

Dis/Unity and Difference

Center for the Humanities Seminar 2018

(selected) Fridays 2:00-3:30
Steiner Hall 205

Prof. Tyler Roberts
Office Hours: T, Th 4-5, W 2:30-4:30, and by appointment

Steiner Hall 203
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Course Description

Difference is a reality of community life, as is disagreement about how to respond to difference. Commonality and unity are also realities, or at least aspirations, of community life, for the very idea of “community” suggests something held in common that draws disparate groups of people together. How do we think, imagine, and represent difference and unity together? Does focusing on unity paper over difference? Does focusing on disunity undermine the possibility of solidarity? This course, which is tied to the Center for the Humanities 2018-19 annual theme, Dis/Unity, will explore these questions through the work of visiting scholars and select performances. Topics will include (but will likely not be limited to) race, religion, public health, and national identity.

Course Plan

The Center for the Humanities seminar provides students with an opportunity to more deeply engage the work of visiting scholars and other select campus programming throughout the semester and year. The seminar will meet seven times over the course of the semester (see dates below) and students are required to attend three Humanities Center events outside of class time. The course puts an emphasis on preparation for and participation in extended class discussion. The course meets twice around each event, once in preparation for the event and once after to discuss the event. Visiting scholars have selected readings most appropriate to introducing students to their work and to preparing for their talk. The instructor has selected the material for the first class session.

Course Learning Goals

This course is a little unusual. We do not spend time building a foundation of knowledge in a particular area of inquiry. Rather, our discussions will build on and respond to Humanities Center programming with the goal of tying multidisciplinary humanistic inquiry to pressing questions in our world. We hope to create a space for open and honest discussion of sometimes challenging material and that you will all draw on your own experiences, both inside and outside the classroom as we forge connections between the material under consideration, our own lives, and the lives of those around us. A successful semester will depend on a spirit of generosity, an assumption that everyone in the room is here to listen, explore, and learn.

Course Work and Evaluation

As a student in the course, you have two core responsibilities: (1) coming to class having done the assigned readings, which in most cases the speakers themselves have recommended as

appropriate introductions to their work, and (2) attending the public events. All readings are available via electronic reserve. You will also be responsible for keeping a course journal, which only you and I will see. Your entries should relate the material under consideration (whether readings, speaker events, or performances) to the core questions of the course (as stated above). Personal reflection is most welcome as part of that work. For class sessions during which we discuss an upcoming talk, you will also be responsible for preparing two questions that you would like to ask during the public event Q & A. Your grade will reflect your engagement with the course (attendance and preparation for class, attendance of public events) and your journal, which is due by Wednesday at 9 p.m. each week we meet (unless otherwise noted in the syllabus). Each entry should be 250-300 words. Your final entry, offering reflections on the course as a whole, should be 500 words. In sum, then, you will have seven regular entries plus the final entry. For weeks in which we double up with event follow-up and new reading, please include a paragraph of reflection on the public event and 250-300 words on the reading.

Course Plan and Readings

All course texts are available through Burling Library electronic reserve.

Aug. 31: Introductions and overview of the course.

Readings:

- 1) "Community Comes from Difference, Not Just Commonality"
https://www.huffingtonpost.com/bob-deutsch/community-comes-from-diff_b_5051107.html
- 2) "Yearning for unity, enduring divisiveness"
<https://www.ap.org/explore/divided-america/yearning-for-unity-enduring-divisiveness.html>

Sept. 7: Preparation for Baker-Tarpaga Dance Project performance

For this session, we will meet at the Bucksbaum Dance Studio

Sept. 14: Baker-Tarpaga Dance Project performance of *Dis/Unity: A Service*.

Sept. 21: Follow up to Baker-Tarpaga and preparation for talk by Katherine Ibbett.

Reading: "Introduction" to *Compassion's Edge*

Sep. 25: Ibbett talk

Oct. 5: Follow up to Ibbett talk

Nov. 2: Preparation for talk by Gina Caison

Readings: TBA

Nov. 6: Caison talk

Nov. 9: Follow up to Caison talk

Nov. 30: Synthesis

Course Policies

1) Out of Class Work Expectations: This is a two-credit course and I have worked to ensure that the workload, including attendance of related Humanities Center events outside of class time, is appropriate. I expect that you will attend the Center's public events, which are often in the evening. If you cannot please communicate with me at the beginning of the semester.

2) Honesty/Intellectual Integrity: Grinnell College's [Academic Honesty policy](#) is located in the online Student Handbook. It is the College's expectation that students be aware of and meet the expectations expressed in this policy.

3) Statement of accommodations: It is essential that every one of you get the most out of this learning experience. I encourage students with documented disabilities, including invisible disabilities such as chronic illness, learning disabilities, and psychiatric disabilities, to discuss appropriate accommodations with me. You will also need to have a conversation about and provide documentation of your disability to the Coordinator for Disability Resources, John Hirschman, located on the 3rd floor of the Rosenfield Center, 641-269-3089.

4) Adjustments relating to religious holidays: Grinnell College offers alternative options to complete academic work for students who observe religious holy days. Please contact me within the first three weeks of the course if you would like to discuss a specific instance that applies to you.

5) Communication: I consider active and thoughtful communication to be a key element of professional success. You will find that I am very accommodating when you communicate well with me, and less so when you do not. I try to return email within one business day, but sometimes life intervenes and I will not be able to do so. If you would like to communicate about something more than a logistical question (which I encourage you to ask each other about before getting in touch with me), it is always preferable to have a quick face-to-face conversation.