BLHS 120 Writing in an Interdisciplinary Environment

POETICS OF JUSTICE
Spring 2015

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Location: Mass Ave C213

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CLASS Mondays: 5:20-7:50

NOTE: Please put the Course designation (BLHS 120) in every email addressed to me in regard to this course. Otherwise I may overlook your email.

PLEASE BE ADVISED: This syllabus is aspirational and provisional and subject to adjustment.

We focus on developing academic writing, speaking and research skills through studying justice in the law and culture context. How does reading or rereading law and literature classics like To Kill a Mockingbird, Billy Budd, and The Trial through the lenses provided by the great philosophers of justice like Aristotle, Bentham, Mill, Kant, Rawls, Nussbaum and Sen, and by neuroscientists and post-modern philosophers, make a difference? Students will be asked to bring contemporary issues on justice to the class and to respond to writing and research prompts weekly as well. Three longer essays, a field trip to the Supreme Court (with related writing assignment) and an in-class final exam will also be required. While we will be learning about and thinking through three of the canonical texts in this field, we’ll also be seeking to reread and reinterpret them through contemporary approaches to law and justice. Some of the questions we will be asking include: Can justice be reduced to a rationally-imposed formula? What is the relationship between emotions and justice? Do babies have a sense of justice? How about animals? How do individual justice, social justice and global justice approaches interact? And what do we make of trolleyology?

Credits: 3
Prerequisites: None
This course is designed to help you develop your writing skills as they relate to interdisciplinary academic writing. The course aims to provide:

- Instruction in close reading and textual analysis
- Emphasis on writing
- Models of close reading of primary texts
- Introduction to a field and its terminology
- Engagement with secondary sources
- Awareness of larger critical conversations within the field

**COURSE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:**

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Design detailed and sophisticated arguments appropriate to academic writing.
- Understand the basis for interdisciplinary research and the meta-reflexive nature of academic inquiry.
- Avoid mechanical errors in one’s writing and document sources correctly according to MLA format.
- Apply editing and revision skills to one’s own writing and the writing of peers.
- Develop a greater understanding of concepts of justice as represented in philosophical, legal and literary texts.
- Use a range of scholarly works in critical thinking and written analysis.
- Determine credible and authoritative sources to be used in library research.
- Develop strategies for managing information.
- Think historically and comparatively in order to understand how concepts develop over time and use this mode of thought in essays and argumentative writing.
- Be able to compose several drafts in consultation with students in peer-reviewed workshops.
- Write well-crafted sentences and paragraphs as well as a longer argument.
- Be able to transition smoothly from one idea to the next.
- Be able to synthesize materials and write about them cogently.
- Develop a sense of diction and the appropriate uses of language.
- Establish a foundation for academic writing across disciplines.
Reading List:

You must buy Sandel, Kafka, Lee and Melville. Other readings and exercises are on blackboard or will be provided in hard copy. Please review the Blackboard listings carefully so you do not miss any readings.


Graff, Gerald. *They Say, I Say*. 978-0-393-93361-1


Selected essays will be distributed in class and/or posted on blackboard.

Supplemental Reading List, Interesting Sources, and Other Great Stuff:

www.lawandneuroscienceproject.org

http://blackstoneweekly.wordpress.com/about/

*Law and Literature* (journal)

*Law, Culture & the Humanities* (journal)

*Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities* (journal)

There are many, many blogs taking up issues of law and justice; some commentators feel that blogs are where the best writing on law and justice is currently appearing.

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO CONTRIBUTE TO THIS LIST AS THE SEMESTER PROCEEDS.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**
Students should expect to become obsessed by questions of the relationship between law, culture and justice. Close reading skills will be emphasized; style and content as well as narrative strategies, plot, setting, characterization will play into our interpretations of all the texts we read, whether literary, philosophical or artifactual. Students should attend each class meeting and participate actively; to facilitate this, they will be asked to bring to the table topical contributions to our discussion of justice and to make regular contributions to a Blackboard discussion, recording their responses to the readings as well as their relationship to the writing process. Active participation requires completion of the assigned readings before they are discussed in class and joining in group discussions on the materials. Student success depends upon the level of engagement brought to the course, and grades will reflect the quality and effort each student demonstrates throughout the semester and the proficiency of one’s comprehension of the materials. The student will be asked to complete a series of short writing exercises, deliver at least one class presentation, write three essays, write a non-traditional response essay (related to the Supreme Court visit) and complete an in-class final exam. The professor reserves the right to give content quizzes on the readings. While my expectation is that you will be writing at a college level, there is no reason college writing should be boring, impersonal or predictable. Take as your models some of the best creative non-fiction being published today in *The Atlantic, Harper’s, The New Yorker, n+1* (online), *The Commons* (on line), *McSweeney’s* (online), etc. Feel free to bring in your own examples of well-written non-fiction prose. (See [http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/5997/the-art-of-nonfiction-no-3-john-mcphee](http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/5997/the-art-of-nonfiction-no-3-john-mcphee) for a discussion of the term “creative non-fiction” and its limitations.)

STUDENTS SHOULD ATTEND A WRITING BOOT CAMP IF THEY HAVE NOT ALREADY DONE SO.

The total percentage of your grade will be determined according to the following scale:

- **60%** short essays (3 essays, approximately 5 pages)
- **20%** class participation, quizzes, miscellaneous writing assignments and presentations
- **20%** final exam: You should bring all your materials and all the writing you have done for this course with you to the final exam.

**EXTRA CREDIT:** Supreme Court Writing Assignment (This visit to the Supreme Court and writing assignment is optional for those who wish to raise their grade. If completed satisfactorily, the assignment could raise your grade by as much as a half grade, so, for instance from a B+ to an A- or an A- to an A.)

Documentation for your essays should follow MLA guidelines.
Students are expected to meet with the professor at least once and as needed thereafter, to meet with the TA or a Writing Center tutor at least once and otherwise as needed, and to make full use of the Writing Center.

INCOMPLETE POLICY — Incomplete grades will be assigned only after discussion with the professor. Please email or call me to discuss any needs you have for extensions or an incomplete grade.

LATE POLICY — Students are expected to turn in all class assignments by the specified due date. Please bring a hard copy to class, post a copy to Blackboard AND send the professor an attachment with your paper in an email to templek@georgetown.edu. Copy the TA on all emailed assignments and put the course title and number in the subject line of your email. Please put page numbers on your papers.

ATTENDANCE POLICY – Students must attend class. You may miss one class period over the course of the semester without penalty; any further absences will result in a reduction of the final grade by at least one level (A to A-, for example), if not more, depending on the circumstances. I advise you to save your penalty-free absences for true emergencies.

GEORGETOWN HONOR SYSTEM — The university community seeks to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. For information on the university’s policy on academic integrity, please consult the Academic Honor System, which can be found on the Georgetown University website:

http://library.georgetown.edu/odyssey/plagiarism.htm.

Georgetown Honor System: Students are expected to follow Georgetown’s honor code unconditionally. You will need to read the honor code material that can be found at www.georgetown.edu/honor. In particular, please read the following documents: Honor Council Pamphlet, “What is Plagiarism?”; “Sanctioning Guidelines”; and “Expedited Sanctioning Process.”

Submitting material in fulfillment of the requirements of this course means that you will abide by the Georgetown honor pledge:

In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.

AMERICAN WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA): Georgetown University complies fully with the ADA requirements and encourages students with disabilities to receive the
extra time and/or assistance needed to complete their courses. Please see the instructor about your specific needs and take advantage of the University Services for Students with Disabilities (see http://ldss.georgetown.edu). If you believe you have a disability, then you should contact the Academic Resource Center at 202-687-8354 (arc@georgetown.edu) for further information. The Center is located in the Leavey Center, Suite 335. The Academic Resource Center is the campus office responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students with disabilities and for determining reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and University policies.

ELECTRONICS USE IN CLASS: Although you may bring your electronics with you, they must be turned off and put away during class time. This includes laptops, phones, and electronic reading devices. Do not use electronic reading devices to read the texts for this class. You must buy the books assigned and print off the blackboard texts for use in class. On occasion, we may wish to access electronics to check a reference or track down the answer to a question with permission of the instructor. Any use for any other purpose will result in the electronic device being banned from the class for the duration of the semester. Additionally, the student will incur one unexcused absence for that day.

GETTING US STARTED

SCHEDULE:

The syllabus is always subject to revision. Please note that there will almost always be some sort of writing due for each class or an in-class writing exercise. Major writing assignments are listed on the syllabus, but various forms of prewriting will almost certainly be due prior to these major assignment due dates. Because you should expect to be reading, writing and presenting your writing for review at every class or almost every class, please be sure to keep a folder/portfolio of your work and to bring it to class with you every day we meet. Note that in each class we will devote a portion of our time to a specific writing issue.

CLASS 1: General introductions to the course and ourselves. We will focus on gaining an understanding of where each of us stands in regard to issues of justice and to an understanding of the relationship between law, literature, justice and culture. In class writing assignments will be designed to probe the current level of our understanding as well as to familiarize the professor with your aspirations for the course. We will review the course syllabus and requirements.

PART I: Some Humanities-Based Approaches to Issues of Law and Justice (and some Trolleology)
CLASS 2: Read: “Western Theories of Justice” http://www.iep.utm.edu/justwest/; Sandel, 3-30. (on Blackboard); Nussbaum (on blackboard). Please come to class with (1) at least one example of a literary work or cultural artifact you have encountered that supports ideas from each of these readings. Be prepared for a quiz on “Western Theories of Justice.” While we will be discussing these ideas in detail during this class and over the next two classes, you should read all three assignments for today. Can you map the history of theories of justice? And can you then map onto these theories, the stories Sandel and Nussbaum tell about the relationship between law, literature and justice? How do they construct what it means to be human, what it means to do justice, how humans read and think? What similarities do you see among their approaches?

CLASS 3: *To Kill a Mockingbird* Part One, pp 1-149. We will discuss the relationship between history, culture and justice in the first half of TKM. Read and reread the first few chapters of the novel so you will be prepared for questions requiring what we call “close reading.” Issues we might discuss include the management of time, narrative voice, class, gender, race and literacy. You should be obsessively attentive to Lee’s narrative choices, asking yourself “why this way of writing a sentence and not another? why this choice of words? why this image? why this reference to this or that book, novel, story?”

CLASS 4: *TKM* Complete the novel. Topics for discussion include justice and personal heroism, justice and progress, the just community, justice and violence.

CLASS 5: DRAFT WORKSHOPS

PART II: Neurojustice: What can biological approaches to justice tell us about morality and just decisions? Does it all come down to DNA and brain chemistry? Or is neuroscience just another narrative?


CLASS 7: *Billy Budd* chapters 1-11; Sandel on utilitarianism, pp. 31 - 57

CLASS 8: *Billy Budd* chapters 12 to end; Sandel on Kant pp. 103 - 140

CLASS 9: Final discussions of *Billy Budd*. Thesis development and development of evidence.

CLASS 10: DRAFT WORKSHOPS

PART III: Performance, Space and Publicity: If justice occurred and there was no one there to hear it, would it make a sound? We will focus here on performances of
justice and on the relationship between localized, contextualized, embodied instances of justice and abstracted, depersonalized representations of justice.

CLASS 10: Julie Stone Peters “Legal Performance Good and Bad” (on Blackboard). *The Trial* pp. 1-110

CLASS 11: *The Trial* pp. 110-end

CLASS 12: *The Trial* Final discussions of *The Trial*. In class development of thesis, evidence, etc. Summing up the class.

CLASS 13: Draft workshops

CLASS 14: SUMMING UP FOLLOWED BY DISCUSSION OF FINAL EXAM

CLASS 15: FINAL EXAM