Course Aims

This course has five core aims:

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, gender and economic inequality in the United States, through the lens of both narrative accounts and policy analysis. 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., including by considering current community efforts in Richmond, VA that seek to expand educational and economic opportunity.

5. To encourage students to think intensively and critically about their own personal responsibility for and capacity to bring about a greater degree of justice, over the course of their lives, both as individuals and in concert with others.
Jepson School of Leadership Studies Common Course Policies

**Awarding of Credit**
To be successful in this course, a student should expect to devote 10-14 hours each week, including class time and time spent on course-related activities.
[registrar.richmond.edu/services/policies/academic-credit.html](registrar.richmond.edu/services/policies/academic-credit.html)

**Disability Accommodations**
Students with a Disability Accommodation Notice should contact their instructors as early in the semester as possible to discuss arrangements for completing course assignments and exams.
[disability.richmond.edu/](disability.richmond.edu/)

**Honor System**
The Jepson School supports the provisions of the Honor System. The shortened version of the honor pledge is: “I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work.”
[studentdevelop.m.ent.richmond.edu/student-handbook/honor/the-honor-code.html](studentdevelop.m.ent.richmond.edu/student-handbook/honor/the-honor-code.html)

**Religious Observance**
Students should notify their instructors within the first two weeks of classes if they will need accommodations for religious observance.
[registrar.richmond.edu/planning/religiousobs.html](registrar.richmond.edu/planning/religiousobs.html)

**Note on Class Evaluations**
Student course evaluations will be completed in-class on the last day of the semester. Bring a laptop to the final day of class. All students are requested to complete the evaluation. Your participation is helpful in improving pedagogy and effective learning in the Jepson School.
General grading standards:

- A range grades are given for truly outstanding written work that not only meets the basic requirements of the given assignment but also demonstrates exceptional insight, clarity, and depth of thought. For instance, an A-range paper will not simply forward a coherent argument, but also anticipate and attempt to answer likely objections to the argument, and/or acknowledge points at which one’s argument might be vulnerable. Such papers will also be very well-organized and well-written, and gracefully presented.
- B range grades are given for good and very good written work which amply meets all the basic requirements of the given assignment and reflects substantial effort and engagement with the material. Such work is generally well-written and well-organized, shows good understanding of the course material, and avoids major substantive or logical errors. B is a good grade for any assignment in this course, and B+ is a very good grade.
- C range grades are given for work which attempts to fulfill the requirements of the assignment but which falls short in some substantial way, with respect to organization, writing quality, understanding of the material, or argumentative logic.
- D and F grades are reserved for work which comes nowhere close to meeting the requirements of the assignment.

Criteria for assessing class participation (courtesy Peter Levine, Tufts University)

1. Attendance.
2. Engaging in a discussion that is informed by the assigned texts.
3. Focusing on the topic and the texts, which does not preclude drawing connections beyond them.
4. Being responsive to other students. Responsiveness needn’t always be immediate, verbal, or occur within the class discussion itself.
5. Building on others’ contributions, and sometimes making links among different people’s contributions or between what they have said and the text.
6. Demonstrating genuine respect for the others, where respect does not require agreement. In fact, sometimes respect requires explicit disagreement because you take the other person’s ideas seriously.
7. Taking risks, trying out ideas that you don’t necessarily endorse, and asking questions that might be perceived as naive or uninformed.
8. Seeking truth or clarity or insight (instead of other objectives).
9. Exercising freedom of speech along with a degree of tact and concern for the other people.
10. Demonstrating responsibility for the other students’ learning in what you say (and occasionally by a decision not to speak).

Class Requirements

1. Civic engagement and community based learning requirements: Students are required to spend a total of 30 hours in civic engagement activities in this class, of which a minimum of 20 hours must consist of community based learning at a designated site.
Students may fulfill the civic engagement requirement by spending 30 hours at their community based learning site, or by spending up to ten hours in other forms of engagement such as attendance at Jepson Forum events, attendance at campus and community events relevant to this class. **Students must document both their community based learning and their civic engagement activities. Students should keep a portfolio of all work done for this course, including a detailed description (totaling one page) of all civic engagement activities.**

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

2. On-time, attentive attendance at each class session. Missing class or being late will not be tolerated. The first unexcused absence will lead to a warning and a 5-point penalty on your participation grade; subsequent unexcused absences will lead to two-point reductions on your final course grade per each absence.

3. Weekly “Four Things” papers. Each Friday at the start of class, you are to hand in a written statement of four things about that week’s reading you found interesting, puzzling, troubling, intriguing, worthy of discussion. This should generally consist of a total of four sentences, with each sentence naming the “thing” and stating why you included it.  

4. Four (4) analytical papers, length 4 or 5 pages  
5. One (1) twelve-page final paper  
6. Class participation (see guidelines above), community engagement

**Notes on Written Assignments**

Prompts for the four analytical papers will be distributed at least 7 days prior to their due date, and will include instructions and guidelines. (The main tip: read thoroughly the book you are writing about.)

The final twelve page paper will require students to integrate their community based learning experience with course material throughout the course, especially content in the last week (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 two minutes prior 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 **prior to entering the classroom.**
6. Bring your book to class every time.
7. No class absences without permission are acceptable.
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 imagininations, 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 19th century about the human condition have to say that is of enduring value to us today? John Stuart Mill can’t answer that question—it is our job as students to answer that question ourselves.
Course of Study

Required books at bookstore:
Danielle Allen, Cuz
Adam Smith, Theory of Moral Sentiments
J.S. Mill, Basic Political Writings of John Stuart Mill
Tressie McMillan Cottom, Thick
Paul Tough, The Years That Matter Most
John Rawls, A Theory of Justice
Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels, The Communist Manifesto
Reinhold Niebuhr, Love and Justice
Matthew Desmond, Evicted

Note: “Four Things” assignment due each Friday at beginning of class, hard copy.

Week 1: January 15 and 17
Danielle Allen, Cuz, Parts 1 and 2

Week 2: January 22
Danielle Allen, Cuz, Part 3

January 24
Adam Smith, Theory of Moral Sentiments, pp. 9-26, 50-66, 67-71, 82-92

Week 3: January 29 and January 31

Paper 1: Due Monday February 3, 6 p.m.

Week 4: February 5
J.S. Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapters 1-3, 5

February 7
J.S. Mill, On Liberty, Chapters 1-4

Week 5: February 12
Mill, The Subjection of Women, Tressie McMillan Cottom, Thick (Chapters 1-2)

February 14
Tressie McMillan Cottom, Thick (Chapters 3-8)
**Week 6: February 19**
Paul Tough, *The Years That Matter Most*, Chapters 1-3

**February 21**
Attend Wyatt Tee Walker Symposium, Camp Concert Hall

**Week 7: February 26 and February 28**
Paul Tough, *The Years That Matter Most*, Chapters 4-9

**Paper 2: Due Monday March 2, 6 p.m.**

**Week 8: March 4 and March 6**
John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Chapters 1 and 2

*Important: You are expected and required to attend class the last day before Spring Break. Make your plans accordingly; no excuses.*

**SPRING BREAK!**

**Week 9: March 18**

**March 20**
Karl Marx, *Communist Manifesto*

**Week 10: March 25**

**March 27**
Reinhold Niebuhr, *Love and Justice*, Part One; Part Two, C.

**Paper 3: Due Monday March 30, 6 p.m.**

**Week 11: April 1**
Mayor’s Anti-Poverty Commission Report (January 2013), Richmond, VA; City of Richmond, Office of Community Wealth Building Annual Report (March 2020)

**April 3**
Matthew Desmond, *Evicted*, Part One

**Week 12: April 8 and April 10**
Matthew Desmond, *Evicted*, Part Two

**Week 13: April 15 and April 17**
Matthew Desmond, *Evicted*, Part Three; Additional reports on evictions in Richmond
Paper 4: Due Monday April 20, 6 p.m.

Week 14: April 22

Melody C. Barnes and Thad Williamson, “Becoming the America We Should Be But Never Have Been.”

April 24

Reinhold Niebuhr, Love and Justice, Chapter 51 and other selections TBA

FINAL PAPER (TWELVE PAGES) DUE SATURDAY MAY 1, NOON. Submit Course Portfolio of all written work, including documentation of civic engagement outside CBL placement.