

**PHL 106.01 Individual and Society**  
Mon-Wed 9:30 to 10:45AM, Moyer 301  
Professor: Dana Francisco Miranda  
Email: danamiranda@muhlenberg.edu  
Office Hours: M 1:00-2:00PM; W 1:00-2:00PM  
@ Moyer 306, or by appointment

## Overview

How is the individual constituted or influenced by society? What possibilities and choices are available for individuals within social systems that are unequal and hierarchical? In this course, we will investigate the individual's relationship with society through an examination of *American* society. We will do so by looking at both negative and positive practices within the United States, as seen in philosophy and literature.

## Course Objectives

Students will study the philosophical questions and problems that have confounded American society. In doing so, students will assess 1) the effect of social systems on individuals and groups and 2) determine to what extent individuals *within* a society can criticize the meanings, prejudices and assumptions found therein. Students will also begin developing their skills in reading, writing and dialoguing as required for undertaking philosophy.

## Course Unit Instruction

This class is scheduled to meet for 3 hours per week. Additional instructional activities for the course include attendance at various College events and associated writing activities/workshops distributed across the semester. Participation in these events and completion of associated activities/workshops will add an additional 14 hours of instruction. Students will be expected to come prepared with critical questions they would like to raise and be prepared to listen to others.

## Policies

All Muhlenberg policies are in effect, but please talk to me if you have any questions. These include:

- Policy on Academic Dishonesty: As an academic community devoted to the discovery and dissemination of truth, Muhlenberg College insists that its students will conduct themselves honestly in all academic activities. Students are expected to refuse to engage in any activity unauthorized by College policy and the faculty member(s) which profits themselves of which helps or hinders others in any work which is submitted for a grade or in any work which leads ultimately to a grade. Students must comply with the Academic Integrity Code.
- Students with disabilities requesting classroom or course accommodations must complete a multi-faceted determination process through the Office of Disability Services prior to the development and implementation of accommodations, auxiliary aids, and services. Each Accommodation Plan is individually and collaboratively developed between the student and the Office of Disability Services. If you have not already done so, please contact the Office of Disability Services to have a dialogue regarding your academic needs and the

recommended accommodations, auxiliary aides, and services.

- If you are experiencing financial hardship, have difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day or do not have a safe and stable place to live, and believe this may affect your performance in this course, I would urge you to contact our CARE Team through the Dean of Students Office for support. Their website is [www.muhs.edu/main/aboutus/deanst/careteam/](http://www.muhs.edu/main/aboutus/deanst/careteam/). You may also discuss your concerns with me if you are comfortable doing so.

Some additional policies include:

- **Gender Pronouns:** All people deserve to be addressed in accordance with their identity, ranging from preferring a nickname to your gender pronouns. Students are encouraged to notify me of their gender pronouns so I can address you correctly (she, he, they, ze, etc.), especially if they have reason to believe I may use the incorrect pronouns. I use he/him.
- **Electronic Device:** Engaged listening without electronic mediation is an important skill, and this classroom will be an opportunity for those otherwise challenged in this domain to practice it. If you have important reasons (e.g., medical, disability accommodation, etc.) to use any such devices, please talk to me as soon as possible so that I can approve appropriate exceptions to this policy. Otherwise, this classroom will be free of electronic devices.
- **Policy on Children:** If you are a parent, you are welcome to bring your child to class. If they are interested and old enough to take part in the conversation, all the better. If they are babies, fine. If they need to breastfeed, fine. You probably have alternate arrangements, and your other professors might not have the same policy (and I respect that), but I just wanted to make my attitude about children explicit in case of preference or emergency. You are welcome here, and if you have dependents that need constant care or whose care has been interrupted, they are also welcomed.
- Everyone needs help at some point (and typically at multiple points) in their academic journey. When you do, I and other campus resources (such as the Academic Resource Center, Writing Center, Disability Services, Counseling Services, and the M.U.L.E. Community Cabinet) are here to help.
- No one will be asked to speak for a group (whether class, race, sexual orientation, age, religion, creed, disability, gender, or geography).

## Assignments

**Responses (20%):** Students are required to turn in a CCC Response (Confusion-Connection-Critique) every week indicated. The assignment must be submitted by email before our Monday class, but can be on any reading during the week. \*Please note the exception for Week 8\*

A CCC Response will focus on examining one text a week, preferably around the philosophical reading. There will be ten graded responses in total and each response should be around 100-150 words. In order to receive full credit students must derive three particular questions from the week's reading(s). Students will provide a question regarding a particular confusion they had around a text, a connection the text had with your life, and lastly a critique or problem one sees with the text. Remember these questions will not be evaluated by how much they accord with what the authors of the text say, or with what I happen to believe; rather they will be evaluated by how much they reflect your individual and critical thinking.

**Participation (20%):** Attendance is mandatory. I understand that emergencies arise, so each student is allowed two absences. Each absence beyond the allotted two will result in a ten-point deduction. Please note that to receive a grade in this category one must not only show up, but also participate. This will primarily reflect a) Preparation for posing questions in the discussion period of class and b) Engaged listening and discussion contributions during this period; will be boosted by c) Participation and question-posing during the (ideally interactive) lecture segment. If you are at any point unsure how you are doing in participation and want to know, email me and we can begin a conversation. *Students who are extremely weary of speaking in class can receive alternative assignments in lieu of in-class participation, but must meet with me in the first two weeks of the semester (or within one week of enrolling if not enrolled during this period) to make arrangements.*

**Short Papers (20%):** Two essay submissions of 450-500 words responding to prompts provided in advance. The papers will be due on the Friday of Week 5 and Week 10. These short essay papers must be handed in by noon either by electronic or hard copy. Hard copies will be collected at my office. Rubric:

- 5 points: Essay addresses all aspects of the question and does so in a thoughtful way, incorporating key insights from texts and class discussions, and suggests a reasonable, though possibly somewhat open-ended, answer.
- 4 points: Essay addresses the question adequately but struggles to reconcile different positions, either through internal inconsistencies (e.g., the essay defends a contradictory position) or through failing to grapple with central dimensions of the material.
- 3 points: Essay addresses the question but doesn't demonstrate any commitment to rigor or critical thought, or fails to relate the question to material from the reading(s) and/or class discussions.
- 2 points: Essay is substantial but does not address the prompt.
- 1 point: Essay fails to address the prompt and lacks substance or coherence.

*Essays that are late but no more than 48 hours late will be docked 1 point. Essays that are more than 48 hours late will be docked 2 points. Essays that are not turned in by the end of the semester will receive no credit. Essays receiving a grade of 3 or lower can be rewritten and submitted for re-grading if you meet with me to discuss them.*

**Final Paper (30%):** For the final paper, students must meet with me in person or must have digital approval; for group papers, all members of the group must be present at this meeting together unless extraordinary circumstances dictate otherwise. Final papers must be emailed by midnight December 9, 2019. My policy is to deduct ten points for each day late. You may choose from any of these options:

- *Position paper.* Write a paper defending a philosophical position related to topics discussed in class or in the assigned readings. Solo: 1000 words. Group of 2: 1500 words.
- *Research paper.* Either a) Read 1-2 outside works and critically examine the reading or its relation to one or more of the required readings for the course, or b) Read and criticize a full book from which one of the required readings is drawn, or c) Propose a research project of your own, subject to instructor approval. Solo: 1000 words. Group of 2: 1500 words.

**Assessments (10%):** Students will complete mid-semester and end-of-class self-assessments so that we may better focus on qualitative and not quantitative evaluations. You will be reflecting carefully on your own work and the work of your peers. If this process causes more anxiety than it alleviates, see me at any point to confer about tips for self-evaluations. Please know that if an assignment does not feel productive, we can find ways to modify, remix, or repurpose the instructions.

Mid-semester assessments must be completed by noon on October 7, 2019. Final assessments must be completed by noon on December 11, 2019, after your final paper is turned in.

### **Guidance on Late Work**

Missing a deadline is a stressful experience. Sometimes it's just the result of an acute situation, but sometimes it's the result of something more persistent—struggling with the material, life circumstances, or one's mental state—and the source of trouble is not always obvious from the inside. Students in these situations often blame themselves and as a result incur late penalties. Students sometimes even fail classes because they get paralyzed and ultimately never submit the assignment. If you are in this situation, I can help. If you are going to miss a deadline:

1. Email me *whatever you have* before the deadline. If I get something from you, no matter how incomplete, the first day's late penalty will be halved.
2. Stay in contact with me until you finish. We will make a plan to get you back on track.

### **Readings**

There is no text for this course; all readings will be provided online.

### **Schedule**

#### Week 1 Introductions

Aug. 26: What is this course and who's in it? *No Reading.*

Aug. 28: The Challenge of Cultural Relativism by James Rachels

#### Week 2 Complicity

Sep. 2: Enabling Harm by Gregory Mellema + The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas by Ursula Le Guin

Sep. 4: My Family's Slave by Alex Tizon

*Assignment Due*

#### Week 3 Our America

Sep. 9: What is an American? By Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur + Trans-national America by Randolph Bourne

Sep. 11: The Other America by Martin Luther King Jr. + A Night at the Garden by Marshall Curry

*Assignment Due*

#### Week 4 Unfreedom

Sep. 16: The Last Flogging by Frederick Douglass

Sep. 18: Unfinished Lecture on Liberation – II by Angela Davis

*Assignment Due*

### Week 5 Racism

Sep. 23: The White Man's Guilt by James Baldwin

Sep. 25: Racism as Self-Love by Grant Silva

*No Assignment. Short Paper #1 Due Friday*

### Week 6 Settler Colonialism

Sep. 30: Colonialism in Equality: Hawaiian Sovereignty and the Question of U.S. Civil Rights by J. Kēhaulani Kauanui

Oct. 2: When Listening Isn't Enough: Settler Denial and Epistemic Injustice by Anna Cook

*Assignment Due*

### Week 7 Borders Pt. I

Oct. 7: Immigration: The Case for Limits by David Miller

Oct. 9: No Class (Yom Kippur)

*Mid-Semester Assessment Due*

### Week 8 Borders Pt. II

Oct 14: No Class (Fall Break)

Oct. 16: Aliens and Citizens: The Case for Open Borders by Joseph Carens + How to Tame a Wild Tongue by Gloria Anzaldúa

*Assignment Due Wednesday\**

### Week 9 Gendered Oppression

Oct. 21: Oppression by Marilyn Frye

Oct. 23: A Black Feminist Statement by Combahee River Collective

*Assignment Due*

### Week 10 Correcting Injustice

Oct. 28: Five Faces of Oppression by Iris Marion Young

Oct. 30: SCUM Manifesto by Valerie Solanas

*No Assignment. Short Paper #2 Due Friday*

### Week 11 Abortion

Nov. 4: A Defense of Abortion by Judith Jarvis Thomson

Nov. 6: An Argument that Abortion Is Wrong by Don Marquis

*Assignment Due*

### Week 12 Death Penalty

Nov. 11: In Defense of the Death Penalty by Louis Pojman

Nov. 13: The Folly of Capital Punishment by Jeffrey Reiman + The Death Penalty Is Cruel. But So Is Life Without Parole. By Stephen Lurie

*Assignment Due*

### Week 13 Homelessness

Nov. 18: In Defense of Homelessness by Andrew Smith

Nov. 20: To the Edge of the Urban Landscape: Homelessness and the Politics of Care by Bart van Leeuwen + This Is How Homeless Women Cope With Their Periods by Janet Upadhye

*Assignment Due*

Week 14 Queerness

Nov. 25: Punks, Bulldaggers and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics by Cathy Cohen + Y'all Better Quiet Down by Sylvia Rivera

*Assignment Due*

Thanksgiving Break (Nov. 27 – Dec. 1)

Week 15 Climate Change

Dec. 2: The Rights of Animals and Unborn Generations by Joel Feinberg

Dec. 4: Elegy for a Country's Seasons by Zadie Smith + Our House is on Fire by Greta Thunberg

*Remember: Final Paper and Final Assessment due next week.*