

You Can't Think That. Or Can You?
LDST 390:02
Spring 2025

Course Syllabus

Professor: Terry L. Price

E-mail: tprice@richmond.edu

Meeting Requests: Please speak with me in class or send an email to set up an appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course begins with the assumption that leaders must be able to think for themselves. They must be able to experiment with ideas that go against the conventional wisdom—to think what others aren't thinking, to say what others aren't saying, and to do what others aren't doing. The design of this course is aimed to help students build these essential leadership skills. We will begin with classic philosophical defenses of freedom of thought and expression and, more recently, the work of Joel Feinberg. But the course moves quickly to the current state of free inquiry in contemporary society. For this segment of the course, we will consider Greg Lukianoff and Rikki Schlott's analysis of "Cancel Culture" in *The Cancellation of the American Mind*. We then try our hand at having free and open discussions of works that question the ideological status quo on most university campuses—what might be called "Books You'll Never Read in College." The primary goal here is to develop the capacity to hold our political commitments and identities loosely so that we can practice thinking for ourselves and engaging with others as "intellectual friends." The course concludes with readings by, and projects on, so-called Wrongthinkers. Students will share in the responsibility for reading selections in this segment of the course. **Needless to say, there is a good chance that participants in this class, including your instructor, will read, hear, or say something that offends. However, by signing up for this class or electing to teach it, we will have voluntarily assumed this risk.**

This course aims to provide the necessary means for developing fundamental leadership competencies. In the end, success will depend in large part on your willingness to engage yourself fully in readings, assignments, discussions, and class exercises. All of my courses are designed for rigorous discussion of the issues, which means that students bear an equal burden in explaining, critiquing, and developing ideas raised in the readings. To facilitate this kind of engagement, I use assigned seating. I regularly call on people and ask them to answer specific questions about the readings so they can demonstrate **Preparation and Engagement**. You should be prepared to **point to passages in the text to support your answers**.

There will be two **Readings Tests**. These tests serve several functions. They give you extra incentive to read carefully and to retain what you've read. They also give me a sense of your understanding of the course basics. Careful reading, retention, and understanding are necessary for engaging with the material at a sophisticated level in class discussions—including in your responses to other students—and in your final projects. *The tests are therefore means to an end, not ends in themselves.*

Attendance affects your **Preparation and Engagement** grade and—in all likelihood—your **Readings Tests** grades. Please email me if you are unable to attend class.

Please note that we **begin and end on time** and that students are expected to remain in the classroom during class. We will take a break! I will deduct points from your **Preparation and Engagement** grade if you are late or leave class in non-emergency situations.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Computers, tablets, phones, and similar devices are not permitted in class. In my experience, their costs outweigh their benefits because they are distracting for all students and make it harder for them to stay engaged in class exercises and discussions. Any such devices brought into the classroom must be silenced and placed out of view during class. Students should minimize all other distractions and respect the rules of standard classroom etiquette.

Recording class sessions or meetings is also prohibited. There is no need to record class sessions (or to worry about getting complete notes) because I provide all necessary guidance for test preparation. Learning in this class occurs primarily through discussion and by developing philosophical habits of mind through practice. My classroom is set up for students to make, and learn from, mistakes. Lots of mistakes. Knowing that there is a recording of your efforts impedes the intellectual risk-taking I expect of students. Finally, for this class to succeed, we must create an environment in which students feel free to express controversial and unpopular opinions. Maybe very unpopular opinions. Recording class discussions has a chilling effect on this kind of expression and, therefore, is at odds with the primary goal of the course. My expectation is that the content of our discussions, including comments from individual students, stays in our class.

THE HONOR CODE AND USE OF AI

As a student at the University of Richmond, you are bound by the Honor Code. I reserve the right to refuse any work submitted without the honor pledge. The Honor Code prohibits the use of any unauthorized assistance. For this course, the use of text-generating artificial intelligence tools (such as, but not limited to, ChatGPT) will be considered unauthorized assistance. I will work with Honor Council to investigate and address any potential violations. This includes the use of generative AI for any stage of the work from conception to completion.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Students should understand the importance of being exposed to ideas with which they disagree.
- Students should become comfortable suspending their political commitments and identities.
- Students should be able to experiment with ideas that go against the ideological status quo on most university campuses and, more generally, the conventional wisdom.
- Student should develop intellectual courage to think what others aren't thinking and say what others aren't saying.
- Students should learn to find what might be true or useful even in what's largely wrong.
- Students should build the skills necessary for productive disagreement.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Greg Lukianoff and Rikki Schlott, *The Canceling of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2023).

Thomas Sowell, *Social Justice Fallacies* (New York: Basic Books, 2023).

Blackboard Readings

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

1. Preparation and Engagement—30%
2. Readings Test 1—20%
3. Readings Test 2—20%
4. Final Project—30%

I take deadlines and scheduled exams seriously. In fairness to your classmates, any emergencies that arise should be brought to my attention as soon as possible before scheduled tests or the final paper. **Otherwise, I do not accept late work.** I will accept and grade unfinished work. I do not give “extra credit,” though I sometimes incorporate bonus points on tests and through class-based group work after a test.

I will round final grades. For example, 92.5 is sufficient for an A in this course.

Grading legend:

A+	97-100
A	93-96
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	50-59

SCHEDULE (subject to change as course progresses)

- W Jan 15 Plato's *Apology*
- W Jan 22 John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapter 2
Joel Feinberg, *Offense to Others* (selections)
- W Jan 29 Greg Lukianoff and Rikki Schlott, *Cancelling of the American Mind*
- T Feb 4 **Class Visit—Greg Lukianoff**
- W Feb 5 Greg Lukianoff and Rikki Schlott, *Cancelling of the American Mind*
- W Feb 12 Jonathan Glover, Part Five, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*
- W Feb 19 Thomas Sowell, *Social Justice Fallacies*
- W Feb 26 **Readings Test 1**
Activity/Reading TBD
- W Mar 5 Heather Mac Donald, *The War on Cops* (selections)
- Spring Break**
- W Mar 19 Abigail Shrier, *Irreversible Damage* (selections)
- W Mar 26 Brad Wilcox, *Get Married* (selections)
- R March 27 **Brad Wilcox Lecture, 5 p.m.**
- W Apr 2 Wrongthinkers
Topic TBD
- W Apr 9 Wrongthinkers
Topic TBD
- W Apr 16 **Readings Test 2**
- W Apr 23 Wrongthinkers
Topic TBD
- S May 3 **Final Project emailed to me in MS Word by 12:00 p.m. (Earlier submissions appreciated.)**