

The Politics of Human Thriving

HUM-SST 295-01 (Spring 2018)

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Class Location: Bear 205-6

Office Hours: T 1:30-3 (Grille) and F, 9-10 (Macy House 210)

Class Description

What does it mean to live beyond mere existence—to thrive as a human being? What are the different factors we should take into account when identifying what constitutes human thriving? Who occupies social positions that empower them to answer these questions for others? What are the implications for how they might go about answering them? This course, tied to the 2017-2018 Center for the Humanities annual theme, the Politics of Human Thriving, will explore these questions from a variety of perspectives. This semester, we will be focusing on race, gender, cultural production, and humanistic activism.

Course Work and Evaluation

You have two core responsibilities for the course: (1) doing the assigned readings, which 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 or speaker events) 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 the upcoming speaker's work, 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. You will have eight 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 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, its central goal is to tie multidisciplinary humanistic inquiry to pressing questions in our world, creating a space for open and honest discussion of sometimes challenging material. These discussions will build on readings by visiting scholars and related Humanities Center programming. My hope is that you will all draw on your own experiences, both inside and outside the classroom, as well, 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 Texts

All course texts are available through Burling Library electronic reserve.

Course Policies

- 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 beforehand. We typically have recordings of the events available by the middle of the following week if you are unable to attend a given event. In cases of screenings, anything that is part of class will be available in the Burling Library collection.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

Course Schedule

Friday, January 26

- Introductions

Friday, February 2

- "James Baldwin," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of American Literature*
- James Baldwin, "Letter from A Region in My Mind"

Sunday, February 4

- Screening, Raoul Peck's *I Am Not Your Negro* (4 p.m., Strand Theater, Grinnell)

Friday, February 9

- Follow-up discussion, *I Am Not Your Negro*

WE WILL NOT MEET ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16

Friday, February 23

- Micha Cárdenas, "Trans of Color Poetics: Stitching Bodies, Concepts, and Algorithms"

Tuesday, February 27

- Micha Cárdenas Public Event, JRC 101, 7:30 p.m.

Friday, March 2

- Follow-up discussion, Micha Cárdenas
- Tomlinson, excerpts from *Culture and the Course of Human Evolution*

Wednesday, March 7

- Gary Tomlinson Public Event, JRC 101, 7:30 p.m.

Friday, March 9

- Follow-up discussion, Gary Tomlinson
- Marlon James, Reading TBD

WE WILL NOT MEET ON FRIDAY, MARCH 16

Thursday, April 5

- Marlon James Public Event, JRC 101, 8-9:30

Friday, April 6

- Follow-up Discussion, Marlon James

Friday, April 13

- Synthesis