

# **CIVIC LEADERSHIP IN THE CONTEXT OF RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL PLURALISM**

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“One of the great problems of mankind is that we suffer from a poverty of the spirit which stands in glaring contrast to our scientific and technological abundance. The richer we have become materially, the poorer we have become morally and spiritually.”

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

## **Course Description**

This course explores “pluralism” in contemporary American society in the contexts of religion and culture. With our changing demographics, we are transitioning into a truly “multicultural” society with a growing and challenging diversity that soars dynamically while many of the institutions of our culture remain static and unchanged. The issue of pluralism will be examined with a particular emphasis placed on motivating students to have an understanding about “civic responsibility” and the role “civic leadership” can play in fostering equity, fairness, and justice. Students will examine the primary “cultural” groups in the United States as they examine the major ways politics are influenced by these groups and the ways religion can and does influence politics. One of the primary goals of the course is to expose students to the countless questions that arise in addressing challenging social issues in an academic course. Though many questions will go unanswered, the intellectual exercises should prove stimulating for the “thinking” learner who is eager to make sense of the difficulties we face as a nation. It is important to note that the class will be safe haven to discuss the themes and ideas that have been on the radar of most people in the world today: religion, war, intolerance, bigotry, and oppression, among them.

## **Course Objectives**

In addition to challenging students to become “critical thinkers,” the objectives of this course, many stated and most unstated, revolve around creating a learning environment where students can discuss critical issues after reading and discussing credible texts, papers, and historical documents. Students will be

- Provided with an academic foundation upon which they will be able to build their knowledge of cultural and religious pluralism,
- Exposed to a variety of learning tools and strategies to enhance their understanding of the topics studied in the course,

- Expected to show commitment to the class by showing up on time with all homework assignments completed,
- Challenged to understand the relationship between religion and culture and all the dynamics that influence this symbiosis,
- Introduced to the basic themes and terminology peculiar to religious and cultural studies,
- Given reading and writing assignments that will develop, encourage and enhance their critical thinking skills,
- Provided with challenging and thought-provoking assignments that will help them understand diversity and pluralism as they relate to culture, politics and community, and
- Given assignments that will expose them to the challenges of academic research that requires using multiple texts and sources, both print and electronic.

### **Course Requirements and Grading**

Students will be required to submit four positions papers on topics to be assigned by the professor (25% of the final grade for the course). In addition, students will be required to submit a research paper at the end of the course on a topic approved by the professor (50% of the final grade). The in-class midterm and final examinations will account for 15% of the final grade for the course. Classroom participation and presentations will account for 10% of the final grade.

### **Required Texts**

In addition to the texts listed below, students will be given an extensive reading list of articles they will be able to access online. These articles will address the various topical areas listed for study and will provide the foundation students need in order to fully understand the topics and the research done in these critical areas. Articles by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Thoreau, William Lloyd Garrison, Cornel West, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, James Carroll, Robert Coles, Michael Eric Dyson, and other writers and thinkers will be included in the online offerings.

Margaret L. Andersen and Patricia Hill Collins (Eds.). **Race, Class, & Gender: An Anthology** (6<sup>th</sup> Edition). Belmont, CA: Thomson, Wadsworth, 2007.

Ronald A. Heffez. **Leadership Without Easy Answers**. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.

Richard T. Schaefer. **Race and Ethnicity in the United States** (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition). New Jersey: Pearson, Prentice-Hall, 2005.

Howard Zinn. **A People's History of the United States**. New York: HarperCollins, 2005.

## **Course Outline**

Week One

Studying Race, Class, and Gender (Andersen-Ch.1, Schaefer-Ch.1) Short paper assign.

Week Two

Definitions of Religious and Cultural Pluralism (online research)

Week Three

Race and Ethnicity (Schaefer-Ch. 5) Short paper assignment.

Week Four

Understanding Power- Political and Social Institutions (Andersen-Parts II, III)

Week Five

Social Class, Human Capital, Social Capital (Andersen-Ch.12-16, online readings)

Week Six

Nationalism and Pluralism (Zinn-Ch. 2, 9, Andersen- Ch. 22-26) In-class presentations.

Week Seven

Leading the World, World Leaders (Zinn-Ch.24, Heffez- Ch. 1-3, 5, online readings)

Week Eight

In-class midterm examination

Week Nine

The Culture of GLBT (Andersen-Ch. 17-21, 27-31, online readings) Short paper assign.

Week Ten

"One Nation, Under God, Indivisible..." (Schaefer-Ch. 6, online readings)

Week Eleven

Family, Village, Community, Country- New Citizens (Schaefer- Ch. 4) The research paper

Week Twelve

Terrorism (Zinn-Ch. 25, Andersen- Ch. 52-56, online readings) Short paper assignment.

Week Thirteen

The Dynamics of Change (Andersen-Ch. 58, 61, 62)

Week Fourteen

Social Welfare, Social Justice, Social Change (Andersen- Ch. 32-36, 49-50)

Week Fifteen

Final Examination, research paper due.

## **Pedagogy and Educational Philosophy**

The professor will use both lectures and classroom discussions to bring to life the topics being addressed in the class. Films, journal articles, case studies, guest lecturers, and other teaching tool and aids may be used to enhance the learning experience for students in the class. The professor, mindful of the fact that people learn differently and have different learning styles, will tailor the course to accommodate the dimensions, differences, and disparities in learning for a diverse classroom "community." Visual aids, audio and video tapes, computer-generated learning materials and other tools may be used to liven up the learning experience. Participation in small groups and in-class oral presentations will be required.

Most students and teachers find it difficult to speak from the “heart” about topics related to “race,” religion, sexuality, and sexual preference. These “taboo” topics are avoided in many instances because they inspire fear, judgment, anxiety and a basic discomfort. People cling to their belief systems and sometimes fear having them challenged. They find “comfort” in what they are used to and do not wish to be publicly challenged if their beliefs are outside of the “norm,” appear irrational and narrow, or in some way suggest a prejudice or hatred against a selected group. New and emerging pedagogies seek to provide a comfortable context for discussing these “difficult” topics. The professor will mix and blend many of these new pedagogies. These new approaches to teaching encourage dialogue rather than seeking to silence it. The following information on the “art of teaching” will provide a reference that will clarify the strategies used in the classroom by the professor.

**Pedagogy** is the science of teaching and educating young people that is generally teacher-centered. John Dewey recognized early on the shortcomings of this focus and encouraged learning through experience, that is, “learning as life.” **Andragogy** is the art and science of helping adults to learn. As “teaching” as a profession and discipline has emerged over the centuries, our academic systems have gone through many modifications and transformations. The evolved professor-teacher will use a variety of teaching methods in a noble attempt to “reach” every student in the classroom. In order to execute powerful and effective curricula, the following models for teaching will be used where deemed appropriate.

### **Traditional Pedagogy**

This teacher-centered model has gone through many iterations over the centuries and has been proven to be ineffective in the education of most groups. Its focus renders the student impotent in the learning experience and does not allow for student engagement and involvement. The teacher is a “talking head” that often puts the student to sleep with the routine of what is so easily anticipated by the student: “I talk, you listen.” This model should not be totally tossed, however. It works quite well with some disciplines for a short period of time. It should not be the dominant method used to educate students in our ever emerging, dynamic culture.

### **Critical Pedagogy**

This model utilizes methods that will stress the relationship between knowledge, authority, and power. It takes into account the entire learning environment the student is immersed in and encourages and requires the involvement of the student in setting learning goals. This model is student and teacher centered. It empowers learners by guiding them to the dimensions of knowledge that cut across disciplines by bringing knowledge to students rather than taking students to knowledge. “Knowledge” has to inform them about who they are and this has to be multidimensional and multicontextual.

## Experiential Pedagogy

The recent trends in the craft of teaching have embraced transformative models that encourage the development of “learning communities” and “inclusive classrooms” where the learning experience is shared. In many institutions **everyone** in the building is a part of the academic team and all “citizens” are valued. These progressive models have proven to favorably influence academic achievement and retention for students of color and new immigrants because they value all learners and their experiences and seek ways to validate their lives, their cultures, and their languages by having everyone “represented.”

## Basic Information for Students

### Grading

The grading systems used by the College will be the same system used to assess work done for your course. Refer to the student handbook for details on this system (the letters used and their numeric equivalents). **No IP grades will be given in this course.** Students will be given a failing grade for all assignments not completed by the end of the semester. These grades will be factored into the final course grade. **No make-up exams will be given.** A failing grade will be given for all missed exams.

### **Plagiarism**

Students are expected to give attribution to any materials written by others. Students should refer to the College's student handbook for the codes of conduct that govern academic integrity. In those cases where plagiarism is suspected, the burden of proof rests with the student, i.e. the student will be required to prove that the written piece was not plagiarized. Written works incorrectly cited will receive a failing grade. In those cases where plagiarism has occurred, the student will receive a failing grade for the class and will be subject to disciplinary action.

**"A" Range:** Achievement is Outstanding, exceeds standards for the course. The student has demonstrated a unique understanding of the materials studied and has original ideas. The student has mastered language and demonstrates a writing style that reflects the standards established by the English department. Student has gone well beyond what is basically required for the course and has shown exceptional scholarship. All assignments are completed and were submitted on time as required. Student has fully participated in the class and has not missed more than three classes.

**"B" Range:** Achievement is above standard and is commendable. Student handles the topics well and has few mechanical errors in writing. Student presents ideas in a clear and organized manner. All assignments for the course are completed. Student has participated in the class and has not missed more than three classes.

**"C" Range:** Standards for the course are met; achievement is average and acceptable. Student demonstrates a general competence and understanding of the concepts and theories for the course. All assignments for the course are completed. Student has not fully participated and contributed to the class and has missed more than three classes.

**"D" Range:** Student fails to demonstrate a real command of the theories and concepts studied; achievement is below standard. The writing and expression is poor and

achievement is unsatisfactory. Some required assignments may be missing. Student has not participated in the class and has more than three absences.

**"F" Range:** Student fails to meet the minimal requirements for the course and has not completed all assignments as required. Student has missed more than three classes.

### **Attendance**

Students are expected to arrive to class on time, prepared to work and to fully participate in classroom activities! Students may miss three classes without penalty. **If more than three classes are missed, the course grade will be lowered one full grade. Students with more than five absences will be expected to withdraw from the course.** Learning is a process; if you are not present, you cannot learn! Continued tardiness will not be tolerated.

### **Behavior**

Students are expected to come to class prepared. Students are expected to behave like adults, respecting the Professor and members of the class. Rudeness and disrespect will not be tolerated. Please refer to the student handbook for codes of conduct. Students will respect the status, opinions and choices of others in the class. It is understood that the properties of the college, including electronic equipment, desks, and teaching aids, will be respected. Trash should be placed in the proper receptacles; students will keep the area surrounding their desks neat and clean.

### **Office Hours**

Professor Johnson's office location is **B350B**. His office hours are posted at this location. If he is unavailable when you arrive, please leave a note under his door. He will make every effort to respond as quickly as possible.

### **Students with Special Needs**

Students with disabilities or special needs should contact the appropriate offices in the college for help and assistance. There are professionals in place who will be able to assist those students who have physical or learning challenges that require special attention. Professor Johnson is committed to providing help and assistance for those with special needs.

### **Personal Electronic Devices**

No recording devices are allowed in class without prior permission from the Professor. No visible cell phones, beepers, pagers, and other electronic devices are allowed in class. **Please turn off all cell phones and other electronic devices before entering the classroom!**

### **Written Work and Class Assignments**

Students are expected to keep copies of all written work. Papers should be typed on 8 ½ X 11 inch paper. Ragged papers torn from notebooks and sloppy submission will not be accepted. The Professor assumes no liability for work lost or misplaced. Students are responsible for all work disseminated during class. It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with classmates to provide them with lecture notes or handouts they might have missed due to tardiness or absence.

**The Professor reserves the right to modify this document and the course syllabus.**