**PHL 461: Senior Seminar**

**Fall 2017**

**Course Syllabus**

**Against Purity: or, The World is Shit, So Now What?**

Instructor: Stephen Bloch-Schulman
Email: sschulman@elon.edu
Office: Spence Pavilion, 110
Office Hours: Tuesdays 12:15 - 2:15 and Wednesdays 1:30-3:30 and by appointment
Phone: 336.278.5697

**Course Description and Goals:**

 This class is about living in compromised times and how we can and ought to do our best when things have always already gone to shit. Or, as Shotwell writes, “‘our’ problem in this world, is how to have *simultaneously an account of radical historical contingency* of the conditions under which we take ethical and political action, critical practices for accounting for our own situatedness in histories that have shaped the conditions of possibility for our actions, and a *no-nonsense commitment* to [“to faithful accounts of a ‘real world’, one that can be partially shared and friendly to earth-wide projects of finite freedom, adequate material abundance, modest meaning in suffering, and limited happiness”].”

 We will also use and question the use of podcasts as a medium for the study and furthering of this agenda. As Malcolm Gladwell put it, ““When a medium is immature, the critics haven’t caught up with it. So, it’s not just *you could do whatever you want*; you could do whatever you want and get away with it. No one is going to call you on anything. So, you write a book these days, you step one inch over the line and 25,000 people come down on your back. That’s because books are a mature medium. Podcasts… I don’t know. It’s like the Wild West. There is one sheriff and he is a hundred miles away.” This free nature may well prove valuable for the “finite freedoms” and “limited happiness” Shotwell hopes we will be able to achieve.

**Required Texts:**

Alexis Shotwell, *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2016).

We will also be reading work that students are using for their papers and 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 that we are using for the papers. These can be no longer than 112.5 words (for TS/IS summaries) or 247 words (For TS/IS/IS summaries). They are graded:

√+ = 1 or higher (these will be quite rare and signify truly exceptional work)

√= .95 points (good or very good work)

√-=.75 points (something didn’t go right here)

0=0 points

Your final grade will be determined by your top 12 summaries. They are due before class starts via email. If they are late, they will not count.

1. **Long Paper Preparation**

To help you write the best long paper you can, you will have annotated bibliography entries for each of your sources. They will be graded in the following way:

√+ = 1 or higher (these will be quite rare and signify truly exceptional work)

√= .95 points (good or very good work)

√-=.75 points (something didn’t go right here)

0=0 points

You will also have three assignments that scaffold the writing of the long paper. Each is worth 2 points. They must be emailed to me on time, 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

1. **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 5 sources, at least one of which will be the Shotwell book. You may, of course, use more, but you are only required to use at least 5 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 graduate journals or professional journals, you will need the permission of the instructor and your other committee member. The undergraduate journals that qualify are: *Stance* (for shorter papers), *Ephemeris* 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++ or A+++=above 50/50

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 3 philosophers: me, Dr. Cahill (who will play the role of methods guru) and one other philosopher, of your choosing (the one exception to this requirement is if Dr. Cahill is the philosopher you choose, in which case you would just have two members of the committee, Dr. Cahill and me).

Dr. Cahill will meet with everyone, at the introduction/outline/annotated bibliography phase to discuss philosophic methods and consult at that phase. You may use her guru-ness at other times, of course, depending on her availability.

The third 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 members more or less, depending on your own needs); 2. s/he will read your proposal and will consult with me as I make the determination that your proposal 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 proposal at the conference; and 4. s/he will consult with me as I determine the final grade for your paper.

Note 1: Any proposal 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 proposal being presented at the conference. A person who misses the conference-worthy mark needs to resubmit the proposal, and present it to the department before she/he can resume the process. If that is not complete before the Nov. 13th deadline, no final paper can be submitted. [Note: the department meets only once a week, on Wednesdays, and not every Wednesday is a time when one could present.]

Note 2: Throughout, while you will be getting help from other members of the department and I will be consulting with these people, 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 proposal 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 10th.

This is an opportunity for you to get important feedback from faculty and from Professor Shotwell on how to improve on your paper as you move towards your final draft. Your draft is due Oct. 3rd, 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 describe your project (in no more than 10 minutes), your third 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. We will record the conversation so you will be able to hear and review everything, and will not have to worry about remembering while the conference is occurring.

1. **Final Group Project**

The final project is worth 28% of your final grade. We will determine what that project is and how it will be graded as the project emerges.

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 grade throughout the semester.

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.

Final GRADES

Summaries (12x1= 12%) + Annotated Bibliography Entries (4x1=4) + Paper preparation (3x2+6) + long paper (50%) + Group Project (28%) = 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

 F=below a 70

**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>.