IDH3931 (Un)Common Arts: Individual Rights Versus Collective Action

Tuesday, Period 6 (12:50-1:40)

119 Little Hall

Kevin M. Baron, PhD

Office Hours: Wednesdays, Noon to 3pm (appointments & drop-ins during other times welcome)  
224 Pugh Hall (in the Bob Graham Center)  
352-846-1575  
[kbaron76@ufl.edu](mailto:kbaron76@ufl.edu)

**1. Course Description:** How do you think about your place in the world? We are individuals seeking to better understand our own identities and find meaning in what we do. Yet we are also members of society, which can defined locally, nationally, or globally. How do we reconcile our needs as individuals versus those of our local communities, or country, or the world? Understanding the debate of the individual versus the collective is a central role societies have grappled with for centuries, and a very real questions for modern day governments. In the US, policies are constructed around the ideologies of individual rights versus collective action where we are seeking to balance our wants and desires with what is best for many. These tensions underpin the current partisan and ideological divides in US politics – just examine the debate on healthcare, taxes, military spending, environmental issues/climate change, and the list can go on.

A prime example, and one that will be explored in this course, is known as the Tragedy of the Commons, where we as individuals seek to maximize our own self-interest, but if we all do so independently, it will lead to the spoils of resources for all, and everyone loses out in the long-run. This problem is fundamental to capitalist economies.

This course will include attending a performance by 600 Highwaymen: The Fever at UF Performing Arts in February. This performance will be mandated as part of the class, and the tickets will be provided by the Honors Program. The performance is interactive, meaning it will require audience participation, and will be focused on exploring these very ideas of how we balance our individual needs with the communities in which we live.

**2. Course Objective:** The purpose of this course is examine how our roles as individuals within society function with the collective action problems that exist. We will explore readings and activities that provide for critical thought and analysis of meeting individual needs while finding solutions that benefit all, or at least most. Politics and policy grapple with this issue at all levels, where individuals seek to influence outcomes, but must be responsive to the needs of the community. Goals of the course will focus on:

* Critically thinking and analyzing real world problems facing our society/community
* Seeking to better understand decision-making processes within the public sphere
* Better understanding of how our individual needs are met within the scope of a larger community
* Analyze how government at all levels seeks to balance between collective goods and individual needs
* Examine how individuals create social capital through community building that leads to a more vibrant society and what benefits accrue from such communities.

**3. Required Text:** There is no required textbook, reader, or other book for this course. Readings and resources will be readily available online and through the [UF Library Website](http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/). This course will utilize multiple resources each week, including academic articles, news articles, website resources, and online videos. You are expected to come to class each week having read, viewed, or become familiar with the resources listed for that week.

- It will be necessary for you to have internet access for this course. It will also be helpful if you are familiar with using the resources available through the UF Library website – tutorials and other resources available here <http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/tutorials/catalogtutorials.html>

- You will also want to ensure you have VPN access from home or your personal computer as many readings will only be available to you through the UF system. <http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/login/vpn.html>

**4. Course Requirements:** This course will be run seminar style, which means it will focus mainly on discussion. That means that participation and attendance in class is mandatory, and will be appropriately reflected in your final grade. You are required to do the weekly readings and view any of the material required for that week’s discussion. This is only a 1-credit course, so the assignments will be moderate, but the discussion element is important. The following assignments are required for the course:

1. Assessment Paper: There will be only one graded assignment for this course, aside from participation and attendance. A final assessment paper will be **due by Wednesday, May 2 by 11:59pm**, by either email or hard copy directly to me. The paper will be 5-6 pages (approx. 1500 words), 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced with one-inch margins.
   1. Paper Topic A: Based on the readings and discussion throughout the semester, provide your position on how the individual can interact with government and others within society to solve collective action problems within a democracy. Take a position and support with evidence from the class or additional resources you find. The paper should focus and address such questions as – how does government seek to moderate the ‘tragedy of the commons’ and how to individuals influence these policy outcomes? Think about a specific policy issue, what problem is it seeking to solve, what communities are in favor of this solution and what oppose, and why? How do you as an individual within a democratic capitalistic society play a role in seeking to solve collective action problems? How can you harness communities to make an impact? These questions serve to get you thinking about what to write, but I leave the specifics up to you to decide.
   2. Paper Topic B: Based on the readings and discussion throughout the semester, offer insight into how an individual’s needs can be met through community building and civic engagement. Take a position and support with evidence from the class or additional resources you find. The paper should focus and address such questions as – does increased social ties and interaction create more engaged communities, and are these communities beneficial? Does civics education provide a better understanding of the importance of social capital within a democracy and do you think individuals as they age become more engaged citizens? How does new information and online social communities impact ‘real world’ communities, and are both the same thing or are there distinct differences? These questions serve to get you thinking about what to write, but I leave the specifics up to you to decide.
2. Performance: This course features a performance at UF Performing Arts of *600 Highwaymen: The Fever*. The performance is focused on testing the limits of individual and collective responsibility and what it means to be a member of a local and global community. The performance is interactive, meaning you will be part of it. Honors will be purchasing tickets for the entire class, so there is no expense for you. For more information <http://performingarts.ufl.edu/events/600-highwaymen-the-fever/>
   1. The performance will be in early February at the Phillips Center. It will most likely be an evening performance. I understand that many of you work, have club activities, other classes, or just may not in general have your evenings free. I cannot mandate that you attend the performance, but urge that you make arrangements to have that night off of other responsibilities. At this time, I do not have the specifics on the performance, but will get them to you ASAP.
3. Attendance: Come to class prepared and ready to participate in discussion

All grades and policies are conducted in accordance with UF policy <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

**Grading Distribution**

Class participation and attendance: 25%

Assessment Paper: 75%

Grades will be assigned based on the following scale:

100 – 93% = A

92 – 90% = A-

89 – 88% = B+

87 – 83% = B

82 – 80% = B-

79 -78% = C+

77 – 73% = C

72 – 70% = C-

69 – 68% = D+

67 – 63% = D

62 – 60% = D-

59% and Below = F

**5. Course Policies**

Assignments are expected to be turned in on the due date, either by hard copy or email. One letter grade per day (not class days) will be taken off for late papers unless you have obtained prior approval for a different date due to special circumstances or have a documented illness or family emergency. Please do not hesitate to let me know if you have some type of special circumstance, but you must do so before the due date unless it is an emergency. Communication is key. Attendance, assignments, and make-up work will adhere to UF policies and standards, available here <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.

Your grade for class participation depends not only on physical presence (role will checked at the beginning of most classes), but also your active participation in class and your "class manners." This means being on time, refraining from side discussions and other distracting behavior and respecting each other’s viewpoints. We will be discussing controversial issues about which many people have strong opinions and beliefs so mutual respect is critical for the success of the class. It is fine to attack someone’s ideas/positions, but not the person. Personal attacks will not be tolerated.

The easiest way to reach me is to come by during office hours or through e-mail. If my office hours are not convenient, I am always happy to set a time to meet. Please do not hesitate to ask me for a scheduled appointment. If you have any special needs, please let me know so that we can work together to make this class a success.

**Students with Disabilities:** If you have special needs, you must register with the Disability Resource Center, <https://drc.dso.ufl.edu/>, so that you can be provided the necessary accommodations to ensure your success. You must inform me at the beginning of the semester and provide me with a copy of your letter. I will work with you to be successful in this course.

Please do not ask me specific questions about your assignments or grades outside of office hours. Federal privacy rules (FERPA) prohibit any discussion that can be heard by others. FERPA also prohibits me from sending grades through e-mail.

**Honor Code of Conduct:** UF students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic honesty. Requirements, expectations, and violations can be found here: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/1617/advising/info/student-honor-code.aspx>. It is your responsibility to know UF policies and procedures, and you should hold yourself to the highest standards.

“There is nothing noble in being superior to your fellow man; true nobility is being superior to your former self.” ~Ernest Hemingway

Professionalism on the part of the student is expected at all times. There has been recent debate on the appropriate levels of professor-student casualness, as exemplified here - <https://nyti.ms/2rchhI8>. While we can have endless debate on this subject, for the purpose of this course, you are expected to maintain an appropriate level of professionalism both in class and in communications outside of class.

**Helpful Links:**

UF Counseling and Wellness Center: <https://counseling.ufl.edu/>

UF Writing Center: <https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>

**\*\*\*DISCLAIMER:** This syllabus represents my current thinking and plan for this course. However, circumstances arise that may necessitate changes to this syllabus. Communication will be given in advance of any changes to this syllabus and course plan so that you are prepared and knowledgeable of requirements and expectations.

**6. Course Schedule:**

**1. January 11:** Introduction

**PART 1 – Theoretical Understandings of Reality**

**2. January 18:** Individual self-interest versus limited community resources

* The Tragedy of the Commons:
  + Read Hardin’s original article from 1968 <http://cescos.fau.edu/gawliklab/papers/HardinG1968.pdf>
  + Watch this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jSuETYEgY68>
  + Read Hardin’s Overview <http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/TragedyoftheCommons.html>

**3. January 25:** Tragedy of the Commons part II – Game Theory

Exercise: How to make decisions – Prisoner’s Dilemma and Stag Hunt, or, is it better to look out for yourself or seek cooperation for the benefit of the group?

* Read: Meaklim “Game Theory: what prisoners and stags can teach public leaders” <https://www.theguardian.com/public-leaders-network/2013/nov/27/game-theory-teach-public-leaders>
* Watch: <https://www.khanacademy.org/partner-content/wi-phi/wiphi-value-theory/wiphi-political/v/the-prisoners-dilemma>

**4. February 1:** Rational Actors and Self-Interest

On the global stage, is it better to go alone to make friends?

* Rational Actor Models of Decision Making in Foreign Policy
  + Read <http://slantchev.ucsd.edu/courses/ps12/03-rational-decision-making.pdf>
  + Watch <http://study.com/academy/lesson/the-rational-actor-model-of-decision-making.html>
  + Read <https://www.iapss.org/wp/2013/09/22/eu-us-relations-balancing-or-bandwagoning/>

**5. February 8:** Rational Decision Making in Congress and Organizations

How do individual decision-makers make decisions when constrained by an institution for the public good?

* Read: Weingast “A Rational Choice Perspective on Congressional Norms” <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2111001.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Af4edbec6d97c56932515c81c0062af59>
* Read: Simon “Bounded Rationality in Social Science: Today and Tomorrow” <http://innovbfa.viabloga.com/files/Herbert_Simon___Bounded_rationality_in_social_science___2000.pdf>
* Institutional Approaches – Binder “The Senate, the power of the minority and the nuclear option” from Brookings <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/unpacked/2017/02/14/the-senate-the-power-of-the-minority-and-the-nuclear-option/>

**6. February 15:** Collective Action Problems

How do we as individuals seek to solve complex public problems when it is not in our own interest? Does individual action create worse outcomes than cooperating? What is government’s role in solving collective action problems and where is the motivation of individual actors to do so?

* Read: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/collective-action-problem-1917157>
* Watch: <https://www.khanacademy.org/partner-content/wi-phi/wiphi-value-theory/wiphi-political/v/collective-action-problems>

**7. February 22:** The Free Rider Problem

What do we do when many benefit from the work of a few? How does government overcome the free rider problem?

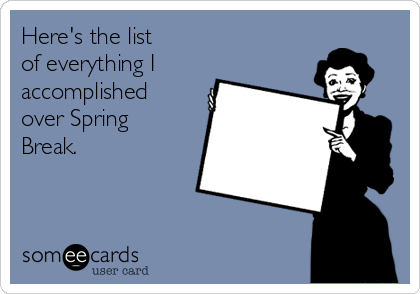
* Read: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/free-rider/>
* Watch: <https://www.khanacademy.org/partner-content/wi-phi/wiphi-value-theory/wiphi-political/v/what-are-public-goods>
* Read: <https://www.economicshelp.org/blog/1626/economics/free-rider-problem/>

**PART 2 – Social Capital, Selfishness, and How to Build Better Communities**

**8. March 1:** What is Social Capital and What Does it Mean if it is in Decline?

* Read: Putnam, “Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America” <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/420517.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A099a9c633f35c27ebe31cda6734f8ba4>
* Read: Putnam, “Social Capital: Measurement and Consequences” <https://search.oecd.org/edu/innovation-education/1825848.pdf>

9. March 8: Spring Break! Whoo-hoo! No Class



**10. March 15:** Responses to Putnam’s Bowling Alone – Differing Perspectives

* Read: Hero, “Social Capital and Racial Inequality in America” <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3687817.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Ab943cb21fdd4055c0b19220505ab8605&acceptTC=true>
* Read: Caiazza and Putnam, “Women’s Status and Social Capital in the United States” <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1300/J501v27n01_05>

**11. March 22:** Loss of Civic Communities – Diagnosis and Solutions

* Check out this factsheet: <http://www.civxsummit.org/factsheet.html>
* Read: Levine and Kawashima-Ginsberg, “The Republic is (Still) at Risk- and Civics is Part of the Solution” <http://www.civxsummit.org/documents/v1/SummitWhitePaper.pdf>

**12. March 29:** Continuing the Conversation…

* Read: Atwell, Bridgeland, and Levine, “Civic Deserts: America’s Civic Health Challenge” <https://www.ncoc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/2017CHIUpdate-FINAL-small.pdf>

**13. April 5:** The Importance of Thinking Local in Community Building

* Read: Pew Research, “Civic Engagement Strongly Tied to Local News Habits” <http://www.journalism.org/2016/11/03/civic-engagement-strongly-tied-to-local-news-habits/>
* Read: Pew Research, “Civic Engagement in the Digital Age” <http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/04/25/civic-engagement-in-the-digital-age/>

**14. April 12:** Information, Definitions, and Language

* Read: Adler and Goggin, “What Do We Mean By Civic Engagement” <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1541344605276792>
* Read: Pew Research, “How People Approach Facts and Information” <http://www.pewinternet.org/2017/09/11/how-people-approach-facts-and-information/>

**15. April 19:** So What Does This All Mean? I am hoping you can tell me…

**16. April 26:** Reading Day. No Class

**FINAL PAPER DUE MAY 2 by 11:59pm.**