

Seminar in Political Theory
POS 419Z (10129), Fall 2015
TuTh. 1:15 – 2:35 BB217

Professor M. Schoolman
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Office Hours for Professor Schoolman:

TuTh., Humanities 16 (Political Science Contact Offices): 12:00 – 1pm.
TuTh., Milne 218 (Political Science Dept.): 4:15 - 5:30 by appointment

Seminar in Political Theory

The theme of this course is “Difference, Otherness, Social Justice, and Film in Light of Ferguson, Missouri.” Against the historical backdrop of the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri on August 9, 2014, this course will investigate the portrayal in film of the situations of minorities in America. It will consider films that explore the predicaments of minorities of color, LGBT populations, the mentally and physically challenged, social class, Jews, and other minority groups, and will explore the question of whether the rule of law can ever be sufficient to guarantee social justice for groups who are the targets of discrimination.

Class participation, an oral presentation, and a final term paper are required.

Course Requirements

There are three requirements for this course:

- 1.** Every student is expected to participate in class on a regular basis, posing questions, answering questions, contesting or arguing on behalf of the views of other students in the course and, certainly, challenging the views of the instructor. Since POS 419Z is a “seminar” format, meaning the class is of modest size and allows for on-going discussion among the members of the class, student participation is facilitated. Class participation is valued at 25% of the final grade. Obviously, in order to participate students must attend class. Attendance will be taken each class. Students who have more than two unexcused absences during the course of the semester stand in danger of automatically receiving a failing grade.
- 2.** All students are required to make at least one oral presentation in class on the reading or viewing material. Students will be given at least one full week advanced notice to prepare their presentations. Presentations should be no more than 20 minutes long. This may seem like a long time for a presentation, but once student presenters thoroughly read and study a text or a film to prepare their presentations they will see that the time allotted is not generous. Presentations are valued at 25% of the final grade.

Student presentations should do the following three things:

First, presentations should summarize the arguments in the reading assignment for that day. Where a film is the topic for the day, student presenters should summarize the narrative of the film.

Second, presentations should relate the argument in the reading or the narrative of the film to class discussions we have had earlier in the semester. This helps to establish continuity in our discussions;

Third, presentations should pose critical questions about the reading material or about the film from the standpoint of the reading material.

Best presentations (grade of A) -- will include all three of the above.

3. Finally, students will have a term paper (15 pages) to write, the goal of which will be to examine selected course readings and films with regard to the questions around which our course is framed. Options for designing your term paper are laid out on the last page of this syllabus.

Here are the questions you must focus on in your term paper in relation to the reading and viewing material:

- i.** To what extent are modern democratic societies – especially America – inclusive?
- ii.** Is inclusiveness a guarantee of equal treatment according to formal-legal constitutional provisions and other constitutional guarantees?
- iii.** How do our course readings and also films produced in America or elsewhere help us to understand how those who are considered to be “different” from the majority with respect to their gender, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so forth, are constructed as the “Other” and despite the formal-legal protections of the law continue to suffer forms of discrimination?
- iv.** Do the course readings and films perhaps offer images to enlighten the public about the values to which a true democracy ought to be committed? If so, what should these images be called?
- v.** Are there contradictions between the narrative structure of our films and the meaning of the images that make-up film narratives?

Each student will submit a term paper prospectus due on November 3 as scheduled below. The prospectus should be 4-5 typewritten pages outlining the term paper project and should include a working bibliography. Students should take advantage of Professor Schoolman's office hours to discuss the prospectus. The prospectus is to be submitted by email attachment to mschlman@albany.edu, and must be received no later than 5pm. No late papers accepted. Term paper prospectuses are valued at 25% of the final grade.

Final term papers are due on the Monday following the last day of scheduled classes. No late papers are accepted. Term papers are to be submitted by email attachment

to mschoolman@albany.edu. Term papers are 25% of the final grade. This course fulfills the 400 level writing intensive requirement for the major in Political Science and the upper-level University GenEd writing requirement.

Rules of Engagement

Students are permitted to bring beverages to class, although no food of any sort is permitted. Cell phones are to be turned off upon entering class. Students who use computers for note taking are not permitted to use their computers for any other application during class time. Each violation of these rules will be rewarded with a deduction of 5 pts. from the final grade. Students must arrive to class on time. If anything competes with these obligations a student should take a different course with more flexible requirements, if such courses exist.

Learning Objectives

The goal of this course is to teach students how to carefully read and interpret texts, identify key concepts on which theoretical arguments are based, and how to use these arguments and concepts to develop critical analyses and understandings of democratic societies and their politics. Students will be taught to think about the complex matter of what counts as politics in modern democratic societies. These objectives will contribute to teaching students how to formulate concepts and arguments of their own in their written work (term papers) and in oral presentations (class participation and class presentations). Finally, students will be taught how to interpret the meaning of films and their images in so far as they pertain to the nature of a democratic education for the citizens of a modern democratic society.

Required Reading

(available at Mary Jane Books, Quail & Western Aves.)

Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*
William Connolly, *Identity\Difference*

(Available in Dropbox)

Norval, "Thinking Identities: Against a Theory of Ethnicity"

Comaroff, "Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Politics of Difference in an Age of Revolution"

Schedule of Reading and Viewing Assignments

August 27 (Th.): Course Introduction

Sept. 1 (Tu.): Foucault, “On Popular Justice” & “Prison Talk”

Class Presentation: Professor Schoolman

Sept. 3 (Th.): No class. APSA Conference.

Sept. 8 (Tu.): Foucault, “Body Power,” “Questions on Geography,” “Two Lectures”

Class Presentation: Professor Schoolman

Sept. 10 (Th.): Foucault, “Truth and Power” & “Power and Strategies”

Class Presentation:

Sept. 12 (Tu.): Foucault, “The Eye of Power” & “The Politics of Health in the 18th Century”

Class Presentation:

Sept. 15 (Tu.): Foucault, “The History of Sexuality”

Class Presentation:

Sept. 17 (Th.): Foucault, “The Confession of the Flesh”

Class Presentation:

Sept. 22 (Tu.): No Class. Yom Kippur

Sept. 24 (Th.): Connolly, pp. xiii-xxxi & “Introduction”

Class Presentation:

Sept. 29 (Tu.): Connolly, “Freedom and Resentment”

Class Presentation:

Oct. 1 (Th.): Connolly, “Global Political Discourse”

Class Presentation:

Oct. 6 (Tu.): Connolly, “Liberalism and Difference”

Class Presentation:

Oct. 8 (Th.): Connolly, “Responsibility for Evil”

Class Presentation:

Oct. 13 (Tu.): Connolly, “A Letter to Augustine”

Class Presentation:

Oct. 15 (Th.): Connolly, “Democracy and Distance”
Class Presentation:

Oct. 20 (Tu.): Connolly, “The Politics of Territorial Democracy”
Class Presentation:

Oct. 22 (Th.): Summary discussion of Readings.

Oct. 27 (Tu.): The Help

Oct. 29 (Th.): The Help Class Presentation:

Nov. 3 (Tu.): Pride

Nov. 5 (Th.): Pride Class Presentation:

Nov. 10 (Tu.): Tootsie

Nov. 12 (Th.): Tootsie Class Presentation:

Nov. 17 (Tu.): Mr. Klein

Nov. 19 (Th.): Mr. Klein Class Presentation:

Nov. 24 (Tu.): Summary of Films

Nov. 26 (Th.): No Class. Thanksgiving

Dec. 1 (Tu.): Norval, “Thinking Identities: Against a Theory of Ethnicity”
Class Presentation:

Dec. 3 (Th.): Comaroff, “Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Politics of Difference in
an Age of Revolution” Class Presentation:

Dec. 8 (Tu.): Last Class. Semester Summary.

Term Paper Optional Topics

You have available two general approaches from which you may choose to complete your term paper assignment:

First, you may critically analyze one or more of the films shown in the course from the theoretical perspectives of Foucault *and* Connolly. Second, you can discuss and analyze the readings for our course as a whole without film examples.