

**PS 1281: Capstone Seminar in American Politics  
(The Politics of Diversity)  
Fall 2017**

M 10-12:30  
4801 WW Posvar Hall

Professor Kanthak  
4443 WW Posvar Hall  
(412)648-7282

kanthak@pitt.edu  
Office Hours: W 10-12

Perhaps the biggest struggle in American politics today is about diversity. People who live different lives, think different things, occupy different genders, wear different clothes, and have different skin colors all live together. Diversity is fun and interesting and beneficial when trying to solve today's complex problems. But diversity is also difficult. What does it mean to be "tolerant"? What obligations do each of us have to others? How can we increase the benefits of diversity while at the same time decreasing its costs? The politics of diversity is everywhere – from elections and elite behavior to office politics to awareness of other groups and to one's own identity. The goal of this class is to think critically about these issues.

This class is also a writing-intensive capstone seminar. The concept of a "capstone" is an experience that somehow ties together what you've learned over the last several years in college and shows what you can do with it. In this capstone, if you do nothing else, I'd like you to think about transitioning your writing from work that someone (namely, the professor) *has* to read to work that someone would *want* to read. This is a big change in thinking. You've spent the last several years making sure your arguments are sound, your coverage of the topic at hand is complete, and your grammar is impeccable. Now, I want you concentrate on doing all that, *plus* making your writing lively, drawing in your reader, and conveying information your reader would find interesting.

The class is also very explicitly created as a "transition to career" experience. You will be expected to share ideas in a way that is clear, coherent, and respectful. You will be asked to write about complicated and technical issues in a way that does not just convey the material, but is a pleasure to read. You will gain experience in critiquing the work of others, a difficult – and sometimes daunting – task that is absolutely essential to success in "the real world." And you will be expected to accept the critiques of others with grace and gratitude, a skill that may be most important "x-factor" that can lead to success.

### **Books**

#### **Required:**

Shames, 2017. *Out of the Running*  
Steele, 2011. *Whistling Vivaldi*  
Hero, 2007. *Racial Diversity and Social Capital*  
Page, 2007. *The Difference*

#### **Recommended:**

Coates, 2015. *Between the World and Me*  
Vance, 2016. *Hillbilly Elegy*.

## Ground rules

This is a discussion-based course, and we will be discussing a lot of “touchy” issues. Given this, it is important for us to create an environment where people feel comfortable sharing their views. We don’t want anyone to feel disrespected, but we also don’t want anyone to feel that his or her views aren’t welcome. And the trouble is, these two things can come into conflict, and they probably will at some point in the semester. I hope we will be able to address those conflicts in a way that is beneficial to the class and its participants. To that end, let’s agree on a few ground rules:

1. *Don’t hog the floor.* This is actually an easy one in this course, I have found, because even people who are comfortable speaking up in class understand that those who are less comfortable NEED to have the floor to get their points to do well in class. If you are the kind of person who feels pretty comfortable talking in class, please think about using some of that comfort to help the less comfortable participate, too. Helping people makes you happier – it is a scientific fact.
2. *Be honest.* This class won’t be much fun if people aren’t honest with themselves or each other. Honesty here requires you to think seriously about the material, and to come to class ready to offer your take on that material. You need to push yourself and push others to explore areas that might be uncomfortable in order to really learn, and if you aren’t willing to give that a shot, this probably isn’t the class for you.
3. *Be kind.* I have a theory that it is never, ever really unkind to be honest, but you sometimes have to give what you are going to say some thought before you proceed with the truth. Let’s test that theory in this class. Being kind is not a license to keep conversations on a surface level, nor is it a prohibition against disagreement. Letting people get away with sloppy thinking is unkind, and so is not engaging them because you think they are so wrong they aren’t worth the trouble.
4. *Assume that everyone else is doing his or her best to be honest and kind.* This is a really, really hard one. We all have different backgrounds and those backgrounds provide us with knowledge, but also with a set of blind spots. And let me be clear: This class will not work if people are afraid to talk about material that is close to their blind spots.
5. *Don’t be a jerk.* Now, of course, if you follow Ground Rules 1-4, you will most definitely be following Ground Rule 5. But we all know That Guy who is intentionally rude or downright mean and then hides behind an excuse of “What? I was just being honest!” Don’t be That Guy. But let’s also not pretend that you can accidentally be That Guy or that we aren’t all at some point or another That Guy. If you are That Guy in this class, though, you should expect to be called on it.

## Your grade

Your grade will be based on four parts:

*Long analysis documents (40 percent):* You will write one paper of about ten pages. Details of the assignment are provided in a separate document. You will have an

opportunity to submit a first draft (worth 25 points) and a revised final draft (worth 15 points) for the paper. Your revision will take into account feedback from your peers and from me.

*Short response document (24 percent):* You will write twelve short papers of 1-2 pages and each worth two points. Details of the assignment are provided in a separate document.

*In-class participation (28 percent):* Participation is central to the success of this class. Therefore, you are expected to attend every class having prepared the appropriate material, and ready and able to participate. Twenty-eight points is a lot. But they will **not** be handed out based on my personal whim at the end of the semester. And you will know exactly how many points you have for in-class participation at any given time. Here's how it works. For every class you attend, you will submit a self-report of your participation for that class. This will be handed in on scrap paper which I will provide. In your self-report, you will explain how you contributed to the class discussion and why it was important and useful. Your grade will be based on this self-report, using the following rubric:

2: Self-report is submitted, and participation outlined therein shows evidence that the student provided a meaningful contribution to the class discussion.

1: Self-report is submitted, but participation outlined therein did not provide a meaningful contribution to the class discussion.

0: No self-report is submitted.

Note that it is impossible to "make up" these points if you miss class. This means that even if you are ill or have good reason to miss the class, you will lose the points. Losing two points is not going to kill your grade, but several absences will add up quickly, hurting both your participation and your ability to do well on the final. Let's be clear, then. If you miss a class, your grade for the course will be reduced by two points.

*Peer review (8 percent):* Part of this class will involve reviewing the work of several of your fellow students. Being able to critique the work of others is a vital part of any workplace, and so you will get valuable practice in this often very difficult task. You will write an in-depth review of one of your colleague's papers (5 points) and three shorter reviews of the other colleagues' work (1 point each). You will be divided into four groups, and then each of the four groups will be paired with another group for peer review. Details of this assignment are in another document.

### **Course policies**

*Students with disabilities:* If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both me and Disability Resources and Services, 140 William Pitt Union, (412)648-7890, [drsrecep@pitt.edu](mailto:drsrecep@pitt.edu), (412)228-5347 for P3 ASL users, as early as possible in the

term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

*Grading:* Again, I don't believe in guessing games. I make up fairly detailed grading rubrics for each assignment, and I grade accordingly. You can access these rubrics on CourseWeb.

*Attendance:* Students are responsible for attending class every day and understanding the material for that day. Yes, it *will* be on the test. That said, I will not regularly take attendance. Please do not attend class if you are not willing to pay attention, or at least to pretend to pay attention. (I can, in fact, see that newspaper you are reading.) If you prefer not to engage the material, please feel free to skip the class as much as you like. Doing so will make your work very poor, and therefore much easier for me to assess.

*Cheating:* Don't even try it. Seriously. If I catch you (and I will do everything in my power to catch cheaters), I will follow university procedures for reporting your offense. You will also receive a failing grade for the *course*. Read that last part again: You will fail the course, not just the assignment for which you went over to the Dark Side. You can familiarize yourself with the University of Pittsburgh's Code of Academic Integrity here: <http://www.pitt.edu/~provost/ai1.html>. Know it.

*Late work:* I do not accept late work, nor do I reschedule exams, unless you have a *documented* excuse. If you know you will have trouble getting to the exams or coming to your assigned discussion date, you would be wise to drop the class now.

*Incompletes:* It is my policy not to give incompletes. I do so only in rare circumstances, such as a documented illness. (Note: Getting tired of school at the end of the term is not rare, and therefore is not a valid excuse for an incomplete.) Asking for an incomplete except in the direst of circumstances beyond your control only eats away at the precious moments we both have on earth.

*Cheating:* Seriously, don't do it. I've reported people before and I'll do it again. I firmly believe that the vast majority of students are honest, hard-working folks who wouldn't even think of cheating. And I'll get a real job where I actually have to produce something useful before I undermine the efforts of the honest majority by letting cheaters get away with it. Anyway, you will feel really bad if you have to live with yourself after such deceitful behavior. I don't want that for you. And neither do you.

### **A word on "safe spaces"**

The concept of the "safe space" is one that has received lots of attention and enjoined lots of controversy in academia of late. So I think it is important that if we are going to build an academic community together over the course of the semester, you may need to know something about my view of safe spaces. My view is simple: Safe spaces are vitally important, a basic human need. We all need environments in

which we feel understood and cared for, places where we don't need to fight. You show me a person who thinks safe spaces are silly and useless and I'll show you a person who is woefully lacking in self-awareness and needs to grow up. And college is a place in which safe spaces are in short supply. College students are often living in situations and with people who are not of their choosing. But you deserve a safe space and you have every right to impose on others to respect that safe space. If you don't have a safe space and you feel you need one, I am willing to help you find one. But classrooms make terrible safe spaces, for a variety of reasons. Good learning often requires being challenged, made uncomfortable, or even offended. Safe spaces are built on trust, and it is very difficult to manufacture trust in a classroom (though I am always happy when I see trust being built over the course of the semester). Most important, the people who share your classroom are not of your choosing and may well not be in a place in their own lives where they can provide support and understanding to you. Instead, classrooms ought to be the places that sometimes push you so hard you find you need to return to your safe space to replenish your resources.

But an antagonistic environment where you have to be careful to protect yourself at all times is also not conducive to learning. So rather than a "safe space," we will endeavor to build a "brave space" in our class this semester. This is a place where we will all do our best to be respectful, even in disagreement, and to listen to each other carefully. But we will also do each other the courtesy of challenging each other to help clarify our own thinking and this will, at times, require you to feel uncomfortable. If there is anything I can do to help you navigate this, please let me know.

### **Schedule**

Below is a schedule of what we will talk about in class and what you are expected to have read BEFORE class each day. Due dates for assignments are also noted below. This is a discussion-based course, and your participation is a large part of your grade. Be sure that you read and understand all of the material before each class and that you come ready to discuss them. I have provided links below for many of the readings. Others are available on courseweb. We will have short breaks during each class. Some days are divided into Parts One and Two. On those days, the break will be between the two parts. You should be prepared to stay until 12:30 every day, although on some days we will finish earlier.

Aug 28: Introductions, trust games, that sort of thing

Sep 11: Part One: Stereotypes and you

Read: Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi*, entire

Part Two: Talking about Writing and Research

Read: Ta-Nehsi Coates "The Case for Reparations"

"Your Writing Sucks"

Sep 18: Part One: Fun with diversity, day I  
Read: *The Difference*, Chs. 1-8

Part Two: Getting Ready to Write  
Read: Murray, "The Essential Delay"

Sep 25: Part One: Fun with diversity, day II  
Read: *The Difference*, Chs. 9-epilogue

Part Two: Thoughts on writing from an obscenely prolific writer  
Read: King, "What Writing Is" and "The Toolbox"

Oct 2: Part One: Studying bias and racism  
Read:

- Banaji and Greenwald, *Blind Spot*, pp. 1-52
- Blee, *Understanding Racist Activism*, pp.1-20

Part Two: Picking a topic  
Read: <http://emory.libanswers.com/faq/44525> and watch the video!

Oct 10: Part One: What is a citizen?, day I  
Read:

- Coates, "The Case for Reparations"
- Mamdani, "Settlers and Natives in North America"
- Takei, "Internment: America's Great Mistake"  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/28/opinion/george-takei-japanese-internment-americas-great-mistake.html>
- Recommended: Coates, *Between the World and Me*

Part Two: Brainstorming  
Come in ready to talk about your progress on your paper

Oct 17: Part One: What is a Citizen, day II  
Read:

- Lay, *A Midwestern Mosaic*, Introduction
- Rehfeld, "On Quotas," In *Political Representation*
- Molina, "In a Race all Their Own," In *Pacific Historical Review*
- Recommended: Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy*

Part Two: Detailed discussion of projects for groups 1&2

**DUE:** Research outlines for groups 1&2

Oct 23: Part One: Millennials and Politics  
Read: Shames, *Out of the Running*, entire

Part Two: Detailed discussion of projects for groups 3&4

**DUE:** Research outlines for groups 3 & 4

Oct 30: Part One: Diversity and Social Capital  
Read: Hero, *Racial Diversity and Social Capital*, entire.

**DUE:** Group 1 first drafts

Nov 6: Part One: Diversity in Everyday Life  
Read:

- Philips, How Diversity Works
- Chua, *Innovating and the World's Crossroads*
- Pettigrew and Tropp, *When Groups Meet*, pp.1-27

Part Two:  
Discussion of Group 1 first drafts

**DUE:** Group 2 first drafts

Nov 13: Part One: LGBTQIA rights  
Read:

- Berekely, "Religious Freedom and LGBT Rights"
- Harrison and Michelson, *Listen, We Need to Talk*, pp. 1-27

Part Two: Discussion of Group 2 first drafts

**DUE:** Group 3 first drafts, Group 1 final drafts

Nov 20: Part One: Who Votes?

Read:

- Silver, Nate. 2013. In Supreme Court Debate on Voting Rights Act, A Dubious Use of Statistics." (Mar 7) 538.  
<http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/03/07/in-supreme-court-debate-on-voting-rights-act-a-dubious-use-of-statistics/>
- Keith G. Bentele and Erin E. O'Brien (2013). "Jim Crow 2.0? Why States Consider and Adopt Restrictive Voter Access Policies." *Perspectives on Politics*, 11, pp 1088-1116.  
<http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&id=9122051&fileId=S1537592713002843>
- Cobb, Rachael V., D. James Greiner, Kevin M. Quinn. 2010. "Can Voter ID Laws Be Administered in a Race-Neutral Manner? Evidence from the City of Boston in 2008." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 7, No 1, pp 1-33.  
[http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1625041](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1625041)

Part Two: Discussion of Group 3 first drafts

**DUE:** Group 4 first drafts, Group 2 final drafts

Nov 27: Part One: Final thoughts from Groups 1 and 2

Part Two: Discussion of Group 4 first drafts

**DUE:** Group 3 final drafts

December 4: Final thoughts from Groups 3 and 4

**DUE:** Group 4 final drafts