Intellectual Freedom: power, bias, control, authority, safety, privilege, censorship, technology, economics, rights and justice

Spring 2023

Brian W. Keith

IDH 2930 - (Un)Common Read          Class Number: 29564          Section: 2321

Little Hall – Room 117              Tuesday, 10:40 AM - 11:30 AM (Period 4)

Office hours: Tuesdays, 11:30 to Noon OR upon request (feel free to request!)

Contact: bwkeith@ufl.edu (preferred)    352-273-2600

UF Course Catalogue Abstract:

This is a discussion-based class in which we will consider a broad range of important and timely questions. What is intellectual freedom? Where does it come from? How is it expanded or diminished and what does it matter? When are ideas and/or speech too dangerous or offensive? When is censorship okay? Who should control and own information and what are the implications on the greater good? How much privacy and freedom from manipulation do we really have? What is the purpose of higher education? How important is safety in learning? Fundamentally: how do power, technology, money, bias and privilege interact below the surface of these questions and seek to shape what we can experience and know? How have those forces shaped the personal and societal intellectual landscapes we occupy today? The course topics will be introduced and framed through readings and multimedia materials, popular and scholarly, but the focus will be our class dialogues. The class will be a space where we can reconsider our assumptions, think about important topics that some may have never really considered and benefit from the consideration of other people’s perspectives and experiences.

Conduct/Collegiality:

We will develop a set of Ground Rules early on in the semester. We can revisit and update them throughout the semester. These will relate to in-person and online interactions. They will be posted on the Canvas site for our class. Adherence to these will be expected from all of us.
Grading Policy:

This is a graded class.

Your final course grade will be based on the following activities:

- **Participation (50%)** – I expect you to equitably participate actively and collegially in all discussions, share insights and observations, ask thoughtful questions, share confusions, help each other, and so forth. Your participation grade will depend on the regularity and substance of your contributions to our class discussions, but also the conscientiousness you show in affording others opportunities to present their views. **Attendance will be taken.** You can miss one class session without penalty. More than one absence will reduce your participation grade proportionally, with the rationale being that you cannot participate if you are not present.

- **Discussion Topics (25%)** – For most weeks you are required to submit (at least 2) potential discussion topics/prompts in the form of your thoughts, questions or epiphanies from the week’s materials. **These are due by midnight on Sunday before the class and will be submitted in Canvas.** We will rely on these to help determine the topics we discuss during our face-to-face sessions.

- **Written Assignments (25%)** – There are 5 short written assignments distributed throughout the semester – typically 500 words or so, total.
  
  Assignment 1  Due: 2/13  
  Assignment 2  Due: 3/6  
  Assignment 3  Due: 3/27  
  Assignment 4  Due: 4/10  
  Assignment 5  Due: 5/4

  There are prompts that relate to and draw from the readings and discussions. You can write on one of them or several. You can come up with your own topic(s), if you prefer.

  The written assignments are due during the week following the class session covering the relevant topics - so that you can benefit from the week’s discussion and the thoughts and observations of your peers. **Your submissions will be posted in Canvas**, so your peers can see them, too - our time is really limited, so this is another opportunity for us to learn from each other.

  In addition, we have 2 really short outside of class assignments.

Late Assignments
I am open to granting extensions if you have a compelling reason; I understand that this course is not your only commitment this semester. I also understand this will be a uniquely challenging semester for many of us. However, I will grant extensions only before the due date, so be sure to communicate with me early on if you don't think you'll be able to meet the deadline. If I don't hear from you before the due date, I will deduct 2 percentage points from your course grade for every day that your assignment is overdue.

Make-up Work
I do not assign make-up work in this course. You'll be graded based on the assigned coursework.
**Accommodations for students with disabilities:**

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/)) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

**Campus Resources:**

**Health and Wellness**
- **U Matter, We Care:** If you or a friend is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu or 352-392-1575 so that a team member can reach out to the student.
- Counseling and Wellness Center: [http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx](http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx), 352-392-1575

**Library Support**
Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the Libraries or finding resources: [http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask](http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask).

**UF grading policies for assigning grade points:**


**UF class attendance and assignment make-up policies:**


**Online course evaluation process:**

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at [https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/](https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/). Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via [https://ufl.bluerain.com/ufl/](https://ufl.bluerain.com/ufl/). Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at [https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/](https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/).

**Cheating, plagiarism, etc.:**

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code ([http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honorcode/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honorcode/)) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor.
## COURSE SCHEDULE

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<th>Week</th>
<th>Key content and activity</th>
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| 1    | **1/10 Discussion:** Welcome, Course Overview, and Ground Rules  
In our discussion we will review syllabus and discuss course format and expectations. Critically, we will collaboratively establish Ground Rules for the collegial discussion of challenging topics, which serve as the core of this course.  
**Assignments BEFORE 8/31 class:**  
1. Take one or more of the Project Implicit, Implicit Association Tests (IAT) at [https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html)  
2. Take a virtual Privilege Walk. |
| 2    | **1/17 Discussion:** Freedom and Rights  
Our discussion will be an introduction to the fundamental and evolving freedoms that frame our political society and, in many ways, intellectual pursuits. We will also begin our consideration of the role of privilege.  
**Assigned Readings for this class (to be read in advance):**  
| 3    | **1/24 Discussion:** Intellectual Freedom & Censorship  
We will examine intellectual freedom in its historical context and carry our discussion into current defenses of literary intellectual freedom.  
**Assigned Readings for this class (to be read in advance):**  
### 1/31 Discussion: Intellectual Freedom & Censorship (Continued)

Our discussion will center on censorship and its goals and impacts on individuals, social movements, and society as a whole.

**Assigned Readings for this class (to be read in advance):**


### 2/7 Discussion: Intellectual Freedom and Racist Content

In our discussion we will consider the presence, significance, and implications of racist information.

**Assigned Readings for this class (to be read in advance):**


Remember to submit Discussion Topics for these readings by Sunday, 1/29

### 2/14 Session: Intellectual Freedom, Race and Sexuality, and a Case for Censorship

Our session will include a discussion of *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*. *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* is a 2006 graphic memoir by the American cartoonist Alison Bechdel, author of the comic strip Dykes to Watch Out For. It chronicles the author’s childhood and youth in rural...
Pennsylvania, focusing on her complex relationship with her father. The book addresses themes of sexual orientation, gender roles, suicide, emotional abuse, dysfunctional family life, and the role of literature in understanding oneself and one’s family. In 2015, a selection committee at Duke University (comprised of students, faculty, and staff) chose this memoir as a recommended reading for all incoming first-year students. The committee selected the title because it would stimulate interesting and useful discussion about what it means, as a young adult, to take a position on a controversial topic. The book contained 1 page of sex between two women and 1 panel showing a teenager masturbating. The book also portrays issues of mental health, interpersonal relationships, and human rights. About 20 students in the incoming freshmen class refused to read the book because of the graphic visual depictions of sexuality which they felt reading would contradict their religious beliefs.

**Assigned Readings for this class (to be read in advance):**

- Bechdel, A. (2006). Fun Home: a family tragicomic. Houghton Mifflin. *(Note: Do not feel like you have to read this book, but in case you would like a better sense of the material, an excerpt will be posted in Canvas.)*
- Fisher, L. (2019). ‘This is where we are, America’: After a Latina Author Talks About Race... Students Burn Her Book. https://www.chronicle.com/article/this-is-where-we-are-america-after-a-latina-author-talks-about-race-at-georgia-southern-u-students-burn-her-book/

Remember to submit Discussion Topics for these readings by Sunday, 2/12

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<th>2/21</th>
<th><strong>Discussion:</strong> Site Visit and Curator Talk: The Isser and Rae Price Library of Judaica.</th>
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<td>Presentation and dialogue with Dr. Rebecca Jefferson, Curator and Head, Isser and Rae Price Library of Judaica</td>
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**Assigned Readings for this class (to be read in advance):**


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<th>2/28</th>
<th><strong>Discussion:</strong> Intellectual Freedom and College</th>
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<td>Our discussion will center on the purpose(s) of college in historical and contemporary contexts.</td>
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**Assigned Readings for this class (to be read in advance):**

### Assigned Readings for this class (to be read in advance):

- **ACLU.** (n.d.). Speech on Campus. [https://www.aclu.org/other/speech-campus](https://www.aclu.org/other/speech-campus)

Remember to submit Discussion Topics for these readings by Sunday, 3/5
Family Relations, 66(1), 116-125.


Remember to submit Discussion Topics for these readings by Sunday, 3/19

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<th>12</th>
<th>3/28 Discussion: Intellectual Freedom and Scholarly Communications: the Economics of Information</th>
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<td>How is scholarship produced, distributed (brought to market), and accessed by the relevant communities of intellectuals? In our discussion we will explore these critical supports and inhibitors of intellectual freedom.</td>
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**Assigned Readings for this class (to be read in advance):**

- Purdue University. (n.d.). Copyright Overview [https://www.lib.purdue.edu/uco/CopyrightBasics/index.html](https://www.lib.purdue.edu/uco/CopyrightBasics/index.html)

Remember to submit Discussion Topics for these readings by Sunday, 3/26

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<th>13</th>
<th>4/4 Discussion: Intellectual Freedom and Gender</th>
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<td><strong>Assigned Readings for this class (to be read in advance):</strong></td>
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<td>• Hecht, K. (2018, July 26). Twitter Post by Kirsten Hecht @HellbenderHecht. <a href="https://twitter.com/HellbenderHecht/status/1022533378795548673">https://twitter.com/HellbenderHecht/status/1022533378795548673</a></td>
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Remember to submit Discussion Topics for these readings by Sunday, 4/2

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<th>14</th>
<th>4/11 Discussion: Intellectual Freedom, Privacy, Ethics and Digital Technology</th>
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<td><strong>Assigned Readings for this class (to be read in advance):</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>4/18 Discussion: Intellectual Freedom, Privacy, Ethics and Digital Technology (Continued)</td>
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<td>Our discussion will be a recap of the module and a discussion of current issues related to intellectual freedom and the role of bias in technology in determining the information we discover and access.</td>
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**Assigned Readings for this class (to be read in advance):**

  [https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/20/opinion/is-big-tech-too-powerful-ask-google.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/20/opinion/is-big-tech-too-powerful-ask-google.html)
  [https://www.them.us/story/instagram-may-be-unwittingly-censoring-the-queer-community](https://www.them.us/story/instagram-may-be-unwittingly-censoring-the-queer-community)
- Gerstein, J. (2021, April 5). Justice Thomas grumbles over Trump's social media ban.  
- Hill, L. (2020, September 7). PODCAST: Is it okay to laugh at Florida Man?  
  [https://www.washingtonpost.com/podcasts/post-reports/is-it-okay-to-laugh-at-florida-man/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/podcasts/post-reports/is-it-okay-to-laugh-at-florida-man/)

Remember to submit Discussion Topics for these readings by Sunday, 4/16

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<th>4/25 Discussion: Intellectual Freedom and Fake News</th>
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<td>Our discussion will be a recap of the module and a discussion of current issues related to intellectual freedom, privacy and censorship.</td>
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**Assigned Readings for this class (to be read in advance):**

- ad fontes media Inc. (2020). Interactive Media Bias Chart® 5.0.  
  [https://www.nber.org/papers/w24462.pdf](https://www.nber.org/papers/w24462.pdf)
[https://www.nber.org/papers/w25223.pdf](https://www.nber.org/papers/w25223.pdf) |  |
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Remember to submit Discussion Topics for these readings by Sunday, 4/23

| **5/4 NO MEETING:**  
Intellectual Freedom and Being an Intellectual |  |
| **Assigned Reading for Final Assignment:** |  |