Recommended texts can be purchased new or used at the following:

The Bookstore,
Amazon.com,
Alibris.com,
Abebooks.com.

They are also listed in Blackboard under Course Content.

There are no office hours but appointments with me can be made at our mutual convenience.

My office is Robinson Research Hall 327. Phone 38310

NOTE

Students registering for this course should know that it is a Mason Core Synthesis Course primarily for seniors in Government and International Affairs. You must be completing your Mason Core requirements this semester, which may include taking other such courses, or have already done so.

August 2018
GOVERNMENT 490  
Democracy and Education

Through class discussion, reading, intensive writing, and work in groups, this course offers students the opportunity to:

- reflect on their experience of the historical and contemporary purposes of education in a democratic society,
- extend their understanding of democratic citizenship and its education,
- discuss critically and write about controversial political and philosophical issues in American and British society, and
- realize the Mason Core Synthesis Course Objectives within a writing-intensive course.

I: Introduction - The Mason Core

George Mason University's Mason Core is designed to complement work in a student's chosen area of study. These classes serve as a means of discovery for students, providing a foundation for learning, connecting to potential new areas of interest and building tools for success in whatever field a student pursues. Learning outcomes are guided by the qualities every student should develop as they move toward graduating with a George Mason degree. The Mason Core program helps students to become:

**Critical and Creative Scholars:** Students who have a love of and capacity for learning. Their understanding of fundamental principles in a variety of disciplines, and their mastery of quantitative and communication tools, enables them to think creatively and productively. They are inquisitive, open-minded, capable, informed, and able to integrate diverse bodies of knowledge and perspectives.

**Self-Reflective Learners:** Students who develop the capacity to think well. They can identify and articulate individual beliefs, strengths and weaknesses, critically reflect on these beliefs and integrate this understanding into their daily living.

**Ethical, Inquiry-Based Citizens:** Students who are tolerant and understanding. They can conceptualize and communicate about problems of local, national and global significance, using research and evaluative perspectives to contribute to the common good.

**Thinkers and Problem-Solvers:** Students who are able to discover and understand natural, physical, and social phenomena; who can articulate their application to real world challenges; and who approach problem-solving from various vantage points. They can demonstrate capability for inquiry, reason, and imagination and see connections in historical, literary and artistic fields.

II Government 490 is a Synthesis Course.

The purpose of the synthesis course is to provide students with the opportunity to synthesize the knowledge, skills and values gained from the Mason Core curriculum. Synthesis courses strive to expand students' ability to master new content, think critically, and develop life-long learning skills across the disciplines. While it is not feasible to design courses that cover "all" areas of the Mason Core, synthesis courses function as a careful alignment of disciplinary goals with a range of general education learning outcomes.
Upon completing a synthesis course, students will be able to:

- Communicate effectively in both oral and written forms, applying appropriate rhetorical standards (e.g., audience adaptation, language, argument, organization, evidence, etc.

- Using perspectives from two or more disciplines, connect issues in a given field to wider intellectual, community or societal concerns,

- Apply critical thinking skills to:
  
  a. Evaluate the quality, credibility and limitations of an argument or a solution using appropriate evidence or resources, and
  
  b. Judge the quality or value of an idea, work, or principle based on appropriate analytics and standards.

iii: Government 490-005: Becoming a critical thinker

In particular, the course emphasizes the critical thinker, a person characterized by the following dispositions and habits of mind:

1. A profound commitment to search for the truth and understanding that knowledge is often provisional.
2. Consistent self-monitoring in respect of open-mindedness and impartiality through always assessing alternatives,
3. Empathy with the perspectives of others and fairness in evaluating those differences,
4. Realistic self-appraisal of one’s strengths and weaknesses,
5. Having a conscience about what one believes – ought I to believe this?
III. OVERVIEW

The Seminar focuses on the following four topics:

1. Democracy, Education and Civil Society.
4. Philosophical principles such as Liberty and Equality.

a. Basic Texts for the Course


*Jeffrey Stout: Blessed are the Organized; Grassroots Democracy in America, Princeton University Press.


The * indicates that these books are essential reading.
b. **The Seminar** will be conducted primarily through lectures and small and plenary group discussions in morning and afternoon sessions, as follows:

1. **Discussions** on the day’s topic, led by a group, and followed by plenary discussion and a presentation as needed.

2. **Requirements:**
   
i. **15 one-page commentaries**, each on the question for the day starting Wednesday, September 5.
   
   ii. **2 essay book reviews** (see due dates on Blackboard).
   
   iii. **1 essay** on a topic planned for inclusion in a Group Presentation.
   
   iv. Participation in an end of semester **Group Presentation**.

Hard copies of the weekly one-page assignment must be brought to class for discussion in groups. **Print out, do not use laptops.** Copies, revised if necessary, must then be posted as the assignment on Blackboard the evening of the session.

c. **Class rules and Expectations:**

1. **Attendance** is compulsory. *If you are absent, you will not have had the benefit of the class discussion on the topic and your weekly assignments will be graded differently. Without an explained absence notified in advance, there will be an increasing points penalty on assignments: 1 point for the first instance, 2 for the second and for any remaining absences.*

2. **What goes without saying...**

   You are fully aware of the Honor Code and the principles of Academic Integrity.
   
   You never consider missing a class without an explanation.
   
   You always make a special problem or illness known.
   
   You understand this course requires extensive commitment, especially in terms of reading.
   
   You never come to class less than fully prepared.
   
   You never submit an assignment late unless it has been negotiated upfront.
   
   Vigorous discussion and debate are expected and welcomed, conducted with civility and respect, in class or on Blackboard.
   
   When you do not understand an issue, you say so: Silence is not an option.
   
   You provide constant feedback on the conduct of the seminar and how the learning experience can be improved.
   
   You are careful to provide relevant personal information (e.g. illness/disability, family commitments)
Essays

You will write three essays for this course: This is a set of questions you should use to get your essay writing to exemplify critical thinking.

• What is worrying this author? What is the question, problem or controversial issues that this text is trying to answer?

• What is the author’s position with respect to this question/problem? What are his/her assumptions? -- Can I describe the author’s position in my own words? -- Can I do so accurately and fairly? -- Can I identify assumptions in the text, which I may not immediately understand but that are important for appreciating the author’s perspective?

• Why might the author’s position make sense? -- Can I understand the text on its own terms? -- Can I situate the text in its particular time, place, and socio-historical context? Are the sources credible and are conclusions tied to evidence?

• Is there anything I can learn from this text about my own situation? -- Does this text teach me anything that I might not understand without reading it? -- Does this text bring to light—and possibly challenge—any of my own beliefs that I may not have examined or even acknowledged?

Critical Reading

• You may conclude that the text is even more amazing (deep, nuanced) than you originally thought

• You may conclude that there are problems in the text, which need to be addressed -- May confirm your instincts re: problems in the text -- May see additional new problems that you hadn’t originally spotted -- Try to identify problems and limitations clearly.

-- Try to explain why problems arise -- Ask: Are these the sorts of problems that should have been avoided (blind spots, bad reasoning, etc.)? Or are these the kinds of problems that will continue to vex us?
The Program


The Democratic Endeavor: Conflicting views of educational purposes.
Readings:
BB1: Public Agenda; BB2: Campus Compact;
BB3: Harvard.


Knowledge and virtue as properties of the critical thinker.
Readings:
BB4: Michael Gerson: The spectacular accumulation of lies.
BB5: When truth becomes a commodity.

(September 3: Labor Day holiday)

2. Preliminary discussion of Presentation topics.

Assignment: Planning for the Group Presentation: Submit choices of 6 topics on BB.

September 10: Obstacles to Democratic Citizenship.
Assignment 1. "What are the obstacles to effective citizenship?"
Readings:
BB7: The Half-Educated Elite.
BB8: Christians and a spiritual reckoning.

Assignment. Essay Review of Evicted: due September 12: 1,500 words

September 12: Political Philosophy.
Assignment 2: What is political philosophy? Can it tell politicians what to do? If not, what use is it?
Readings:
Miller, ch. 1.
BB9: The use or not of political philosophy.

September 17: Civil Society.
Assignment 3:
*How do we distinguish civil society from government?
Readings:
BB10: Rosenblum, Nancy and Lesch, H. T.
September 19: Social Justice (1).

Assignment 4: How do we describe the basics of social justice?
Readings:
Barry, chapters 1, 2 and 3.

Group Presentations: Formation of Groups.

September 24: Social Justice (2).

Assignment 5: Does Social Justice Matter?
Readings:
Barry, B. chapters 1, 2 and 3.
Putnam, R: Our Kids: Chapters 1 and 2.

September 26: Citizens and their Rights (1).

Assignment 6: Do rights define the relationship between citizens, civil society and government in a democratic society?
Readings:
Miller, chapter 4:
Clapham, chapters 5 and 6:
Bellamy, chapters 1 and 4:

October 1: Group Planning for Presentations:
Identification of Individual Topics and Responsibilities.
Outline Proposal to be submitted this week for comment and approval.

October 3: Citizens and their Rights (2).

Assignment 7: What is wrong with the view that I can’t do anything to influence the government?
Readings:
Miller, chapter 1.
BB12. The ‘avalanche of cash’.

October 9 (T): Equality of Educational Opportunity.

Assignment 8: Is equality of educational opportunity desirable? If so what are the conditions for achieving it?
Readings:
Putnam, R. Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis. (all)
Barry, op cit: chapters 4 through 7.
BB13: Equal Opportunity?

Due date for Submission for Approval of Individual Essay Topics for Group Presentations.

October 10: Our Kids: Putnam and Inequality.

Assignment 9: Is the American Dream a nightmare, an illusion or a reality?
Readings:
Putnam, especially chapters 2-5.
October 15: Minorities.

**Assignment 10:** Should minorities in a democracy be protected? If so, how?

**Readings:**
Miller, chapters 2 and 3, Bellamy, chapter 5.

**BB15:** The End of Human Rights.

October 17: Controversy in Education: Politics and Religion.

**Assignment 11:** How does religion enter debates about education?

**Readings:**
Clapham pp. 123-127.
Warburton: *Free Speech.*

October 22: Negative and Positive Liberty.

**Assignment 12:** What is meant by freedom? Can it be a target for teaching?

**Readings:**
**BB16:** Isaiah Berlin: *Two Concepts of Liberty.*
**BB17:** Sockett: Reviving Teaching for Freedom.
**BB18:** Libertarians and Autocrats.

October 24: Justifying limits on freedom.

**Assignment 13:** How important is free speech? What kinds of limits on free speech are justified in a democratic society?

**Readings:**
Miller, chapter 6: Nussbaum, chapter 2 and 3.
Warburton, N. *Free Speech.*

**BB19:** The New Campus Censors.

**Assignment Due:** Submission of Essays on Topics for Group Presentations.

October 29: Group Meetings on Presentation Plans in Class.

October 31: Trust in Democracies:

**Assignment 14:** What is trust? How is it important in a democracy?

**Readings:**
Hawley, K. *Trust.*

**BB20:** Natalie Nougayrède: *Beware: this Russian cyber warfare threatens every democracy.*


November 7: Book Review Discussion (2): Stout, J: *Blessed are the Organized.*

November 12: Democracy and Education:

**Assignment 15:** What is to be done?

**Readings:** Putnam, passim, especially chapter 6:

November 14, 19, 26, 28. December 3 and 5: **Group Presentations**

6 groups will give presentations on topics selected. Groups will both research detail and critically assess the issue, based on individual essays written. Each presentation must include time for class discussion.

Each student will provide a presentation critique of all other presentations than his or her own.

**Assignments & Assessment (180 points)**

1. **15 one-pagers.** 5 points each, due dates on BB 75 points

   *Without an explained absence notified in advance, there will be an increasing points penalty on assignments: 1 point for the first instance, 2 for the second and 3 for any remaining absences.*

2. **Essays (all 1,500 words).**
   
   i. Review of Desmond: due 9/10. 20 points
   ii. Individual Presentation Essay. due 10/22. 20 points
   ii Review of Stout: due 11/19. 20 points

3. **Group Presentation.**
   
   i. The Presentation: assessed as a group effort. 15 points
   ii. Individual Contributions. 10 points

4. **Presentation Critiques.** due 12/9. 20 points

Total 180 points

**LITERAL AND NUMERICAL GRADES**

B+: 153-160  B: 144-152  B-: 136-143