

Honors Uncommon Read: Creating Capabilities IDH2930 Spring 2025- Class # 25863

Instructor: Michael K. O'Malley, omalleym@honors.ufl.edu, 352-392-1519

Location: LIT117

Time: Thursdays, Period 4 (10:40 AM - 11:30 AM)

Required Text: Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach by Martha Nussbaum

Office Hours: By appointment, but I am widely available to meet outside of our scheduled class meeting-times, and I will do my best to make arrangements to meet with you. Please speak with me before/after class or email me to arrange a time to meet. You can also book an appointment with me in your Honors Cohort Canvas.

Course Description:

In this course, we will read and discuss the book *Creating Capabilities* by Martha Nussbaum, which argues in support of a “capabilities approach” to justice and human development that goes beyond a measure of GDP to address the qualitative elements of freedom, equality and dignity.

Note: Parts of the book we'll read for this course include content that some students may find disturbing and/or traumatizing. Please feel free to speak with me about any concerns you may have regarding this. I will work with any students to ensure proper accommodation.

Course Objectives:

1. Students will gain a general knowledge of the capabilities approach as discussed in the book and develop or refine an understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of the approach
2. Students will synthesize what they've learned from the book with their own knowledge, perspectives, and experiences, analyzing issues and ideas in order to contribute to classroom discussions
3. Students will strive to evaluate the topics covered based on a number of factors, including students' own backgrounds and aspirations, other voices in academic and journalistic discussions, and peers' viewpoints as expressed through class discussions

Assignments & Grades:

Grades will be based on the following criteria:

Attendance: 25%

Participation: 25%

Discussant Presentations: 25%

Reflection Paper: 25%

Attendance & Participation:

This is a discussion-based, seminar style course, so it is a given that students will attend every class session well prepared to participate actively in all discussions. Half of the grade in this course is based on attendance and participation because those two elements are vital to the success of the course. **If you're not speaking/participating every class session, please do not expect to receive a full grade for participation.** Excused absences must be consistent with university policies in the Undergraduate Catalog and require appropriate documentation:
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

A note on the structure of the course: A seminar-style discussion is a particular type of classroom conversation that is owned and driven by all participants. It is very different from a traditional classroom lecture in which the professor directs the conversation and speaks most of the time. The success of a seminar discussion is carried by and is the responsibility of every single member. In a sense it is a gathering of equals, so every member has a right to speak and to be heard (within the bounds of respectful and courteous conversation) with equal respect given and received. In more traditional classroom discussions, often students have a fear of saying the “wrong” thing, but one goal of the seminar is to generate a space of openness and freedom to share thoughts and ideas and to respond genuinely within the framework of the discussion.

We will know if we are successful in our seminar endeavors not only if each student is contributing and responding during every class session, but also if each seminar session is generating new ideas based on synthesis and analysis of the topics introduced in the book. In this sense, a successful seminar becomes a “text” of its own, such that students may even use concepts generated during a discussion as paper topics for the course.

Finally, in order to participate effectively, it is imperative that students prepare well for each class session. This goes beyond simply reading the required chapters for the week. **Students should prepare every week as if they were responsible for leading that day's classroom discussion** by taking time to think and reflect on the text and then preparing comments, questions, and notes to share with their peers.

Discussant Presentations: Students will be responsible for leading at least one class discussion and will be assigned a date during the second-class meeting. Further details and expectations will be posted on Canvas and discussed in class.

Reflection Papers: One reflection paper is required for this course. It should be a minimum of two pages. Students have broad leeway in determining the topics of these papers, but they should seek to satisfy the following two criteria:

- Be somehow connected to or stem from an issue or concept discussed in the book or in class
 - Show evidence of thought and reflection resulting in an evaluation of the chosen issue or concept
- These papers are not “book reports” and must not simply restate or go into further detail about a topic discussed in the book. They should say something using a well thought-out and clearly articulated argument. The instructor will work with students to determine an appropriate topic.

Grading Scale:

The below grading scale is not subject to change. No “Incomplete” (I) grades will be issued. Students are expected to keep track of their course progress and grades on Canvas throughout the semester. Any discrepancies should be reported to the instructor.

A 94 – 100

C 74 – 76

A- 90 – 93

B+ 87 – 89

B 84 – 86

B- 80 – 83

C+ 77 – 79

C- 70 – 73

D+ 67 – 69

D 64 – 66

D- 60 – 63

F <60