Course Aims

The aims of this course are fourfold:

1. To engage students in serious examination of the concept of social justice. What is a just society? What are its defining moral principles? What political, social and economic institutions are required to realize justice? What relationships must citizens have with one another in order to realize and sustain a just society?

2. To examine contemporary patterns of racial and economic inequality in the United States. This examination informs two further questions: First, how well does the contemporary United States realize social justice as a whole (as well as its component parts)? Second, what are the barriers to achieving a greater measure of social justice in the United States?

3. To expose students firsthand to community problems in Richmond, Virginia that are related to the distribution of social and economic opportunities and to historical patterns of racial and economic segregation. This exposure is intended to compel students to reflect upon the ways in which patterns of social justice and injustice impact particular persons and communities.

4. To engage students in considering how social justice might be better realized or advanced in the 21st century U.S., primarily by considering current community efforts in Richmond, VA that seek to expand educational and economic opportunity.

The course of study has six component parts:

1. Building a Theory of Justice. In this section, the theoretical core of the course, we examine the evolution of conceptions of justice in Western political thought from the late 18th century to John Rawls’s comprehensive theory of justice as fairness. We begin consideration of the implications of Rawls’s theory for the assessment of contemporary social and economic institutions.

2. Equality of Opportunity and Education. In this section, we examine the general impact of poverty and inequity on educational opportunity in the U.S., then consider the specific racialized educational inequities characteristic of Richmond and other metropolitan areas in the U.S. South.

3. Poverty, Underemployment and Social Welfare. In this section we examine the impact of U.S. social policies on the lived experience of persons in poverty, with a particular focus on the challenges of obtaining and sustaining quality employment faced by a large proportion of the population.

4. Poverty, Profit, and Housing. In this section, we examine poverty as lived experience through the lens of housing instability, informed by Matthew Desmond’s recent account Evicted.
5. **Towards a Situated Theory of Justice:** In this section, we examine a contemporary statement of how a theory of social justice should inform assessment of racialized inequalities in the American metropolis, Tommie Shelby’s *Dark Ghettoes*.

6. **Community Wealth Building in Richmond.** In this section, we examine one strategy for challenging patterns of social, racial and economic exclusion in a southern city by looking at the work of the Office of Community Wealth Building in Richmond to initiate a process of long-term systemic change in education, employment, and housing.

In addition, the course has a significant semester-long **community based learning** requirement in which students work with organizations seeking to address community needs in Richmond.

**Class Requirements**

1. Community Based Learning placement: 26 hours on main site. Students will work with Dr. Williamson and Dr. Kerstin Soderlund to establish placements for the semester.
2. Attendance at Matthew Desmond, One Book lecture on *Evicted*, February 1.
3. Attendance and one-page response paper at any **two** of the following events:
   - Jepson Forum, January 24, Isabel Wilkerson
   - WGSS Event, February 6, Courtney Martin
   - Jepson Forum, February 15, Jamelle Bouie
   - CCE Brown Bag, February 17, Trauma-informed Care Movement
   - Jepson Forum, March 21, Thomas Jackson
4. Mandatory self-guided City of Richmond tour via GRTC, week of March 26-April 1
5. Participation in mandatory class field trip to City Hall, Richmond Office of Community Wealth Building, Friday April 14.

*Successful completion and verification of mandatory community based learning is a requirement of a passing grade in this course.*

1. Three (3) six-page analytical papers, one of which will be a take-home quiz 45%
2. One (1) twelve-page final paper 35%
3. Attendance, preparation for class, and consistent participation 15%
4. Attendance at mandatory events and written responses to two events 5%

**Notes on Written Assignments**

The three six-page papers will be based on analysis of the course material in the first four sections of the course. Essay questions will be assigned the week prior to the due date (7 days or more). Tips on writing for this course will be distributed prior to the first paper.

The final twelve page paper will require students to integrate their community based learning experience with course material throughout the course, especially content in section 6 (on community wealth building in Richmond). Detailed instructions for the final paper will be distributed one month before the final due date.

**General Course Policies**
1. Arrive three to five minutes early to class so we can start on time.
2. Get enough sleep before you come, and eat breakfast.
3. Coffee in class is okay, but food is not.
4. Go to the bathroom before class. Do not interrupt class by doing so.
5. No electronic devices in use in class. All cell phones must be completely powered off and stored away.
6. Bring your book to class every time.
7. No class absences without permission are acceptable. Each unexcused absence will lead to a full letter grade drop in your semester participation grade. Falling asleep in class or other disruptive behavior will be treated as an absence.
8. Every student must attend professor’s office hours at least once prior to spring break.

How and Why to READ for this Class

Reading must be the fundamental default activity of all college students. When you are not doing anything else, you should be reading. This class will require that you do a lot of reading.

We live in a culture that has devalued deep reading and thinking. Why then read books, as opposed to just a series of short articles or excerpts? Because books are still the best technology we have for allowing a sophisticated train of thought—or body of knowledge—to be communicated from one human mind to another. A book allows the author to explore an event, person, or question in sustained depth, to present a sustained argument supported by evidence, to make connections between different events or phenomena, or to explore all sides of a disputed question thoroughly. Or a book may simply expand or stimulate our imaginations, our moral consciences, our sense of what is possible in human life. To read an interesting, important, or imagination-expanding book is one of life’s great pleasures—but it is a pleasure it takes effort to cultivate. Think of reading a book as engaging your mind with someone else’s mind in an extended, in-depth conversation. If your reading takes the form of a thoughtful, internal conversation with the author, when it comes time to write your papers—your actual chance to “talk back” to the author and his or her ideas—you won’t be struggling to generate material from scratch; instead you will simply be transcribing and refining the conversation you’ve already had in your brain. Good writing is fundamentally a result of good thinking, and good thinking comes about via the practice and habit of being in conversation with good thinkers—such as the authors we will be reading this semester.

But how then to read thoughtfully?

First, cut out the distractions. Turn off social media, the Internet, and anything else that might tempt you to turn your mind away from what you are reading. Find a quiet space where you can concentrate fully on the text.

Second, set yourself an attainable goal for how long you will concentrate fully on reading the text. Whether it’s thirty minutes, an hour, or two hours, set a goal, and stick to that goal, with the aim of increasing it over time. If you can learn how to sit in the library or somewhere for three consecutive hours, reading for 45-50 minutes at time, then taking 10-15 minute breaks each hour,
you will over the course of the week get a lot done—and more importantly, have a lot of fruitful conversations with great thinkers and writers.

Third, take notes as you go—either in the text margins, or in a notebook. This is helpful in keeping track of the author’s train of thought, and will help you remember arguments and key points when you go back to review or re-read.

Fourth, when you are done reading a section, write down a few key points the author made, or alternatively some questions you have about the author’s arguments.

Fifth, as you are reading, think not just about the face value arguments of the text, but also about the author’s intended audience and purpose. Why and for whom was this book written? Being able to answer that question often is very helpful in understanding the text as a whole.

Sixth—and this is the most advanced skill, and one that will take time to master—think critically about what you are reading. Even the most brilliant texts, texts that have impeccable internal logic and that will make you smarter simply by reading them, have limitations of perspective and purpose. What does a text written in the 18th century about the human condition have to say that is of enduring value to us today? Adam Smith can’t answer that question—it is our job as students to answer that question ourselves.

OVERVIEW OF COURSE OF STUDY

January 11. Class overview; idea of society as a system of social cooperation; idea of “basic structure” of society; Richmond context.

ALL STUDENTS MUST MEET WITH DR. SODERLUND & DR. WILLIAMSON, WED 1/11 or FRIDAY 1/13

Section I: Theory


January 18. J.S. Mill, Utilitarianism, Sections 1, 2, 5.


January 25. Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts: Labor

January 27. Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts: Capital

February 1. John Rawls, A Theory of Justice (excerpts), discussion of overall framework, concept of Original Position, concept of reflective equilibrium


February 3. John Rawls, A Theory of Justice (excerpts): Discussion of argument for and meaning of First Principle; critique of utilitarianism; concept of “political liberalism”


**FIRST PAPER DUE MONDAY FEBRUARY 13, 5 pm**

February 15. Paul Tough, *Helping Children Succeed*

February 17. Paul Tough, *Helping Children Succeed*


**SECOND PAPER (TAKE-HOME QUIZ) DUE MARCH 3, 5 pm --- SPRING BREAK**

March 15. Matthew Desmond, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*

March 17. Matthew Desmond, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*

March 22. Matthew Desmond, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*

March 24. Matthew Desmond, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*

March 29. Tommie Shelby, *Dark Ghettos: Injustice, Dissent and Reform*

March 31. Tommie Shelby, *Dark Ghettos: Injustice, Dissent and Reform*

April 5. Tommie Shelby, *Dark Ghettos: Injustice, Dissent and Reform*

April 7. Tommie Shelby, *Dark Ghettos: Injustice, Dissent and Reform*

**THIRD PAPER DUE APRIL 10, 5 p.m.**

April 12. Mayor’s Anti-Poverty Commission Report, 2013

April 14. Office of Community Wealth Building Annual Reports, 2016 and 2017

**MANDATORY FIELD TRIP TO RICHMOND CITY HALL, APRIL 14**

April 19. Richmond Social Enterprise Plan, 2016


**FINAL PAPER DUE APRIL 28, 5 pm**