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., including by considering current community efforts in Richmond, VA that seek to expand educational and economic opportunity.

The course of study has four component parts:

1. **Theory: What Do We Mean When We Talk About “Justice”?**
2. **Policy: How Public Policies Structure Outcomes**
3. **Experience: Personal Impact of Structural Injustice**
4. **Hope/Change: Working for Justice**

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: 24 hours on main site. Students will be placed with either the RVA Future Centers or with the Mayor’s Youth Academy.
2. Attendance at the following two Jepson Leadership Forum events: Wednesday September 12, **Mayor Levar Stoney** (on voter disenfranchisement), 7 pm; Thursday October 25, **Peter Edelman** (on criminalization of poverty), 4:30 pm. Submit a brief two paragraph summary of the event and how it relates to Justice within one week following the event.
3. Attendance at any two of the following events on campus: Wyatt Tee Walker archive launch panel and roundtable, Thursday September 13, 3 p.m.; Joseph Evans speech on the Poor People’s Campaign; Thursday September 13, 6 p.m; Jonathan Haidt (on viewpoint diversity), Thursday September 27, 7 p.m.; Janaya Khan (on Black Lives Matter), Thursday October 25, 7 p.m.; Beverley Tatum (on “empathy gap”), November 1, 7 p.m.; Blanche Wiesen Cook, Jepson Forum (on Eleanor Roosevelt), December 4, 7 pm. Submit a brief two paragraph summary of the event and how it relates to Justice within one week following the event.

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

4. Two (2) six-page analytical papers 40%
5. Two (2) three-page personal reflections 20%
6. One (1) twelve-page final paper 25%
6. Attendance, preparation for class, and consistent class participation 15%

Notes on Written Assignments

Longer analytical 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 analytical paper.

Prompts for the personal reflections will be distributed 5 days prior to their due date, and will include instructions and guidelines. (The main tip: read thoroughly the book you are writing about.)

For the longer analytical papers, the emphasis is on critical thinking, making good arguments, and effective understanding of and use of the course material. For the shorter reflection papers, the emphasis is on depth of personal engagement with the material as well as understanding of and reflection upon the authors’ aims.

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. 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. (Why? See the Frank Bruni article at the end of this piece!)

*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? Rousseau can’t answer that question—it is our job as students to answer that question ourselves.

OVERVIEW OF COURSE OF STUDY

Required Texts

Bryan Stevenson, Just Mercy
Adam Smith, Theory of Moral Sentiments
John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism; On Liberty; The Subjection of Women
John Rawls, A Theory of Justice
Victor Chen, Cut Loose
Kathryn Edin and Luke Shaefer, $2 a Day
Matthew Desmond, Evicted
Peter Edelman, Not a Crime to be Poor
Patrice Khan-Cullors & asha bandele, When They Call You a Terrorist
Sarah Smarsh, Heartland
Beth Zasloff and Joshua Steckel, Hold Fast to Dreams
City of Richmond, Office of Community Wealth Building 2016 and 2018 Annual Reports

Note: The assigned syllabus is subject to change; in particular additional articles from contemporary events of relevance to themes of the course may be added. These will be circulated by the professor. Any changes to due dates of assignments will be announced via email.

Part One: What do We Mean When We Talk About Justice?

Wednesday August 29. Introduction. Bryan Stevenson, Just Mercy, Chapters 1-5
Friday August 31. Bryan Stevenson, Just Mercy, Chapters 6-10
Wednesday September 5. Bryan Stevenson, Just Mercy, Chapters 11-Conclusion

Short Paper Assignment #1 Due: September 5, midnight (by email). Personal reflection on Bryan Stevenson’s Just Mercy.

Friday September 7. Adam Smith, Theory of Moral Sentiments, Part I
Wednesday September 12. Adam Smith, Theory of Moral Sentiments, Parts II, V and VI

Wednesday September 12: Required Jepson Forum event, 7 pm, Camp Concert Hall. Mayor Levar M. Stoney on disenfranchisement.

Friday September 14. J.S. Mill, Utilitarianism (Chapters 1, 2 and 5)
Wednesday September 19. J.S. Mill, On Liberty (Chapters 1, 3, 4)
Friday September 21. J.S. Mill, The Subjection of Women (Chapters 1, 4).


Friday October 5. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Chapter Three (sections 20-29) and Chapter Four (section 31); Martin O’Neill and Thad Williamson, “Property-Owning Democracy and the Demands of Justice.” (*distributed as PDF*)

**Analytical Paper #1 Due Monday October 8, 5 p.m.**

**Part Two: Policy**

Wednesday October 10. V. Chen, *Cut Loose: Jobless and Hopeless in an Unfair Economy*. All read Chapter 1; plus either Chapter 2, 3, or 4 (will divide class into groups).

Friday October 12. V. Chen, *Cut Loose*. Chapters 5-7. *Invited Guest Speaker: Victor Chen, Virginia Commonwealth University*

Wednesday October 17. K. Edin and L. Shaefer, *$2 a Day: On Just Getting by in America* (Chapters 1-3)

Friday October 19. Edin and Shaefer, *$2 a Day* (Chapters 4-6, conclusion) *Invited Guest Speaker: TBA*

Wednesday October 24. P. Edelman, *Not a Crime to Be Poor* (Chapters 1-6)

**Thursday October 25. Peter Edelman lecture on criminalizing poverty, Jepson Forum, 4:30 p.m.**

Friday October 26. Edelman, *Not a Crime to be Poor* (Chapters 7-10)

Wednesday October 31. Matthew Desmond, *Evicted* (Chapters 1-12) (*different groups will be given different families to focus on in the book*)

Friday November 2. Desmond, *Evicted* (Chapters 13-24 and conclusion)

**Analytical Paper #2 Due Monday November 5, 5 p.m.**

**Part Three: Experience**

Wednesday November 7: P. Khan-Cullors and bendele, *When they Call You a Terrorist* (Chapter 1-8)

Friday November 9: Khan-Cullors and bendele, *When they Call You a Terrorist* (Chapter 9-16)

Friday November 16: Smarsh, *Heartland*, Part Two

**Short Paper #2 Due Monday November 19, 6 p.m.** Personal reflection on Khan-Cullors and Smarsh books.

*Thanksgiving Break!*

**Part Four: Hope and Change**

Wednesday November 28. B. Zasloff and J. Steckel, *Hold Fast to Dreams*, Chapters 1-6 *(groups will be assigned different student to focus on)* *(Invited Guest Speaker: Toria Edmonds-Howell, Mayor’s Youth Academy/Office of Community Wealth Building, City of Richmond.)*


Wednesday December 5. City of Richmond Office of Community Wealth Building Annual Reports, 2016 and 2018.


**Final Paper Assignment** *(includes reflection/analysis of Community Based Learning and material from last two weeks of class)*, due Friday December 14, 6 p.m., Email and Hard Copy.

**NO FINAL EXAM**
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

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/

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.”
studentdevelopment.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

*updated 8/10/2016
SYLLABUS INSERT REGARDING ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL SUPPORT SERVICES
If you experience difficulties in this course, do not hesitate to consult with me. There are also other resources that can support you in your efforts to meet course requirements.

**Academic Skills Center** ([http://asc.richmond.edu](http://asc.richmond.edu), 289-8626 or 289-8956): Assists students in assessing their academic strengths and weaknesses; honing their academic skills through teaching effective test preparation, critical reading and thinking, information conceptualization, concentration, and related techniques; working on specific subject areas (e.g., calculus, chemistry, accounting, etc.); and encouraging campus and community involvement. Hours at the Center are:

- Sunday through Wednesday 3:00-9:00 p.m. and Thursday 3:00-7:00 p.m. On-call tutors are also available.

**Career Services** ([http://careerservices.richmond.edu/](http://careerservices.richmond.edu/) or 289-8547): Can assist you in exploring your interests and abilities, choosing a major or course of study, connecting with internships and jobs, and investigating graduate and professional school options. We encourage you to schedule an appointment with a career advisor early in your time at UR.

**Counseling and Psychological Services** ([http://wellness.richmond.edu/offices/caps/](http://wellness.richmond.edu/offices/caps/) or 289-8119): Assists currently enrolled, full-time, degree-seeking students in improving their mental health and well-being, and in handling challenges that may impede their growth and development. Services include short-term counseling and psychotherapy, crisis intervention, psychiatric consultation, and related services.

**Speech Center** ([http://speech.richmond.edu](http://speech.richmond.edu) or 289-6409): Assists with preparation and practice in the pursuit of excellence in public expression. Recording, playback, coaching and critique sessions offered by teams of student consultants trained to assist in developing ideas, arranging key points for more effective organization, improving style and delivery, and handling multimedia aids for individual and group presentations.

**Writing Center** ([http://writing.richmond.edu](http://writing.richmond.edu) or 289-8263): Assists writers at all levels of experience, across all majors.
We overwhelm teenagers with advice about choosing a college. Go big. Go small. Put prestige above cost. Do the opposite.

We inundate them with tips for getting in. Spend summers this way. Write essays that way. Play a niche sport. Play an obscure instrument.

And then? We go mum, mustering less urgency and fewer words for the subject of actually navigating the crucial college years to best effect. It's strange. And it's stupid, because how a student goes to school matters much, much more than where.

So for several years -- during visits to campuses, interviews with experts on higher education and interactions with recent graduates -- I've been gathering wisdom along those lines.

My interest isn't which types of programs at which kinds of institutions yield the surest employment and highest salaries. That information is already out there and always changing. I also worry that it casts college as purely vocational and plants the false notion that, at the age of 18, you know yourself well enough to plot out the entirety of your professional life.

My focus is on optimal ways to socialize, to prioritize, to pick up skills integral to any career and to open up exciting opportunities both en route to a degree and after you've acquired it. Not nearly enough of the roughly 20 million Americans who are beginning or resuming college over the coming weeks pause, in their trepidation and exhilaration, to think about that.

Many don't have the luxury: College for them is a slapdash scramble to grab credits as they can while working a demanding job, caring for family members or both. More than a third of the students enrolled in higher education in this country attend two-year institutions. Those at four-year institutions often don't participate in the romantic ideal of nurturing dormitories and verdant quadrangles. They live with parents. They pray for parking.

But others do have the freedom to tailor their time. They just neglect to take advantage of it. My friend Eric Johnson, who provides guidance to underprivileged students at my alma mater, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, put it to me this way: "The more you regard college as a credentialing exercise, the less likely you are to get the benefits."

Johnson is as thoughtful and insightful about higher education as just about anyone I've come across. The wisest students, he said, "move into a peer relationship with the institution rather than a consumer relationship with it." They seize leadership roles. They serve as research assistants.

And they build social capital, realizing that above all else, they're in college "to widen the circle of human beings who know you and care about you," he said. That's perfectly put.
Many students, nervous about a new environment, follow friends from high school or people whose demographic backgrounds match their own into homogeneous cocoons. That can indeed provide solace and support. But it's also a wasted opportunity -- educationally, morally, strategically. Diversity opens you to an array and wealth of ideas, and being comfortable with it is an asset in just about any workplace or career. You can decide to establish that comfort in college.

But perhaps the most important relationships to invest in are those with members of the school's faculty. Most students don't fully get that. They're not very good at identifying the professors worth knowing -- the ones who aren't such academic rock stars that they're inaccessible, the ones with a track record of serious mentoring -- and then getting to know them well.

As part of my research, I collected surveys from about 30 recipients of the prestigious Mitchell scholarship, a rough analogue of the Rhodes that sends 12 recent American college graduates every year to universities in Ireland to pursue master's degrees. (I was on the panel of judges who selected the winners from 2015 through 2017.) I asked them to reflect on college and to rank, in order of importance, such activities and dynamics as coursework, travel abroad, internships, relationships with classmates, involvement in campus groups and reading done apart from any class obligation.

Relationships with faculty members was also an option, and it was the clear winner, placed near the top by almost all of the scholars and at the top by many, including Azza Cohen, a documentary filmmaker who graduated from Princeton in 2016. To explain that ranking, she directed me to a 2014 essay of hers for The Daily Princetonian that was titled "Empty Chairs." It charted her realization and regret that she and so many classmates skipped professors' office hours and didn't avail themselves of invaluable conversations and counsel. "In the routine rush to finish our assignments, sometimes the breadth of the surrounding intellectual force field slips our minds," she wrote. She was then a sophomore, and she mended her ways.

Reading her essay, I was reminded of an interview I did several years ago with Condoleezza Rice, the former secretary of state, about her days at the University of Denver. She said she liked to sign up for the front end of office hours, because she wanted to catch professors when they weren't feeling depleted and watching the clock. She read up on professors beforehand and, if their written work was accessible, familiarized herself with it, so she could make mention of it. That flattered them and pegged her as a serious, considerate person.

Taking that too far, of course, could be repulsively obsequious. The correct calibration is everything. And it's worth acing, because a professor or administrator who takes a genuine interest in you can be a bridge to other influential people inside and outside the school, to limited-space seminars, to special collaborations, to exclusive summer programs, to competitive internships, to graduate work and more.

Damian Walker saw that at U.N.C.-Chapel Hill, from which he graduated last spring. "The most influential thing I did here was find mentors," he told me. And he found them largely by opening up to them.

Walker attended U.N.C.-Chapel Hill as a Carolina Covenant scholar, which means that his family was poor enough for him to qualify for full financial aid. He told me that early on he went to an open campus discussion about police violence against minorities. Several faculty members were also there, and he approached Judith Cone, the vice chancellor for innovation, entrepreneurship and economic development.
"I didn't know who she was," he recalled. "Short lady. I shared my story about how police shootings affected my life, my family. She gave me her business card and said, 'Follow up.' I still have that business card to this day." He went to see her in her office and kept going to see her in her office, and with the encouragement and help of her and other faculty members, he cobbled together the money to go to an educational conference in Massachusetts, to meet with entrepreneurs in New York City and to spend the summer between his junior and senior years interning for a company in China. He's about to head back to China to teach English for a while. He's well on his way to fluency in Mandarin, which he thinks will give him a definite edge in any future business career.

Walker is an example of what a mammoth study by Gallup, Purdue University and the Strada Education Network has found. Previously known as the Gallup-Purdue Index and now called the Strada-Gallup Alumni Survey, it has questioned about 100,000 American college graduates of all ages about their college experiences, looking for connections between how they spent their time in college and how fulfilled they say they are now.

The study has not found that attending a private college or a highly selective one foretells greater satisfaction. Instead, the game changers include establishing a deep connection with a mentor, taking on a sustained academic project and playing a significant part in a campus organization. What all of these reflect are engagement and commitment, which I've come to think of as overlapping muscles that college can and must be used to build. They're part of an assertive rather than a passive disposition, and they're key to professional success.

I'm not saying that this is a cinch, nor am I ignoring the demons in the way. Anxiety and depression are legion on campuses today, holes that too many students fall into and never crawl out of. More than ever, students should be on the lookout for them and take the necessary steps to mitigate them.

Be careful, especially at the beginning of college, about spending too much time alone. Isolation can become its own bad habit, and prying eyes can be the best insurance policy against destructive behavior. Regulate time on social media, where discourse can be barbed and peers curate honeyed alter egos that stoke insecurity in those looking at them. Don't drink too much and don't shortchange sleep, as prosaic as that sounds. And work out in some way.

"We know that exercise is very, very important," said Jan Collins-Eaglin, the associate dean for wellness at Pomona College in Southern California. "It will calm you down." She noted, too, that many schools have invested in their mental health services but that many students hesitate to use them. "Seeking help is not taboo," she said. "If you get over that, you are one step ahead of the game."

One crossroads that students often get needlessly worked up about is choosing a major. It's less make-or-break than you think. I hear that from a majority of thriving college graduates, and the professors I speak with strongly caution students against wedding themselves to a single field of study before being exposed to several of them. College's greatest gifts can be an introduction to a passion you didn't previously have and a pivot into an occupation you never before envisioned.

"You have to ask yourself what lies closest to your heart," said Jim Gates, a renowned theoretical physicist at Brown University who previously taught at the University of Maryland and M.I.T. "If you are fortunate enough to find something that you're totally obsessed with, you're likely to work very hard at it. If you're a human being of average
intelligence and you work very hard at something, you're likely to become very good at it. And if you become very good at it, people are likely to notice." That means they're likely to employ and reward you as well.

Regardless of major, there are skills to insist on acquiring because they transcend any particular career. Communication -- clear writing, cogent speaking -- is one of them, and many different courses can hone it.

Another of those skills, frequently overlooked, is storytelling. It's different from communication: a next step. Every successful pitch for a new policy, new product or new company is essentially a story, with a shape and logic intended to stir its audience. So is every successful job interview. The best moment in a workplace meeting belongs to the colleague who tells the best story. So take a course in Greek mythology, British literature, political rhetoric or anything else that exposes you to the structure of narrative and the art of persuasion.

I asked Mitchell scholars if there was a department or discipline that they wished they had paid more heed. Science majors mentioned humanities. Humanities majors mentioned computer science and statistics. In retrospect, if not in real time, intellectually curious people appreciate and want the benefits of balance. So incorporate it, to some degree, in your college years.

Several Mitchell scholars also fretted that they'd lost out on some of what college had to offer by sticking to predetermined scripts, sweating perfection and avoiding risks. That dovetailed with a concern that many professors articulate to me -- that students aren't learning to stumble and to right themselves, which they can do in college with lower stakes than later on.

One of those scholars, Aaron Kurman, who graduated from the University of Virginia in 2005 and now works as a human rights lawyer in Israel, copped to all of that and more, writing: "I didn't learn how to fail. I didn't learn how resilient I was. I didn't learn to distinguish between what was truly important to me and what I was doing because I thought it was important in others' eyes. I didn't learn how freeing it is to pursue what drives you even when others whose opinions you deeply value don't understand or support it. I didn't learn the value of doing something truly open-ended, where you don't already know at the outset what you are going to do next." All of that came later. But it could have come in college -- at least the beginnings of it.

Something else that can come in college is an enormously expanded self-knowledge that translates into a hugely improved design for living. But that hinges on an adventurous spirit, especially outside the classroom.

"The mistake is to confuse career success, financial success and reputation with happiness," said Andrew Delbanco, a Columbia University professor who is the president of the Teagle Foundation, which promotes liberal arts education, and the author of the 2012 book "College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be." Delbanco added that an important component of real contentment is figuring out what lights your emotional and intellectual fires, not necessarily for the purpose of a job but for the purpose of reflections and pastimes that fill in all those hours away from work.

Is it poetry? Music? Sport? Those and more are abundant on college campuses. "You're trying to shape a life that leads you to a happy place," Delbanco said. Let college do precisely that.

I invite you to follow me on Twitter (@FrankBruni).