

BLHS 120 Writing in an Interdisciplinary Environment

POETICS OF JUSTICE

Fall 2017

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[Location: Mass Ave](#)

[CLASS Wednesdays: 5:20-7:50](#)

[NOTE: Please put the Course designation \(BLHS 120\) in every email addressed to me in regard to this course and use your official Georgetown email address. Otherwise I may overlook your email.](#)

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

We will 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. Three longer essays with drafts and revisions, 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:

- Understand and use the writing process, including brainstorming, research, drafting, and revision.
- 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 to understand how concepts develop over time and use this mode of thought in essays and argumentative writing.
- Compose drafts and revisions in consultation with students in peer-reviewed workshops.
- Write well-crafted sentences and paragraphs as well as a longer argument.
- Transition smoothly from one idea to the next.
- Synthesize materials and write about them cogently.
- Express a sense of diction and the appropriate uses of language.
- Establish a foundation for academic writing across disciplines.

Reading List:

You must buy Sandel, Lee and Melville in hard copy. Please no digital texts. Other readings and exercises are on blackboard and/or will be provided in hard copy. Please review the Blackboard listings carefully so you do not miss any readings.

Sandel, Michael. *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do* ISBN-13: 978-0374532505 (Required)

Kafka, Franz. *The Trial* ISBN-13: 978-0805209990 (You are not required to buy this although some of you may wish to. I'll provide relevant portions digitally and in hard copy.)

Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird* ISBN-13: 978-0060935467 (Required)

Melville, Herman. *Billy Budd* ISBN-13: 978-0226321325 (Required)

Williams, Joe. *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*. ISBN-13: 978-0-205-74746-7 (Recommended: the cheapest edition you can find used will be fine.)

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

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:

Please note: I welcome questions about my policies.

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, and 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 discussion. Keeping a writing/thinking journal is encouraged. 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> for a discussion of the term "creative nonfiction" and its limitations.)

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

60% short essays (4 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.

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 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. Put the course title and number in the subject line of your email. Please put page numbers on your papers. A half grade will be deducted for each day the paper is late.

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 absence for true emergencies.

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." In accord with university policy, all incidents of suspected plagiarism or other Honor Code violations will be reported to the Honor Council without fail.

If the Honor Council finds that a student has plagiarized or has violated the Honor Code in any other way, the student may receive a grade of F for the course.

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 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. If you are a student with a documented disability who requires accommodations or if you think you may have a disability and want to inquire about accommodations, please contact the Academic Resource Center at 202-687-8354 or arc@georgetown.edu. 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.

Extreme weather, Emergencies, and Instructional Continuity: During inclement weather or other emergencies on a day when we are scheduled to meet face-to-face, check the university's Web site or call (202) 687-7669 for information on whether the university is open. If the university is open, this class will meet. If the university is closed, this class will meet through distance means such as online videoconferencing; check your e-mail for a message from me on how we will proceed in that situation. Due dates for written assignments submitted through Blackboard will not be changed due to campus closings.

The university recently has acquired the capability to send text messages and recorded messages about emergencies to cell phones and other mobile devices. Sign up on MyAccess.

Policy Accommodating Students' Religious Observances: Georgetown University promotes respect for all religions. Any student who is unable to attend classes or to participate in any examination, presentation, or assignment on a given day because of the observance of a major religious holiday or related travel shall be excused and provided with the opportunity to make up, without unreasonable burden, any work that has been missed for this reason and shall not in any other way be penalized for the absence or rescheduled work. Students will remain responsible for all assigned work. Students should notify professors in writing at the beginning of the semester of religious observances that conflict with their classes.

Electronics Use in Class: Barring a disability that requires the use of assistive technology, electronic devices must be turned off and put away during class time unless we are engaging in a writing or revising activity that requires their use. 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.

SCHEDULE:

The syllabus and the schedule are 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. With a few exceptions, you may write on your laptop or by hand, so bring your laptop if you wish to use it for our in-class writing assignments. 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.

Sept 6: General introductions to the course and ourselves. We will focus on gaining an understanding of where each of us stands in regards 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, requirements, and paper rubric. Be prepared to go for a walk during this class as we explore the way law and justice manifest themselves in our daily lives.

Practicum: The Writing Process/Freewriting

PART I: Some Humanities-Based Approaches to Issues of Law and Justice (and some Trolleology)

Sept. 13: Library Research Instruction.

Practicum: Come to class with a 300-500 word draft of an essay based on our Justice/Law in Daily Life Walkabout last week. Read the paper rubric and improvement supplement, available on blackboard and evaluate your draft based on that document. Then email me your revision by the end of class.

Sept 20: Read 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. What stories do 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?

Practicum: The Hook

Sept 27: *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?”

Practicum: Time Management for Writers

Oct 4: *TKM* Complete the novel, pp. 150 to the end. Topics for discussion include justice and personal heroism, justice and progress, the just community, justice and violence. An in class writing assignment will help you develop a draft.

Practicum: Organizing a paper

Oct 11: DRAFT DUE/DRAFT WORKSHOPS: Please bring three copies of your paper to class. (NOTE: Final revision due October 15, 5 p.m.)

Practicum: Workshopping a paper, learning helpful critique methods, getting the most out of your workshop.

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?

Oct. 18: *Neuroethics: An Introduction with Readings*: pp. 1-10, available on Blackboard;
Watch: https://www.ted.com/talks/daniel_reisel_the_neuroscience_of_restorative_justice
Read *Billy Budd*, chapters 1-4.

Practicum: Reading Difficult Texts/Developing a Writing Vocabulary

Oct. 25: *Billy Budd* chapters 5-end.

Practicum: Paragraph structure. Transitions.

Nov. 1: Sandel on utilitarianism, pp. 31 – 57; Sandel on Kant pp. 103 – 140; Final discussions of *Billy Budd*. Thesis development, in-class drafting.

Nov. 8: DRAFT WORKSHOPS on *Billy Budd* paper; bring three copies of your paper to class. (NOTE: Final revision due via email Nov. 12, 5 p.m.)

Practicum: Simple editing tips. Passive/Active.

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.

Nov. 15: *The Trial* selections (on blackboard).

Practicum: Fostering Creativity

Nov. 22: We will meet in small groups via zoom over the long weekend to discuss your progress.

Nov. 29: Final discussions of *The Trial*. In class development of thesis, evidence, etc. Summing up the class. *TRIAL PAPERS DUE BY EMAIL DECEMBER 6, 5 P.M.*

Practicum: Subordination; Fostering Motivation.

Dec. 6: Final Exam

