Junior Seminar, spring 2016

**Exercises in Deliberative Democracy and Civic Engagement**

HONC 3310, CRN 27892

McAlister 303, Tuesday and Thursday: 9:25 - 10:40

**Instructor: Prof. Peter J. Mehl** **Email:** [**peterm@uca.edu**](mailto:peterm@uca.edu)   
Office: Irby 120 (Dean’s Office) Office phone: 450-5282   
Office hours: TTH, 9:40-12 Cell: 269-8391 (emergencies)   
The best way to meet with me is by appointment, call or email to set one up.   
Virtual office hours: 8am-9pm. I check email regularly and can almost always respond within a few hours.

**Associated Faculty**: Dr. Patricia Cantrell, Economics; Dr. Wendy Lucas, History; and Dr. Clay Arnold, Political Science; others to be determined.

**Course description**:

The political landscape in America is wide and diverse, but it seems that candidates outside the mainstream, Donald Trump, Bernie Sanders and Ben Carson, are attracting the most attention. What are they saying that is so compelling? In this seminar we will carefully and critically evaluate Dr. Carson’s views as they are found in his book *America the Beautiful*, and Bernie Sanders’ views as found in *The Essential Bernie Sanders and His Vision for America*. We will also take time to do some comparisons to other candidates.

It has often been noted that one major purpose of higher education is an informed citizenry; for democracy to flourish there must be citizens who can critically evaluate the views, the policy proposals, of those who aspire to lead them. Doing so can be an enlightening process where we learn about our history, our society, our economic and political system, as well as our moral and religious views. It can be a voyage of personal discovery of ourselves as well: where do we stand in relation to this or that candidate’s views? While these two books will be central, we will cover normative philosophical distinctions using Michael Sandel’s book, *Justice*, a book that is itself a call to a morally engaged citizenship. This course, as Sandel says of his book, is a “journey in moral and political reflection” (30). As well, numerous additional readings will be selected by our many guest faculty who help us go deeper into the topics addressed. Since I am not an expert on all the topics these candidates cover, my plan is to have historians, economists, political scientists, and philosophers from across campus as guests. And you too will research topics sharing your findings with the class and the public.

Central to this class in social and political inquiry and action will be the values of open-mindedness, civility and mutual respect. These values will be beyond question, as they form the foundation for everything we will do!

Finally, since democracy is not a spectator sport, we will be engaged in the *polis* (the social political community). This course will include civic engagement or what is sometimes called *advocacy service-learning*: “Educating others about topics of public interest – projects that aim to create awareness and action on some issue that impacts the community.” In general, service-learning is defined as “a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities.” So we will try to advance not only our knowledge but our civic skills, those skills necessary to democratic participation: working in groups, organizing to accomplish tasks, communicating, working out differences of perspective on public issues, and implementing positive outcomes. We will do this by actually tackling issues the candidates are addressing and then sharing our knowledge in an effort to advance the public good. Further we will find out what is happening in Arkansas that is relevant to a given national issue, identify stakeholders, and decision-makers, then work to influence the outcomes by such means as social media, writing letters, meeting with officials, attending public meetings, putting on a public forum, and any other creative means we devise!

**Objectives**:

* Demonstrate an understanding of the main positions in Anglo-American ethics, such as utilitarianism, Kantian views, libertarianism, Aristotelian and contemporary communitarian views.
* Demonstrate an understanding of some central issues in social and political thought.
* Demonstrate an understanding of the positions of two candidates for the U.S. presidency.
* Demonstrate an understanding of some major issues facing American society: e.g. health care, economic inequality, education, environment, etc.
* Be able to apply ethical and social/political perspectives to these issues.
* Be able to engage with others in the public, to collaborate and communicate to achieve positive outcomes.

**Required Readings:**

* Carson, B. with C. Carson. (2012). *America the beautiful: Rediscovering what made this nation great*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan
* Tasini, J. *The essential Bernie Sanders and his vision for America*. (2015) White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing
* Sandel, M.J. (2009). *Justice: What’s the right thing to do?* New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
* Materials provided by our “associated faculty,” and pieces accessed on the internet.

Supplemental Readings

**Readings in Ethics and Social/Political Philosophy:**

Frankena, W. K. (1963). *Ethics.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Rachels, J., & Rachels, S. (2007). *The elements of moral philosophy.* Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

Rawls, J. A. (1971). *A theory of justice.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Nozick, R. (1974). *Anarchy, state and utopia* (New York: Basic Books)

Nussbaum, M. C. (2011) *Creating capabilities: The human development approach*. Belknap Press.

**Sandel and books related to his communitarian perspective:**

Sandel, M. J. (1998). *Liberalism and the limits of justice*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Sandel, M. J. (2012). *What money can't buy: the moral limits of markets.* Array, NewYork: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Bellah, R. N. (1985). *Habits of the heart: Individualism and commitment in*

*American life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

MacIntyre, A. (1984). *After virtue: a study in moral theory*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

**Moral psychology:**

Haidt, J. (2006). *The happiness hypothesis: finding modern truth in ancient wisdom*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Haidt, J. (2012). *The righteous mind: why good people are divided by politics and religion*. New York, NY: Pantheon.

**Resources**

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://plato.stanford.edu>

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/>

Political resources:

<http://www.campuselect.org/>

<http://reclaimdemocracy.org/>

<http://www.civilpolitics.org/>

<http://votesmart.org/>

League of Women Voters: <http://lwv.org/>

<http://www.factcheck.org/>

<http://www.politico.com/>

<http://truthinmedia.com/>

<http://journalistsresource.org/>

<http://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics>

<http://www.ontheissues.org/default.htm>

Financial Resources:

<http://www.taxpolicycenter.org/index.cfm>

<https://www.nationalpriorities.org/>

Our authors:

Sandel: <http://www.justiceharvard.org/>

Carson: <https://www.bencarson.com/>

Sanders: <http://www.berniesanders.com>

<http://feelthebern.org/>

**Always come to class prepared. Thoughtfully READ the assigned readings BEFORE class, and be prepared to discuss the assigned readings.**

**Class Attendance is required.**   
I take roll regularly. Participation counts and you cannot participate if you are not here. If you have an emergency let me know as soon as possible. If you simply skip class, it will result in loss of participation points; 10 points each time.

**Participation (aka communication and collaboration activities)**  
This course will be a constant opportunity to discuss morality, political philosophy, economic, history, and whatever else we might discover is relevant to thinking about our democracy and the matters we confront. Most of our class time will be spent with careful but creative discussion of such matters. I encourage you to ask questions and participate in the discussion; indeed I require it! Course participation means raising questions, responding to my questions, responding to peers, collaborating together, etc. Sometimes I will structure our discussion so that students will be randomly chosen to orally summarize a point or argument found in our book. Other times we will break into groups to discuss an issue or case, and I will ask for an oral summary of the discussion. We can also use the discussion forum on Blackboard to continue a discussion not fully explored!

**Civic Engagement Activities (aka service-learning--learning through doing good)**

As we learn how to think about social and political issues, and about the positions of specific candidates on issues, we want share our knowledge and perspectives. Further, we will see if we can actually make a difference! How? By working to influence social and political outcomes. For one thing, we will share our developing perspectives by hosting a public forum at the Faulkner Country Library. Other means to engage the issues will determined. Everyone will go into depth on at least one issue to be researched, presented and turned in at the conclusion of the course.

**Writing . . . is thinking deeper.**  
There will numerous specific writing assignments all collected in an “electronic journal.” One will be a service-learning advocacy reflection. I will provide specific questions for critical reflection, but you can also augment these with your specific reflections. Journals will be checked regularly.

**Grading Written Work**

* Minimal and purely perfunctory responses; questions not fully answered. Grade D
* Adequate responses, questions answered but begging for development. Grade C
* Good responses from a mind seriously engaged with the material; questions answered in depth and readings well integrated. Grade B
* Insightful connections with other material covered in class and/or brought in from personal experience but pertinent to the material under consideration. Questions answered in depth and readings very well integrated; Issues explored in a critical, creative and comprehensive manner. Grade A

**Exams**  
There will be two written exams: a Sandel exam and a final exam.

**Course Grade**

**Journal entries** 100 pts

**Sandel exam** 100 pts

**Final exam (50% oral, 50% written)**  100 pts

**Research issue project**  100 pts

**Course participation/S-L project** 100 pts

TOTAL POINTS POSSIBLE 500 points

Course Grade Scale: Grades are determined against the standard grade scale. Above 90% of total possible points is an A, 80% - 89.9% a B, 70% - 79.9% a C, 60% - 69.9% a D, below 60% is an F.

**Extra Credit**: Extra credit assignments may be available as events on campus and in the community appear. I will announce these opportunities in class and by email. Maximum of 10 points added to your total points for each extra credit assignment. I will ask you to write a one-page summary with your critical evaluation of the event. Your summary is due by the next class period.

**In Class Rules**: No eating in class; drinking is okay. Use of laptops is not allowed; unless we are all researching a topic. **Please stow away and silence cell phones; if your cell phone is out after class starts you will be counted absent.**

We do not receive wisdom, we must discover it for ourselves, after a journey through the wilderness which no one else can make for us, which no one can spare us, for our wisdom is the point of view from which we come at last to regard the world.” Marcel Proust

**Tentative Course Schedule**

Thursday, January 7th

Introduction to the course, discussion of activities and student interests.

We will typically discuss what you have read in class. Be sure to keep up with your journal entries; they should be completed before the next class period.

How should we engage with the *polis*?

Sandel: <http://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2012/apr/08/observer-profile-michael-sandel>

Tuesday, January 12th

ISSUE: The place of civic activity in our lives; moral reasoning and approaches to justice

READ: *Civic Virtues for Work and Action*, Ronan and Barker; Sandel, chapter 1

DISCUSS: The points in the Ronan and Barker article; the cases Sandel explores.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS: How does moral thinking proceed? Use an example to explain how Sandel understands the process of moral reasoning. Do you agree?

Thursday January 14th

ISSUE: Utilitarians, morality and social policy

READ: Sandel, chapter 2

DISCUSS: The promise and peril of utilitarianism

JOURNAL QUESTIONS: What is your general assessment of the utilitarian perspective? What do you think of John Stuart Mill’s views? Is the Shakespeare vs. Simpsons example convincing?

Tuesday, January 19th

ATTEND: TEDx on Liberal Arts Education, UCA Downtown, 6 pm)

ISSUE: Libertarians, morality and social policy; economic inequality; business ethics

READ: Sandel, chapters 3 and 4.

VIEW: <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/making-sense/whats-the-state-of-economic-inequality-in-america/>

DISCUSS: What to do with this information about economic inequality?Where does Arkansas stand on these issues? Are they more libertarian? How could we find out?

JOURNAL QUESTIONS: The distribution of wealth is a contentious issue in the U.S. It is a fact that the wealth is concentrated in a relatively few hands, but is this morally objectionable? Your reflections on military service and out-sourcing pregnancy.

Thursday January 21st

ISSUE: Kantians, moral philosophy and social policy

READ: Sandel, chapter 5

DISCUSS: Sex, Lies and Politics

JOURNAL QUESTIONS: Is the Kantian moral perspective one that seems useful for everyday decision making? For social policy issues?

Tuesday January 26th

READ: Sandel, chapters 6 and 7

ISSUE: Rawls and liberal social philosophy; affirmative action

DISCUSS: Rawls and the contemporary social and political situation in America.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS: Do you, like Rawls, favor redistributing the wealth of a society? If so, on what basis; if not, why not? Is there a role for affirmative action in educational admissions?

Thursday January 28th

READ: Sandel, chapter 8

ISSUE: Aristotle’s normative approach and university education

JOURNAL QUESTIONS: What is the purpose of a university? What is the purpose of politics? Do you agree with Aristotle’s (and Sandel’s) vision of the political life as necessary for the fully human life?

Tuesday February 2nd

READ: Sandel, chapter 9

ISSUE: The communitarian approach: In this section Sandel begins to explore his specific perspective: the communitarian approach to normative thinking.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS: What is the ideal of moral individualism? Why does Sandel reject it? What does a communitarian hold regarding how to decide right from wrong? Do find this perspective persuasive, why or why not?

Thursday February 4th

READ: Sandel, chapter 10

ISSUE: Justice and the common good; religion, morality and public life

DISCUSS: Religion, morality, and a politics of the common good.

Guest: Phillip Fletcher, Executive Director, City of Hope Outreach

JOURNAL QUESTIONS: Final reflections on Sandel’s vision. Reflections on Mr. Fletcher’s views.

Tuesday February 9th

ISSUE: Who is Ben Carson? Who is Bernie Sanders?

READ: Carson, Prologue and chapter 1 to page 14; pp. 53-56, 111-115; and

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ben_Carson#Personal_life>

Sanders, Prologue, Tasini’s impressions of Sanders, and pp. 139-140; see also

<http://www.npr.org/2015/11/03/452912856/becoming-bernie-the-6-chapters-of-sanders-life>

DISCUSS: How does life story influence social political philosophy?

JOURNAL QUESTIONS: Why does Ben Carson make so much of his life-story while Bernie Sanders does not? How might this relate to Sandel’s concern about a narrative identity as a basis for normative decision making?

Thursday February 11th

ISSUE: Early American History, Religion and the Tea Party

READ: Carson, Prologue and chapters 1 and 3; Sanders, search the internet to see what you can find about Sanders, religious faith and the Tea Party

Readings from our guest Dr. Lucas: “Deism and the Founding Fathers”

RESEARCH and discuss: Faith of the founding fathers, the Tea Party, then Carson’s and Sanders relation to the Tea Party

JOURNAL QUESTIONS: What do you think of the Tea Party? Research them and their core beliefs. Who better appeals to their interests, Carson or Sanders?

Tuesday February 16th

ISSUE: The structure of our political system; campaign financing, and the “Citizens United” U.S. Supreme Court decision

READ: Carson, chapter 2; Sanders, chapter 10

Readings from our guest Dr. Arnold: *The Federalist, Paper #10*, James Madison; *Testing Theories of American Politics*, Gilens & Page.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS: What do you find most important about our political system? What does Carson think about special interest groups and campaign financing? Sanders?

Thursday February 18th

ISSUE: Education

READ, Carson chapter 4; Sanders, chapter 3.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS: Carson prizes education: what sort of education? Although he does briefly mention the cost of a higher education (p. 83), do you think Carson would support Sanders’ proposal to make all public universities tuition-free? Is the Sanders’ proposal realistic?

Tuesday February 23rd

ISSUE: Economics: Capitalism and Socialism

READ: Carson, chapters 5 and 6 and pp.118-125; Sanders, chapters 1, 5, 6 and 7.

Readings from our guest Dr. Cantrell: Forthcoming

JOURNAL: Reflections from Dr. Cantrell’s presentation

Thursday February 25th

ISSUE: Continue Capitalism and Socialism

Continue discussion with Dr. Cantrell

JOURNAL QUESTIONS: Using Sandel, morally assess their two positions on economic development.

Tuesday March 1st

ISSUE: Morality

READ Carson: chapter 7: What is a Moral Nation?

DISCUSS: Carson’s view in relation to what we learned about moral perspectives with Sandel.

Thursday March 3rd

ISSUE: Continue Morality

READ: Sanders: Chapter 8, family values; chapter 14, immigration

DISCUSS: Carson’s views compared and contrasted to Sanders.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS: Given Sandel’s final call for a politics of the common good, where does he stand in relation to Carson and Sanders?

Tuesday March 8th

ISSUE: The Presidency

Guest: Dr. Heather Yates, Political Science

JOURNAL QUESTIONS: Reflections on Dr. Yates’ presentation

Thursday March 10th

ISSUE: Environment; global climate change

Carson, p 76; research this one on the internet to see what can be found about Carson’s views.

Sanders, chapters 4 and 13

Tentative guest: Dr. K. C. Larson, Biology; readings on Blackboard

JOURNAL QUESTIONS: Sanders thinks climate change is one of the biggest problems today, but Carson seems to discount it. Your thoughts on this issue.

Tuesday March 15th

ISSUE: Health Care

DISCUSS: Balancing health care values

READ: Carson, chapter 10; Sanders, chapters 2, 9 and 12.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS: How do Carson’s and Sanders’ proposals differ? Which do you find most appealing and why?

Thursday March 17th

ISSUE: Continue with Health Care

Guest: Mr. Cal Kellogg, with Arkansas Blue Cross

JOURNAL QUESTIONS: Reflections on Mr. Kellogg’s presentation.

Spring Break: March 21 through 25

Tuesday March 29th

ISSUE: Divisions in America: Race and Class

READ: Carson, chapter 11; Sanders, chapter 15

Tentative Guest: Dr. Taine Duncan, Philosophy & Religion

Thursday March 31st

ISSUE: Political orientation of college students

Guest: Dr. Gizahew Tiruneh, Political Science

Tuesday April 5th

ISSUE: War and Foreign Affairs

READ: Carson: chapter 9; Sanders: chapters 16 and 17

Guest: Dr. Jim Deitrick, Philosophy & Religion

JOURNAL QUESTIONS: Thoughts on Carson’s plans after 9/11; your reflections on Dr. Deitrick’s presentation.

Thursday April 7th

ISSUE: Political philosophy

READ Carson, chapters 12, 13 and 14; Sanders, chapter 20

JOURNAL QUESTIONS: Compare and contrast their views to Sandel’s final proposals

These next two weeks will be arranged as best we can given our schedules.

Tuesday April 12th

Guest: Dr. Jeremy Horpedahl, Tax policy and its implications

Thursday April 14th

Civic Engagement activities: Getting involved in politics

Tentative Guest: President Courtway

Tuesday April 19th

Research presentations

Thursday April 21st

Research presentations

Final Exam: 8 am, Tuesday April 26th.

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**An Emergency Procedures Summary:** (EPS) for the building in which this class is held will be discussed during the first week of this course. EPS documents for most buildings on campus are available at http://uca.edu/mysafety/bep/. Every student should be familiar with emergency procedures for any campus building in which he/she spends time for classes or other purposes.

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