Philosophy 212A: Ethical Practice

Syllabus

Professor: Stephen Bloch-Schulman

Fall 2015

4 Credit Hours

Office Hours: 12:30-2 and 4-5 T/Th and by appointment

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"We need to recognize that the situation in Ferguson speaks to broader challenges that we still face as a nation. The fact is in too many parts in this country, a deep distrust exists between law enforcement and people of color."

 Barack Obama

**Course Description:**

Given what has happened to Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown and others, it will come as no surprise that there is a basic feeling of distrust prevalent in our country, particular when different racial groups interact. In the first half the semester, we will examine fear, trust, sacrifice and citizenship to ask about the relationship between these key phenomena. We will ask about why trust is so hard to come by, why fear seems to be so prevalent and why and if sacrifice is necessary for a good community. We will also ask what these reflections mean for us, as individuals, as part of our schools, city, state and country.

In the second half of the semester, we will ask about the limits of trust and of the positive values of distrust, if there are some. We will look at resistance and civil disobedience, incivility and skepticism to see if they too have a positive value. Like in the first half, we will ask about what these reflections mean for us, as individuals, as parts of our schools, city, state and country.

**Course Goal:**

By looking at trust and distrust as an example, our course goal is to critically examine our practices and habits (e.g. How we think about our practices and habits, and how we enact them alone, among friends, and in public), and to further develop those practices and habits we come to value through their conscious enactment and rehearsal.

**Readings:**

Danielle Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since* Brown v. Board of Education (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). [This is the one book you need to purchase.]

Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* (New York: W.W.Norton and Co., 2010 for the 2nd edition, 2014 for the 3rd edition), chapter 1 (available on google doc)

## Various Authors, edited by Justin Weinberg, Daily Nous Roundtable on Rachel Dolezal (available on Google Docs)

Meena Krishnamurthy, “(White) Tyranny and the Democratic Value of Distrust,” forthcoming in *The Monist*, <https://meenakrishnamurthydotnet.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/krishnamurthy-white-tyranny-and-the-democratic-value-of-distrust1.pdf>

Alice MacLachlan, “Reparative Civility,” *Philosop-Her Blog*, <http://politicalphilosopher.net/2015/07/09/featured-philosop-her-alice-maclachlan/>

Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” <http://www.uscrossier.org/pullias/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/king.pdf>

Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Sword that Heals,” in *Why We Cannot Wait* (New York: New American Library, 2000), 17-43 (available on google doc)

**Grading:**

There are four elements upon which you will be graded.

1. Daily writing assignments (17 assignments, the top 15 count towards your final grade, each worth 1%)

You will have writing assignments due for almost every class. For the most part, these are summaries, though once in a while, they are other types of writing. I will explain the particular nature of each as we go and as we discuss what makes writing effective.

These assignments should be emailed to me before the beginning of class. Late assignments will not count.

I recognize that you are busy and that things outside of school (e.g., family, work, friends) can get in the way, or you might be running late some morning or have computer problems or email problems, or forget to send the work that you did before class, etc. So I am excusing you, right now, from 2 responses. If you do not have the response before class for any reason at all, you don’t need to explain to me why you didn’t. You don’t need any excuse; you will just not hand in the assignment for that class. But they are due when they are due, and all but 2 are unable to be excused except in the most extreme circumstances (e.g., you contract mononucleosis).

Let me be blunt here: other than in extreme circumstances, you are already excused from 2 responses—no others will be excused.

1. Quizzes

There will be 5 quizzes throughout the semester; each is worth 6% of your final grade. All but the last one (which is a take-home quiz) are to be written in class. In each case (except the final one), you will be given a set of2-4 potential questions ahead of time, and you will be expected to answer one of them on the quiz in no more than 22 minutes, total.

1. The Humans of Alamance County interview project.

This will consist of meeting, interviewing and photographing strangers and then posting on our class Pinterest site <https://www.pinterest.com/humansofAC/> 12 times (each worth 1%) and writing a short description of the encounter and emailing it to me before the assignment is due. You will also write 2 reflections on what you have learned by doing these interviews (each worth 1.5%). The purpose here is to take Allen’s title, *Talking to Strangers*, as a prompt for action and practice. Put another way, Allen argues that talking to strangers holds the potential to radically change the world in which we live. This is not about becoming friends, at least in the typical sense, but of being a citizen (and thus, she argues, a political friend). The hope is that we will interrogate her claim, in part, by trying to enact what she advocates.

You may submit 2 of these up to a week late. All others need to be on time to count. Again, no need to explain why they will be late; you just get them to me within one week of when they were due and they will count fully. And again, unless there are exceptional circumstances, all others must be due on time to count.

1. Roundtables and current event blogs

The Daily Nous ([www.dailynous.com](http://www.dailynous.com/)) is an increasingly influential blog that focuses on philosophy as a discipline, a practice, and a profession. It is primarily read by members of the profession of philosophy (that is, philosophy instructors and graduate students in philosophy). Occasionally it publishes “roundtables”: a collection of short blog posts by a diverse slate of philosophers on a current issue. For example, in June 2015, it published roundtables on the Supreme Court gay marriage ruling and the shooting in South Charleston. While the posts that make up each roundtable are often fairly brief, and must, by definition, be written fairly quickly, they are intended to use philosophical tools and insights to illuminate contemporary events in meaningful ways.

Over the course of this semester, you, as a class, will be tasked with contributing to and curating (that is, selecting which posts are to be included in the final roundtable and in what order) a complete roundtable suitable for publication in the Daily Nous. In fact, you will do this twice: once in the middle of the semester as practice and to come to understand the process, and once at the end of the semester. The roundtable that you curate at the end of the semester will actually be sent to the editor of the Daily Nous, who will decide whether to publish it. This project will include a cluster of assignments (some to be completed individually, some to be completed as a class), all of which are included in the schedule below. More details regarding those assignments will be provided as their due dates near.

Blog post#1…………………………………..……………………………...……....2.5%

Description of curating process #1………………..………………...…….2.5%

Roundtable #1…………………………………….……………..………………...….5%

Self-evaluation of process #1………………….……...…………..……….....5%

Blog post #2…...………………………………………………………………………...5%

Description of curating process #2…….…...…………...………………..…5%

Roundtable #2…………………………………………………………………………10%

Evaluation of process follow-through (by instructor)……….………5%

 Total 40%

For the Daily Nous work: Individual assignments will be penalized by 20% of the total possible points to be earned for each 24 hours the assignment is late (and anything after the stated due date and time is considered late; that is, if you pass in an assignment that was due at the beginning of class two hours late, it is penalized the full 20%; if you pass it in a day and two hours late, it is penalized 40%). Note that this is a very severe penalty: you should avoid handing assignments in late if at all possible. On very rare occasions, I will grant extremely short extensions, but only on the basis of a documented emergency experienced by you or a close family member. Group assignments will not be accepted late; if they are not handed in on time, the entire group will earn a zero for that assignment.

**Participation:**

This is the kind of class where your presence and participation are, you will find, necessary but not sufficient for getting a good grade and succeeding. There is no penalty for missed classes, other than the missing of the essential material (which is, you will find, penalty enough). If you do miss class, as it says in the student handbook, it is up to you to make sure you make up the work--including getting notes from another student.

If you miss class, you will be the one who pays the penalty (in learning lost). Because being distracting harms others, there is one and only one participation component that will be graded: if you fail to abide by the cell phone/computer policy, as stated in class, the first time, you will be asked politely to abide by the policy. If you fail to abide by it a second time, you will be warned. If you fail to heed that warning, you will be penalized 1% point for every subsequent event.

Daily writings (15x1% = 15%) + HoAC (12 x 1 % and 2 x 1.5% = 15%) + Quizzes (5 x 6% = 30%) + Daily Nous (totaling 40%) = 100%

The scale is the following:

 A 93-100%

 A- 90-less than 93%

 B+ 87-less than 90%

 B 83-less than 87%

 B- 80-less than 83%

 C’s and D’s work like B’s

 F less than 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.

For issues of academic integrity and honesty, refer to the Elon Academic Honor Code. Students will be held accountable for their actions, and thus need to know the code and follow it at all times. You can find information about the Elon Academic Honor Code in the Elon Student Handbook. In there are any questions or concerns, please ask me. All suspected violations of the Honor Code will be handled through the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. Furthermore, **if you are found to have violated the Honor Code, you will automatically receive a failing grade for the course.**

Let me point, in particular, to the problem of plagiarism. Plagiarism is cheating, and it will be taken extremely seriously. If you do not know the rules about plagiarism—what you can and cannot quote and how to do it legitimately—make sure you speak to me before you hand in your work. As the Elon student handbook makes clear: “Any student must be thoroughly familiar with methods for documenting the use of another person's sentences, arguments or ideas.” That means that it is your responsibility to cite properly. I would be happy to help you before something is due, but this is something you need to get right all of the time.

**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>.