White Privilege: Considering Habits, Beliefs and Epistemologies

Course Description and Goals:

People in the media, on our campus, and (likely) in our lives—and probably including the people in this class—use the term “white privilege” in an attempt to further racial justice. But it is often unclear exactly what they (and we) mean when we use the term and how its use furthers racial justice. In this course, we will be examining white privilege to try to gain some clarity about what exactly it is and what its moral and epistemological implications are. We will do this by reading, reflecting on and with Shannon Sullivan, author of Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege and co-editor (and author of one chapter) of Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance. We will thus be trying to make sense of a commonly used, often clichéd term, to determine if it reveals something about the world (and the people in it), if so, what, and how that can help us make sense of the world and move towards a more just world. That is, it is about actionable knowledge and thoughtful action.

Required Texts:
Shannon Sullivan, Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006)

We will also be reading a lot for the group project, but because that is not yet set, we don’t yet know what we will be reading.

Evaluation:

1. Summaries

You will submit a summary for each assigned text. These can be no longer than 112.5 words (for TS/IS summaries) or 158 words (For TS/IS/IS summaries). They are graded:
√+ = .75 or higher (these will be quite rare and signify truly exceptional work)
√= .71 points (good or very good work)
√-=.5625 points (something didn't go right here)
0=0 points

Your final grade will be determined by your top 20 summaries. They are due before class starts via email. If they are late, they will not count.

2. Long Paper Preparation

To help you write the best long paper you can, you will have three assignments that scaffold the writing of the long paper. Each is worth 2 points. They must be emailed to me on time (before class), and you must meet with me on time, for them to count.

Grading:
√ = 2/2 (thoughtfulness and a good faith effort)
√-=1/2 (either lacking thoughtfulness or a good faith effort)
0 = lacking both thoughtfulness or a good faith effort, or late

3. Long Paper

You will write a paper coming directly out of the issues and readings we do in class. It can be no fewer than 3252 words (not counting the abstract and not counting references) and you are only required to use 4 sources, at least one of which will come from (or be) one of the books we are using in class. You may, of course, use more, but you are only required to use at least 4 highly relevant and appropriate sources.

This work should be written for a philosophic audience, and must be prepared and formatted to be ready-to-send to one of four undergraduate philosophy journals or any graduate or professional journal that is appropriate. Note, to submit to a graduate journals or professional journals, you will need the permission of instructor and your other committee member. The undergraduate journals that qualify are: Stance (for shorter papers), Ephemesis and Episteme (for papers up to 5000 words), or Dialogue (for papers longer than 5000 words). You do not need to submit your paper, but it needs to be totally and completely one-click-away ready for submission. See each journal for formatting requirements (which you will submit with your full draft and final paper).

One important thing to note: given that this is your Senior Seminar, we in the department expect that you will be fully committed to the task at hand, ready to do whatever it takes to succeed. With that in mind, the grades at the top of the scale look pretty typical, but those at the bottom do not. Please pay close attention.

The Final paper is worth 50% of your final grade.

Grading scale:
A+=50/50
A= 47.5/50
A = 46.25/50
B+ = 43.75/50
B = 42.5/50
B- = 41.25/50
C+ = 38.75/50
C = 37.5/50
Below a C=0/50

Note: As you might suspect, this means that if you do not get a C or above on the final paper, you will not pass the class.

You will work with a faculty committee, and I will be the chair of the committee. That committee must include 2 philosophers (that is, you need to partner with one other member of the philosophy department). The other committee member will have the following role: 1. s/he will be available to help you as you formulate your topic, write early drafts, and think through the issues involved, and consult after the conference through the revision process (other than an initial meeting, this is all up to you to determine; you can use your other committee member more or less, depending on your own needs); 2. s/he will read your draft and will consult with me as I make the determination that your paper is “conference-worthy” (the criteria for this is something we will discuss and work out together in class); 3. s/he will offer a short commentary on your draft at the conference; and 4. s/he will consult with me as I determine the final grade for your paper.

Note 1: Any paper deemed un-conference-worthy will be penalized by ensuring the author is unable to do other assignments that are due soon after the conference and are predicated on the paper being presented at the conference. A person who misses the conference-worthy mark needs to resubmit the paper, and present it to the department before she can resume the process. If that is not complete before the Nov. 12th deadline, no final paper can be submitted. [Note: the department meets only once a week, on Wednesdays.]

Note 2: Throughout, while you will be getting help from another member of the department and I will be consulting with person, as the instructor of record, I am the one who ultimately will determine your grade based on the criteria we discuss in class.

Note 3: Your draft is due by 5 p.m. Because the turn-around time is so fast, late drafts will be penalized 5% off the paper grade for being between 10 minutes and 100 minutes late; after that, it will be penalized an additional 10% off the paper grade for every 2 addition hours the paper draft is late.

Note 4: Your final paper is due by 5 p.m. If it is between 10 minutes and 1 hour late, it will be penalized 2%. After that, it will be penalized 10% and an additional 10% every day it is late.

About the Conference:
Conference DATE: OCTOBER 20th.
This is an opportunity for you to get important feedback from faculty and from Professor Sullivan on how to improve on your paper as you move towards your final draft. Your draft is due Oct. 9th, and it needs to be the best work that you can do at the time (that is, a minimum viable product will not suffice). At the conference, you will introduce your work (in no more than 10 minutes), your committee-member will offer commentary (which will take no more than 10 minutes), and then there will be 15 minutes for questions. Throughout—unless the discussion goes off track or in directions that I find unhelpful—I will remain quiet and will take copious notes, which I will then give to you, so during the conversation you can pay attention and be fully present, and so that after the conference, you have a way to remember what was said as you move towards your final draft.

4. Final Group Project

We will collaborate and put on some kind of public discussion/display/exhibit/? about white privilege as it is relevant to Elon. This will be put up in mid-February. We need to get all of the planning done before the end of this semester. The criteria will emerge as the work does, we will discuss it, and I will help craft the final criteria once we know more about what kind of project we have decided to take on.

This 30% will be determined in two parts:

1. Individual work—these could be summaries, reflections, and other work you will complete yourself which is not directly part of the group work, but will give you the information and background you need to engage in the group work well

2. The group project, which will be graded in two steps two steps:
   
   A. Base group grade—in whatever size groups we ends up working in, each group will get a base grade as determined by the criteria we will collaboratively establish as we figure out what the tasks are that we are trying to accomplish

   B. Individual student scaling of the base group grade—that is, whatever your group gets, that is where your grade will start. Throughout the semester, I will keep notes on how I see each student participating; in addition, at least every month, you will give me comments about how you and your group-mates are participating. I will take both of these under advisement and determine your individual grade staring from your group’s grade and based on your own involvement and engagement. For example, if a group of 4 students takes on one part of the overall project, does very good work throughout with a few elements that were not quite up to par, the group grade might be an A-. If your work was roughly equal to the group’s, you would earn an A-. If you were the leader, pushing others to do their best work, stepping in when others were not at their best (without encouraging passivity among your group-mates), you might earn an A or even an A+. And if you did generally well, but fell through with a few things that mattered to your group and the overall quality of the group work, you might earn a B or a B+. 
Note 1: My goal is that everyone has sufficient information that no one should be surprised at all, good or bad, about what grade s/he is heading towards. Though last-minute surprises do sometimes happen, barring the unexpected, you will know the likely range of your individual group grade throughout the semester.

Note 2: Throughout, while you will be working with your group-mates and I will be consulting with you and them about your work on the project, as the instructor of record, I am the one who ultimately will determine your grade based on the criteria we discuss in class.

Note 3: I thank you in advance for your flexibility with this part of the class; there are likely to emerge issues that cannot possibly be foreseen, and I encourage you to enter into this process with an open mind and enthusiasm, knowing that I will keep you up-to-date on your grade and will be lenient, if need be, given the changing dynamics of the project. That is, if the project runs pretty smoothly, I will grade it as we planned. If there are some significant last-minute changes and adjustments, those will factor into my grade, as will your willingness and ability to adapt to the particular challenges we face.

Summaries (20x.75= 15%) + Paper preparation (3x2+6) + long paper (50%) + Group Project (29%) = 100

Grading scale
A = 93-100
A- =90-93
B+=87- < 90
B=83- < 87
B-=80-<83
C+=77- <80
C=73- <77
C-=70-<73
D+=67-<70
D=60- <67
F= <60

Elon Honor Code

Elon’s honor pledge calls for a commitment to Elon’s shared values of Honesty, Integrity, Respect and Responsibility. To be clear about what constitutes violations of these values, students should be familiar with the Judicial Affairs policies in the student handbook, including violations outlined at http://www.elon.edu/e-web/students/handbook/violations/default.xhtml.

Students with questions about the specific interpretation of these values and violations as they relate to this course should contact this instructor immediately. Violations in academic-related areas will be documented in an incident report which will be maintained in the Office of Student Conduct, and may result in a lowering of the course grade and/or failure of the course with an Honor Code F.
Violations specifically covered by academic honor code policies include: plagiarism, cheating, lying, stealing and the facilitation of another’s dishonesty. Multiple violations will normally result in a student’s temporary suspension from the University.

Elon Disabilities Services

If you are a student with a documented disability who will require accommodations in this course, please register with Disabilities Services in the Duke Building, Room 108 (278-6500), for assistance in developing a plan to address your academic needs. For more information about Disabilities Services, please visit the website http://www.elon.edu/e-web/academics/support/disabilities_services.xhtml.