Justice and Civil Society

Dr. Javier Hidalgo
Office: 234 Jepson Hall
Email: jhidalgo@richmond.edu or hidalgoj@gmail.com
Class Time & Room: Wednesday and Fridays 10:30am to 11:45am in Jepson 107.
Office Hours: I post a sign-up sheet for my office hours on blackboard. Please sign up for office hours there.

Course Description:

The fundamental question to ask yourself throughout this course is: how can I promote justice? To answer this fundamental question, you'll need to first identify what counts as a just outcome. To this end, we'll read about different theories of justice in order to gain a better understanding of what a just society would look like. But, to answer our fundamental question, it's not enough to know about theories of justice. You also need to understand which actions or policies are effective at advancing justice. So, we'll also examine how to evaluate interventions to promote just outcomes and to find reliable evidence on which interventions work best.

This course has as service learning component. You'll be placed with a non-profit organization in Richmond that serves disadvantaged populations. This component of class is designed to help students integrate what they are learning in class with the practical, hands-on experience of working to advance the mission of a non-profit organization. Educational research indicates that service learning increases civic engagement, strengthens openness to diversity and difference, and promotes a deeper understanding of course content.¹ We’ll aim to capture these gains in this class.

Course Objectives

The aim of this course is for you to learn the following general skills/bodies of knowledge:

- **Persuasive Writing**: you will need to complete several writing assignments in this class. These assignments will increase your ability to write argumentative essays in a clear and compelling way.
- **Rhetorical Abilities**: you'll hone your ability to engage in public speaking through class debate and discussion.

• **Moral Reasoning**: you’ll learn about prominent theories of justice and how to apply them to public policy and other interventions.

• **Effective Interventions**: one focus of this course is to evaluate interventions to promote a more just society. To do this, you’ll learn how to identify reliable research and interventions that produce positive results.

• **Knowledge of Richmond**: we’ll read about the history of Richmond and the state of the city today.

**Course Requirements:**

Here’s a general comment about the philosophy that motivates the course requirements. The goal of this course is to maximize your learning. To this end, I’ve done my best to consult educational research in order to find out what most effectively promotes learning. This is why this course includes the following components:

• **Frequent quizzing.** A robust result from educational research is that frequent quizzing promotes learning and retention.² There are several reasons for this. One reason is that quizzes give you an incentive to carefully study the course material. But another reason is that the practice of retrieving information from your memory in itself promotes learning (this is called the “retrieval effect”). While I understand that you may not enjoy frequent quizzes, this is one of the most powerful learning tools available to us. Thus, you’ll complete brief quizzes and/or writing exercises in most class sessions.

• **Active learning.** This class will often engage in “active learning” practices. Although I will give short lectures, most of this class will not involve passive listening and notetaking. Instead, you’ll engage in class discussions with other students and work together to interpret and apply the course material in creative and novel ways. Once again, the available research shows that active learning is usually a superior approach to the alternative.³

Now, let me turn to specific course requirements. There is a total of 1000 possible points in this class. The points will be distributed as follows:

1. Quizzes (20%)  

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³ An influential meta-analysis on this topic is: Scott Freeman et al., “Active Learning Increases Student Performance in Science, Engineering, and Mathematics,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111, no. 23 (June 10, 2014): 8410.
a. You’ll take a brief quiz at the beginning of each class session unless noted otherwise on the syllabus. This quiz will ask you to remember information from the readings and may include a brief writing assignment. I expect each quiz to take about 5-15 minutes to complete and I’ll drop your lowest three grades on the quizzes.

2. Class Participation and Activities (10%)
   a. You’re expected to listen attentively to other students and to participate in class discussion.
   b. Some ground rules for class discussion:
      i. Every perspective is welcome in this class as long as you can state reasons for your views and respond to comments/questions about it. I encourage you to try out different perspectives and opinions in class discussion even if you don’t fully endorse them.
      ii. You should be respectful of the instructor and other students. Please don’t dismiss other people’s views or make fun of students for holding controversial positions.
   c. You will occasionally complete other activities in class that you’ll submit for a grade. These may include brief writing assignments and reflections, and these assignments will count toward your participation grade.
   d. While attendance is not strictly required, you cannot expect to get a good grade unless you attend the vast majority of classes.

3. Argumentative Essays (20%)
   a. You’ll complete two argumentative essays, one on a theory of justice and one on effective altruism. These paper will be about 1000-1500 words long. You’ll have a chance to revise them in light of my feedback for a higher grade. If the paper substantially improves, it will receive a 1/3 to 2/3 grade increase. To revise your papers, you must turn in a letter that details the changes that you have made to your paper in response to my comments.
   b. To turn in your paper, you should copy it to a google doc and share it with me. I’ll provide you with instructions on exactly how to do this in class.
   c. If you need an extension, you need to request one at least 24 hours before the paper is due. Computer problems are not a valid excuse for late papers (for this reason, I strongly recommend that you use google drive or drop box to save your work as you write).
d. Late penalties: if you turn in your paper late, I will drop it by 1/3 of a grade. I will then continue to drop your grade by 1/3 for every day that passes.

e. Each paper is worth 10% of your final grade.

4. Partner Evaluation (20%)
   a. Near the end of the course, you’ll write a long paper (2500-3000 words) that evaluates your service-learning organization. This paper will synthesize and apply much of the material from the course.
   b. If you need an extension, you need to request one at least 24 hours before the paper is due. Computer problems are not a valid excuse for late papers (for this reason, I strongly recommend that you use google drive or drop box to save your work as you write).
   c. Late penalties: if you turn in your paper late, I will drop it by 1/3 of a grade. I will then continue to drop your grade by 1/3 for every day that passes.

5. Final (15%)
   a. The final exam will consist in several short answer questions about the reading as well as essay questions. The class will take a practice final on the last session of class so that you get a sense of what to expect.
   b. The final exam is scheduled during the following time:
      December 13th, 9-12pm.

6. Service Learning Component (15%)
   a. Field Supervisor Evaluation. I will use this evaluation to assess the quality of service hours, responsibility, and initiative shown at the site of service.
   b. Attendance. You will also be graded on whether you completed your service hours and attended all of the required events. You must complete 22 hours of community service at an approved site.
      i. To register for your Justice service with one of the community partners approved for your section of Justice, to request transportation, and to log your service hours you will be using Spiders Engage. Go to the Justice & Civil Society website
         (https://jepson.richmond.edu/major-minor/justice/course-info.html) – you will find a link here that will take you directly into Spiders Engage and your Justice & Civil Society class page.
   c. Two Journal Entries. You must complete two journals that reflect critically on your community service. Journal entries
should be about 200-400 words and combine some element of the experience at the service setting and some element of personal introspection. You can find the deadlines for the journal entries in the main syllabus. These journal entries will be graded on a pass-fail basis.

d. **Important Note:** you must receive a passing grade on this component of the course in order to pass the rest of the class.

7. Please see the rubrics on blackboard for more information about each assignment.

**Policies:**

1. Please use your laptop, ipad, or phone during class only when I explicitly instruct you to do so.°⁴ We will often use laptops in this class, but only when I ask you to take them out.
2. I can only offer make up assignments in cases of extreme duress like documented medical emergencies and/or religious observance.
3. If you have a documented disability and would like some form of academic accommodation, please contact me as soon as possible to discuss whether such accommodation can be provided.

**Feedback**

I’m trying out new material and teaching techniques this semester. But, sometimes when you try out new things, you make mistakes. To increase the odds that things run smoothly, I’m going to use a app called Class Pulse to solicit your feedback throughout the course. This is an app that allows me to poll the class about your experience and you can leave me anonymous feedback as well. If something in this class is not working, I’d appreciate it if you let me know and I’ll seriously consider changing it. But here’s my rule: I won’t make any changes to this class that I think will detract from your learning. And, if you do send a message to the whole class, please make sure that your comments are respectful and constructive.

**Required Texts**


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°⁴ Why do I put restrictions on laptop use? A growing body of research finds that the use of laptops and cell phones in class significantly diminish student learning. For example: Arnold L. Glass and Mengxue Kang, "Dividing Attention in the Classroom Reduces Exam Performance," *Educational Psychology* (forthcoming): 1–14.
• Kathryn Edin & Luke Shaefer, $2.00 A Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America.
• Andrew Leigh, Randomistas: How Radical Researchers Are Changing Our World.

All other readings are available on the blackboard page for this class. I may make some modifications to the syllabus as the semester progresses. I'll announce any changes to the syllabus in class and you can always find the updated syllabus on blackboard. It’s your responsibility to make sure that you have the updated version of the syllabus.

**Week 1: Introduction and Identifying Justice**

**Description of Week 1:** On Wednesday, students will complete an orientation on Justice & Civil Society and we'll discuss the syllabus. We'll begin to consider how to develop and defend a theory of justice. Remember that the most fundamental question of this class is: *how can I promote justice?* To answer this question, we first need to identify what would count as “justice” or a just outcome. Theories of justice help us to do this. Philosophers have developed different theories of justice throughout the centuries and we'll discuss the merits of some of these theories. On Friday, we'll focus on utilitarian theories of justice, the view that society should maximize net happiness.

Wednesday, August 29th: Introduction
- Orientation and introduction
- Michael Sandel, *Justice: Doing the Right Thing*, chapter 1

Friday, August 31st: Utilitarianism

**Week 2: Identifying Justice**

**Description of Week 2:** This week we’ll continue our exploration of different theories of justice and what a just society would look like. We’ll examine two major theories: (1) libertarianism and (2) egalitarianism. You’ll also begin the process of comparing these theories against each other and trying to figure out which is most compelling.

Wednesday, September 5th: Libertarianism

Friday, September 7th: Egalitarianism
Week 3: Identifying Justice

Description of Week 3: On Wednesday, we’ll take a break from the main content of this course to focus on writing. What counts as good writing for the purposes of this class? We’ll read advice on good writing and sample student essays. This session will prepare you to write your first papers for this class. On Friday, there will be a hurricane.

Wednesday, September 12th: Writing Day
- Anthony Weston and David Morrow, "Extended Arguments" and "Argumentative Essays."

Friday, September 14th: Hurricane
- Hurricane!

Week 4: Identifying Justice and Debate

Description of Week 4: This week will conclude our discussion of theories of justice. On Wednesday, we’ll examine civic republican theories of justice, the view that a just society should promote community and virtue. You’ll turn in your first paper assignment before class on Thursday. During the Friday session, we’ll complete our investigation of theories of justice by debating at least some of the theories. By debating the theories, you should be better able to identify which theory is most defensible overall.

Wednesday, September 19th:
- Sandel, Justice: Doing the Right Thing, chapters 8-10.

Thursday, September 20th:
- First argumentative paper is due at midnight.

Friday, September 21st:
- Read before class: “Debate Camp Workbook.”
- In-class debate.
- No quiz.

Week 5: Promoting Justice

Description of Week 5: This week, we'll begin a new section of the course. Return to our master question: how can I promote justice? Will MacAskill’s book is about using reason and evidence to bring about good outcomes. Although MacAskill is mostly focused on promoting well-being overall, we can adapt his framework to understand how to effectively promote desirable outcomes in any setting. Suppose that you have an opinion
about what a just society looks like. How should we bring about this society? MacAskill’s book will help you to answer this question.

Wednesday, September 26th:

Friday, September 28th:
- MacAskill, *Doing Good Better*, chapter 5-6, 8.

**Week 6: Promoting Justice**

Description of Week 6: On Wednesday, we’ll continue reading MacAskill’s book in order to identify effective ways to achieve a just society. One crucial element of this investigation is evidence. It’s not enough to have good intentions. You need to have good evidence that your approach to promoting justice will actually work. But what counts as good evidence? We’ll also begin to read Andrew Leigh’s *Randomistas* to explore this question and to learn about the history of efforts to find reliable evidence. On Friday, we’ll conclude MacAskill’s book by investigating (1) how we should prioritize causes and (2) how you can promote a more just society through your career choices.

Wednesday, October 3rd:
- Recommended: GiveWell, “Common Problems with Formal Evaluations: Selection Bias and Publication Bias” and “How We Evaluate A Study.”

Friday, October 5th:

**Week 7: Justice & Education**

Description of Week 7: We’ll now apply our knowledge of theories of justice and effective interventions to one key subject: education policy. Why education policy in particular? Most of you will be doing your service learning at an educational site. So, education policy is highly relevant to your experience in this course. To make the content even more relevant, we'll keep our focus on education in Richmond. Much of this week will be historical background. We’ll read about and discuss the history of education in Richmond in order to better understand how the educational system evolved over time and the problems that it currently faces.

Wednesday, October 10th:
• Benjamin Campbell, “Developing Structures of Segregation” from *Richmond’s Unhealed History*.
• James Ryan, *Five Miles Away*, pp. 1-4, 21-41.

Friday, October 12th:

**Week 8: Education**

**Description of Week 8:** We’ll continue our reading on the history of education in Richmond. But this week we’ll begin to explore possible ways of improving education in Richmond, particularly more school funding and school choice. Are these viable solutions to the problem of educational inequality?

Wednesday, October 17th:

Friday, October 19th:
• Ryan, *Five Miles Away*, pp.181-228.

**Week 9: Education**

**Description of Week 9:** Class will be cancelled on Wednesday because I’ll be away at a conference. On Friday, we’ll have a class visitor: Dr. Shields. Dr. Shields is an expert on education in Richmond and he’ll be talking to the class about the recent evolution of the educational system in the city. The reading will be a report that details trends in educational inequalities and housing patterns in Richmond and policies that could address these trends (Dr. Shield's is a coauthor of the report).

Tuesday, October 23rd:
• Second argumentative paper due at 5pm.

Wednesday, October 24th:
• Class cancelled.

Friday, October 26th:
• Dr. Shield visits.
• “Confronting School and Housing Segregation in the Richmond Region.”

**Week 10: Education**

**Description of Week 10:** We’ll conclude the section of the course on education this week. We’ll examine whether racial and socio-economic
integration is a compelling way of reducing educational inequalities and we’ll learn about promising approaches to improving learning outcomes in schools. Finally, we’ll read about some of the partners for this course and discuss how to apply what we’ve learned to evaluate their organizations.

Monday, October 29th:
- First journal entry due at 5pm. Please submit your entry through blackboard (you can find the assignment in the content folder for week 10).

Wednesday, October 31st:
- Ryan, *Five Miles Away*, chapter 8 and epilogue.
- Elizabeth Anderson, “Fair Opportunity in Education.”

Friday, November 2nd:
- Andrew Leigh, “Learning How to Teach,” in *Randomistas*, chapter 5.
- Read websites of partners:
  - Church Hill Activities and Tutoring (CHAT).
  - Peter Paul Development Center.
  - Youth Life Foundation of Richmond.
  - SLI.

**Week 11: Justice & Poverty**

Description of Week 11: We’ll move on to a new subject this week: poverty and deprivation. For the next two weeks, the class will learn about extreme poverty in America, how public policy may have contributed to poverty, and possible ways of reducing poverty. The main reading will be Edin & Shafer’s book *$2.00 A Day*, which describes the lives of the extreme poor in America. But we’ll also read supplementary articles on ethics and public policy. In particular, the class will read about conservative approaches to justice and whether labor market regulations, like the minimum wage, are effective ways to reduce poverty.

Wednesday, November 7th:
- Alex Rajczi, “What is the Conservative Point of View About Distributive Justice?”

Friday, November 9th:
- Edin & Shaefer, *$2.00 A Day*, chapter 2.
Week 12: Poverty

Description of Week 12: This week students will read about how people in poverty struggle to obtain adequate housing and work, and the structural forces that explain these problems. The class will also debate different systematic approaches to reducing poverty, including the radical idea of a universal basic income.

Wednesday, November 14th:
- Edin & Shaefer, $2.00 A Day, chapters 3-4.

Friday, November 16th:
- Edin & Shaefer, $2.00 A Day, conclusion.
- Rutger Berman, “Why We Should Give Free Money to Everyone.”

Week 13: Thanksgiving

Wednesday, November 21st:
- Thanksgiving break.

Friday, November 23rd:
- Thanksgiving break.

Week 14: Poverty

Description of Week 13: The class will focus on poverty in Richmond this week. On Wednesday, we’ll read the mayor’s report on how to address poverty in Richmond. On Friday, we’ll consider experimental evidence from around the world on effective ways to reduce poverty and bring about political change. We’ll use what we’ve learned to evaluate the partners for this course that are focused on poverty, homelessness, and unemployment in Richmond.

Wednesday, November 28th:

Friday, November 30th:
- Andrew Leigh, Randomistas, chapters 3, 7, and 9.
- Websites of partners/programs in Richmond:
  - Goodwill Northside Community Employment Center.
  - Crossover Healthcare Ministry.
  - Reestablish Richmond.

Week 15: Debate and Review
Description of week 15: On Wednesday, you’ll briefly present on your final paper and together we’ll debate how to award a (small) donation to one of the course’s partners. On Friday, the class will take a practice final in order to prepare you for the real thing.

Monday, December 3rd:
- Partner Evaluation due at 5pm. Email it to me at jhidalgo@richmond.edu or share it with me over google docs.

Wednesday, December 5th:
- Debate.

Friday, December 7th:
- The class will take a practice final.
- Second journal entry due at 5pm. You can find it in the blackboard folder for week 15.

Final:
- December 13th, 9-12pm.