

MODEL SYLLABUS:

THE CHALLENGE OF DISCUSSING ISSUES WRAPPED IN IDENTITY, MORALITY  
AND/OR JUSTICE

A college campus, at its best, is a place where students can examine any issue critically, feeling free to say what they believe, with a mind open to learning that their opinions might be wrong. Deliberate, calm, thoughtful, evidence-based debate is the ideal.

A college campus, at its best, is a place where students are engaged – passionate about what’s wrong in the world around them, and committed to using their growing knowledge to change it for the better.

What happens when difficult and contentious issues involving core identity and senses of justice come into play? Why is there so much “binary” thinking around such issues on some campuses (Israel/Palestine, Ferguson, immigration) and in the larger society (flag burning, abortion, gay marriage, gun ownership, labor relations, sports team affiliations and mascots, etc.)?

What happens to people when they feel personally invested in one of these issues, and see themselves in contest with others who have a strong but opposing point of view? What happens to thinking, nuance, empathy, and the capacity to acknowledge that one might be mistaken, or be open to rethinking arguments and positions? When someone sees themselves as part of a movement fighting to right a perceived wrong, is their capacity for independent thought inevitably diminished? Is it possible to maintain the passion that is needed to bring about change and at the same time critically engage ideas offered by other students that are not only 180 degrees different than yours, but that you also see, on some level, as a threat?

CLASS SESSIONS:

- 1) Introduction, orientation, discussion of why students are taking class, expectations, review of FISHBOWL discussion technique, to be used for discussions of the various “cases.” <http://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/difficult-dialogues/#tools> Also, read Paul Elbow, The Believing Game:  
[http://works.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1019&context=peter\\_elbow&sei-redirect=1#search=%22Elbow,+Peter.+The+Doubting+Game+and+the+Believing+Game:+An+Analysis+of+the+Intellectual+Process.%C3%A2%C2%80%C2%9D+In+Writing+Without+Teachers.+Oxford+University+Press,+1973.%22](http://works.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1019&context=peter_elbow&sei-redirect=1#search=%22Elbow,+Peter.+The+Doubting+Game+and+the+Believing+Game:+An+Analysis+of+the+Intellectual+Process.%C3%A2%C2%80%C2%9D+In+Writing+Without+Teachers.+Oxford+University+Press,+1973.%22)

- 2) EMOTIONS and their impact on the brain: Robert Sapolsky, GPS Interview: <https://www.cnn.com/videos/tv/2019/03/11/exp-gps-0310-robert-sapolsky-interview-in-full.cnn><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNY0AAUth3g>; HATE and the brain  
<http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0003556>;  
 Purity and Danger: Pollution and Taboo: Mary Douglas, "Purity and Danger":  
<http://socserv.mcmaster.ca/econ/ugcm/3ll3/mill/liberty.pdf>; The process  
 of denial, Baumesiter et al, "Freudian Defense Mechanisms in Modern Social  
 Psychology: Reaction Formation, Projections, Displacement, Undoing,  
 Isolation, Sublimation, and Denial,"  
[http://faculty.fortlewis.edu/burke\\_b/personality/readings/freuddefense.pdf](http://faculty.fortlewis.edu/burke_b/personality/readings/freuddefense.pdf)  
 and also <http://www.judicialfamilyinstitute.org/facesofdenial.html>
- 3) How we see ourselves as part of a group, believe that group is "better," and  
 that other groups may be threatening—Waller, "Our Ancestral Shadow: Hate  
 and Human Nature in Evolutionary Psychology,"  
<https://jhs.press.gonzaga.edu/4/volume/3/issue/1/> (121); Harrington,  
 "The Social Psychology of Hatred,"  
<https://jhs.press.gonzaga.edu/4/volume/3/issue/1/> (49)  
 Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (conclusion – pps 415 et  
 seq <http://www.social-sciences-and-humanities.com/PDF/The-Elementary-Forms-Of-The-Religious-Life.pdf>
- 4) MORALITY Steven Pinker, "The Moral Instinct,"  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/13/magazine/13Psychology-t.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>, John Haidt, Moral Authority --  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan\\_haidt\\_on\\_the\\_moral\\_mind?language=en#t-471867](http://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan_haidt_on_the_moral_mind?language=en#t-471867); The Neuroscience of Fairness and Injustice --  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-mindful-self-express/201408/the-neuroscience-fairness-and-injustice>  
 Rabbi Irwin Kula – Homosexuality Redux: Can We Hear Each Other?  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rabbi-irwin-kula/homosexuality-redux-can-w\\_b\\_578137.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rabbi-irwin-kula/homosexuality-redux-can-w_b_578137.html) Leonardt and Parlapiano, Why Gun Control and  
 Abortion Are Different From Gay Marriage.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/30/upshot/why-gun-control-and-abortion-are-different-from-gay-marriage.html?r=0&abt=0002&abg=1>  
 Thoughts about thinking and learning: quotes from John Dewey:  
[http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/42738.John\\_Dewey](http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/42738.John_Dewey)
- 5) FIRST CASE DISCUSSION: ABORTION. Students should be prepared to argue  
 both sides, providing note to professor with citations of materials researched  
 and reviewed. (Fishbowl exercise) (NOTE-FOR THIS AND EACH OF THE  
 SUBSEQUENT CASE DISCUSSIONS, STUDENTS MUST SHARE THEIR

CITATIONS WITH THE PROFESSOR BY 6PM, TWO DAYS BEFORE THE CLASS MEETS.)

- 6) FIRST SHORT PAPER DUE: On Abortion discussion, on whether anything heard changed opinions (or not), and if so why or why not, and how you felt. (Did you have a firm opinion before you began researching? Did your point of view change from the research? From the discussion? Can you identify and catalogue your emotions and/or other reactions to having to think through this issue, and how you felt when you were faced with arguments or positions with which you strongly disagree or agree?)
- 7) Discussion of LANGUAGE and MORALITY Sagi and Dehghani, "Measuring Moral Rhetoric in Text,"  
<https://www.ermon.net/sites/default/files/biblio/Sagi%20Dehghani-SSCR%202013-Measuring%20Moral%20Rhetoric.pdf>  
Ellen Langer, "The Mindlessness of Ostensively Thoughtful Action,"  
<http://jamesclear.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/copy-machine-study-ellen-langer.pdf> also <http://www.hulu.com/watch/1477>
- 8) CASE 2 THE GROUND ZERO MOSQUE – Students select material, and share citations with professor, but also view Pam Geller vs. Ibrahim Raney  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YmDip9BaFUU> and Michael Barbaro, "Debate Heats Up Over Ground Zero Mosque," NY Times July 30, 2010  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/31/nyregion/31mosque.html>  
and Bloomberg speech on Ground Zero Mosque --  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQsHc1EHgQY>
- 9) SECOND SHORT PAPER DUE: On Ground Zero Mosque discussion (Did you have a firm opinion before you began researching? Did your point of view change from the research? From the discussion? Can you identify and catalogue your emotions and/or other reactions to having to think through this issue, and how you felt when you were faced with arguments or positions with which you strongly disagree or agree? Was there anything different from how you perceived this issue and the abortion issue? If so, what? why?) ALSO DUE: 200-word proposal for midterm paper topic (students will propose to write about how they see clear thinking impacted by forces studied in this class on a specific debate or conflict.)
- 10) How and why people see only what they want to see, and implications thereof -- "Myside Bias,"  
[http://www.keithstanovich.com/Site/Research\\_on\\_Reasoning\\_files/Stanovich\\_CDPS\\_2013.pdf](http://www.keithstanovich.com/Site/Research_on_Reasoning_files/Stanovich_CDPS_2013.pdf), Vallone et al, "The Hostile Media Phenomenon: Biased Perception and Perceptions of Media Bias in Coverage of the Beirut Massacre," <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~jpiliavi/965/hwang.pdf>;  
Also, John Stuart Mill, on Liberty, chapter II  
<http://socserv.mcmaster.ca/econ/ugcm/3ll3/mill/liberty.pdf>  
and Brandeis concurrence in Whitney v. California:  
[https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/274/357#writing-USSC\\_CR\\_0274\\_0357\\_ZC](https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/274/357#writing-USSC_CR_0274_0357_ZC)  
George Orwell, preface to Animal Farm:  
[http://orwell.ru/library/novels/Animal\\_Farm/english/efp\\_go](http://orwell.ru/library/novels/Animal_Farm/english/efp_go)

- 11) Sacred Values: Interpersonal Effects of Emotions in Morally-charged negotiations.  
<https://mindmodeling.org/cogsci2012/papers/0262/paper0262.pdf>  
 TM Lurhmann, "Faith vs. Facts," NY Times, April 19, 2015  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/19/opinion/sunday/t-m-luhrmann-faith-vs-facts.html>, Malhotra & Bazerman's Negotiating Genius, 2007, chapter 4 (on NHL strike); Jeremy Ginges et al, "Sacred Bounds on Rational Resolution of Violent Political Conflict,"  
<http://groups.psych.northwestern.edu/medin/documents/GingesAtranMedinShikakifinal.pdf>  
 Isaiah Berlin, Message to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:  
<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2014/oct/23/message-21st-century/>
- 12) CLASS VISIT BY CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROFESSOR.
- 13) CLASS discussion of proposed midterm topic papers.
- 14) SYMBOLS Barlett, "The Social Function of Symbols,"  
<http://www.bartlett.psychol.cam.ac.uk/TheSocialFunction.htm> FILM: IN WHOSE HONOR (Jay Rosenstein) – (entire film – trailer at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoRYYUQRyuQ>)
- 15) CASE 3 – American Indian mascots -- Students select material, and share cites with professor – possible visit (via skype) with activists in this issue (such as filmmaker Jay Rosenstein, Charlene Teters, or Suzanne Harjo). MIDTERM PAPERS DUE.
- 16) THIRD SHORT PAPER DUE on American Indian Mascot issue. (Did you have a firm opinion before you began researching? Did your point of view change from the research? From the discussion? Can you identify and catalogue your emotions and/or other reactions to having to think through this issue, and how you felt when you were faced with arguments or positions with which you strongly disagree or agree? Was there anything about this issue that was different from the prior ones examined? If so, what? why?)
- 17) Comparing discussions of intractable conflicts: Michael Lessac film "A Snake Gives Birth To A Snake" (entire film – trailer at <http://www.asnaketoasnake.com/>) STUDENTS SEND PROFESSOR PROPOSED TOPIC FOR FINAL PAPER
- 18) DISCUSSION OF MIDTERM PAPERS (student lead).
- 19) CASE 4: MICHAEL BROWN, TREVON MARTIN, ERIC GARDNER, WALTER SCOTT, FREDDIE GRAY -- Students select material, and share citations with professor (Possible skype visit by experts, activists, police officials).
- 20) FOURTH SHORT PAPER DUE on issues raised around police killings of young black men – same questions as in Third short paper. ALTERNATIVELY, with professor's permission, students may interview students not in the class about their perspectives of this issue, and write a short analysis of what those students said/believed, and how those assertions intersect with what has been learned in class to date.

- 21) UNDERDOGS: Vandello, "The Appeal of the Underdog," Society for Personality and Social Psychology (2007). STUDENT DISCUSSION AND PICK TOPIC FOR CASE 6.
- 22) CASE 5 ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT PART 1 Students select material, and share citations with professor (Possible skype visit by experts, activists, police officials). Read also Paul L. Sham, "The Historical Narratives of Israelis and Palestinians and the Peacemaking Process," <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA168434155&v=2.1&u=gain40375&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w&asid=a44a7d4860a4c4ad4f867dfc218852d2> (For those who want to read a short, fair and excellent presentation of the conflicting narratives, I strongly recommend Neil Caplan's The Israel-Palestine Conflict: Contested Histories -- [http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb\\_sb\\_ss\\_i\\_3\\_8?url=search-alias%3Daps&field-keywords=neil+caplan+contested+histories&srefix=neil+cap%2Caps%2C141](http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_ss_i_3_8?url=search-alias%3Daps&field-keywords=neil+caplan+contested+histories&srefix=neil+cap%2Caps%2C141))
- 23) CASE 5 ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT PART 2 – FINAL PAPERS DUE
- 24) FIFTH SHORT PAPER DUE on issues raised around Israel/Palestine (same questions).
- 25) CASE 6 (Student selected).
- 26) IN DEPTH DISCUSSION OF FINAL PAPERS (student led)
- 27) IN DEPTH DISCUSSION OF FINAL PAPERS (student led)
- 28) Wrap-up, with food.