to be noted here has to do with your work with the organizations themselves. Most of these organizations are engaged in trying to tackle overwhelming problems with limited resources. You are one of the resources they rely on. Whether you are the only volunteer at a site or one of thirty, your contribution is important. It’s therefore incumbent upon you to be sure you are a blessing and not a burden to the organization you are working with. If you become a burden, you harm the organization and ultimately the populations they are trying to serve. This means that fulfilling your service requirements in a way that meets or exceeds expectations is in fact an obligation of justice on your part.

Over the years may positive and negative things have been said about UR students doing community work. There are also a number of stereotypes of UR students to be aware of.

**Common Stereotypes of UR Students**

--May question your motives for coming into the community

--May assume you are personally rich and/or have access to lots of resources

--May assume you are sheltered/oblivious

--May assume that they will never see you again once you’ve checked the box and completed your volunteer work

**Negative feedback actually received about (some) UR students**

--Don’t take service seriously or treat it as a priority

--Act like their schedule is so packed that they can’t reliably show up when they are supposed to show up; frequently cancel; become a headache to deal with

--Lazy/passive; don’t engage proactively or make the most of the time

--Don’t focus on what they are doing at the site; spend time texting/talking on phone

--Inappropriate dress

--Inappropriate discussion/display of money
--Arrogant/impatient/believe they have all the answers

--Act like users of the organization rather than contributors to it

--Try to get by with the bare minimum

--Rush to conclusions/judgments about populations they are serving; fail to come to the work in a spirit of empathy; don’t make effort to see connections between what’s happening in the community and what is discussed in class

**Positive feedback received about (many) UR students**

--Dependable

--Engaged, Enthusiastic

--Contribute ideas/constructive feedback

--Go above and beyond the call of duty to create new programs

--Develop good relationships with kids/adults

--Think of new ways to contribute your talents to organization

--Humble and willing to learn from others; remember that “it’s not all about you”

--Willing to share one’s self

--Approach work from a standpoint of empathy

As this list suggests, successful volunteers treat their assignment professionally. They carry out tasks assigned by the organization, and when those tasks are open-ended they actively seek to go beyond the bare minimum. They recognize that their time on-site is limited and hence shut everything else out, turning off the cell phone and setting aside one’s outside social life, and focusing on how to be as useful as possible. They communicate clearly with supervisors and meet obligations reliably. They enter into relationships of care, respect, and mutual learning with the individuals whom they are serving. They seek to understand the circumstances of the people they work with from an empathetic standpoint that refrains from snap judgments. They give the best of themselves while soaking up as much knowledge and experience as they can.

**Concluding thoughts:**

Please read and reflect on this document as you begin your service work, and return to it every month or so as a check-in. Everyone has a different experience, and in almost every experience there are going to be awkward moments, and many will have painful moments. It is more than okay to make well-intentioned mistakes. This is part of personal growth. What we want to avoid
are mistakes that result from indifference or being oblivious to your obligations and to how you are perceived by the communities you serve.

To encourage the right attitude, this semester you are **strictly required to do all hours at the same organization.** You are strictly forbidden from trying to patch together hours from different sites, or quitting one site in the middle and starting somewhere else. The only conceivable exception is if there is something so seriously dysfunctional or unsafe at a site that it is determined that UR should pull its volunteers from the site. (This is extremely unlikely to happen.)

To summarize, enter your service work with two goals:

1) Don’t be oblivious (!)
2) Be a blessing and not a burden to your organizations