

“What is, so to speak, the object of abolition? Not so much the abolition of prisons but the abolition of a society that could have prisons, that could have slavery, that could have the wage, and therefore not abolition as the elimination of anything but abolition as the founding of a new society.”

— **Fred Moten and Stefano Harney**

“We don’t think you fight fire with fire best; we think you fight fire with water best. We’re going to fight racism not with racism, but we’re going to fight with solidarity. We say we’re not going to fight capitalism with black capitalism, but we’re going to fight it with socialism [...] We’re going to fight [...] with all of us people getting together and having an international proletarian revolution.” - **Fred Hampton**

Another World is Possible

(or, preparing for the end of the world as we know it)

SOCY 391-001

Fall 2022

Tuesday, Thursday 3:30pm - 4:45pm

701 West Grace Room 2305

Professor: Jesse Goldstein

Overview

This is an experimental course, and a course about experimentation. The course is about imagining and building towards new and uncharted futures. There is no question that the world is teetering at the edge of crisis – from planetary ecological destabilization to ever-increasing economic inequality, to the persistence of racially motivated and state-sanctioned violence. And as new as this may feel at times (how many times do you hear people talk about things being “unprecedented” with regard to COVID or climate change?) the world has been an unfolding crisis for many people – maybe for you - in many times and many places. What this means is that we have a living history of past and present experiences to learn from; experiences of people turning towards crisis with confidence, and having the courage to imagine and build towards better worlds.

The core capacities that I ask you to bring with you to the class are curiosity, creativity, and an honest desire to build community. In turn, these are the “skills” or really, the orientations towards the world that we will be working to nurture and expand over the course of the semester. This is work that needs to be done at every scale – from the planetary to the local – and through this semester we will encourage each other to figure out which places, which scales, which projects, which struggles, resonate with each of us.

Learning Outcomes

- Teamwork and critical self-assessment

- Self-directed research (asking questions not just finding answers)

- Creative application of sociological analysis

- Presentation and communication skills

Course Modality and Mobility

This course is listed as fully in-person, and with only a few exceptions I expect us to meet regularly in person - assuming there is no dangerous resurgence of COVID that makes us collectively reconsider. I do not want anyone to feel unsafe or at risk, so I do ask that folks be prepared to mask up if this is something that members of our community ask us to do.

We are still living amidst a pandemic and this semester may take unexpected twists, either collectively or individually. Please remain in communication with me, and know that I will engage you with empathy, understanding and respect. Life is stressful enough as is; I do not intend to add to your stress with this course. If you need accommodations or adjustments to your expectations for the course, just talk to me about it, and we'll figure out something that works. Learning should be hard, but also fun and enjoyable. If it's not, then we're not doing it right. (That's true with or without a pandemic).

Not only is the class in-person, but it is also going to be in-place. **That means we will be regularly holding class outside of the classroom - in spaces both on campus and in surrounding community spaces.** We will work out transportation collectively, and folks who's schedule really doesn't allow them to meet off-campus for a specific day will be able to attend virtually.

Readings

Most material will be made available via links and a google drive folder. However if possible please purchase this one small book: <https://www.versobooks.com/books/3713-mutual-aid> And if you are going to buy it - do it soon! We will be reading it together within the first few weeks of the semester!

Assignments and Expectations

I am planning on putting a lot of my own energy into this class, and on facilitating an experience that will be meaningful to all of you on a lot of levels. The fact that we're doing this in the midst of a pandemic, and largely virtually, does not in any way change this. This also means you are going to be expected to do a fair amount of work. I want to be clear about what that means – it won't be busy work: memorizing facts, taking tests, writing papers. The hard work that I am going to ask you to do is “affective” – in other words, it is the work of caring, of empathizing, of investing yourself in the ideas that we discuss as living frameworks and ways of orienting your lives, individually and together. It is the work of developing thick ties and generous, emotionally responsible relationships with your fellow classmates, giving yourself to our discussions and allowing yourself to let down your defenses – to help build a common experience that is more than any of us individually could ever hope to achieve. It is the work of allowing yourself to remain confident despite vulnerability, allowing yourself to be creative, to explore, to question... allowing yourself to want to know the things that you don't yet know, allowing yourself to be moved, shaped, changed. This might sound abstract, but these are the expectations I have for this class – as we work together over this term.

The course is divided into a number of **Workshops, Projects** and **Discussions**.

Discussions are like standard course sessions, where we read something together and discuss it, along with everything else we're doing and thinking about. **Workshops** are bigger, team-based projects that will require you to research and create work, collectively, that responds to a set of prompts. **Projects** are smaller versions of workshops that ask you to address a specific challenge and develop a well-thought out, creative response. There will be much more information about each of the workshops and projects in additional documents.

You will be required to work as part of student teams for the majority of this course. All of the work involved in projects and workshops is collaborative, and you will be expected to contribute actively to this work. I know that this is difficult – but as you will see, this is the primary assignment I am asking you to do for the entire semester. There are no tests or papers – there are only team-based projects – and so I ask you to engage in this work with the understanding that it is the main “deliverable” for the class. A majority of this work will be done during class time – which makes attendance extra important (and means you will have less homework/readings on a regular basis).

Assessment: You will be given feedback on these group assignments but you will not be formally graded. Instead, we will initiate a dialog between myself as instructor and you as student through periodic “process letters” that you will be asked to submit. These can be written, audio-recorded or assembled in any way that seems right to you. You will be asked to assess where you are with the class up to that point; how work with your teams has been going; how you feel about the products you are developing and the process of arriving at these ends. This is a space to tell me about things that have worked, things that have not worked, things you have become interested in, tangents not yet explored. In other words, you are reflecting on your experience of this shared process, and giving me an opening to engage with you on your terms. These process letters are required, and centrally important to the way the class is structured.

So long as you hand in all of the process letters, then at the end of the term, your final process letter will ask you to suggest the grade that you want me to record for the work you've done over the term. While I reserve the right, as instructor, to adjust this grade (in either direction) my hope will be that we are in agreement, or at least close enough. The main reasons I would change a grade is if I felt that you were being too hard on yourself (hence the need to raise your grade) or if I felt like you were abusing the trust that I am placing in you, meaning that you didn't really engage during the semester or produce work (or submit process letters). If you fall into the latter category, I will do my best to be in communication with you to let you know how I am feeling.

NOTE: As this is an experimental course, please be flexible and assume that some of our work may shift or change over the course of the term.

Attendance Policy:

It will be very hard to participate and fulfill your requirements without regular attendance. However, I do understand that everyone lives complex lives and that we are living amidst a very trying time. I want you to please communicate with me if you cannot make it to class for one reason or another. I will take attendance – and if you have 3 or more unexcused absences I reserve the right to drop your grade 1 letter grade from your self-assessment. If you have 5 or more unexcused absences I reserve the right to fail you in the course, for this reason alone.

Course Schedule

Please note – each session is run differently. Sessions listed as “hybrid” mean that we will meet both virtually and in-person. Others, listed as “virtual” are days when we will all meet on zoom. Sessions listed as “free time” are tbd.

Tuesday August 23th

Introduction to class and each other

Discussion: Reciprocity, presence, gratitude

Shared Experience: Listen to Robin Wall Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass Ch9 - Invitation to Gratitude

Thursday August 25th

Discussion: Collaboration, Collective, Coordination

Reading: Jesse Stommel, [How to Upgrade](#), Mariame Kaba, [So you're thinking about becoming an abolitionist?](#), Mariame Kaba, [Hope is a Discipline](#) this is also a podcast episode (the audio is at this same link),

In Class: Share AAG presentation from last year

Assignment: process letter #1

Tuesday August 30st

Discussion Session: Rupture

Readings: Dean Spade, [Mutual Aid pp 1-20](#), Rebecca Solnitt, [A Paradise Built in Hell](#), pp1-7, 8-9, Naomi Klein, [Shock Doctrine](#), pp 3-7,

Only if you have the time: Shemon and Arturo, [Theses on the George Floyd Rebellion](#)

Thursday September 1st

Workshop Session:

[How will we work together?](#)

[Mutual Aid \(1\)](#)

Tuesday September 6th

Discussion Session: Organizing Power

Readings:

Rodrigo Nunes, [The Scale of Things to Come](#) (more challenging - don't get put off if some of it doesn't make sense, and skip around if you start getting lost)

Dean Spade, [Mutual Aid pp 21-42](#) (easier - definitely prioritize this)

Thursday September 8th (working without a boss in the room)

zoom me in if you need me though: <https://vcu.zoom.us/j/84882435737>

Workshop Session: [Mutual Aid \(2.1\)](#)

Readings: Dean Spade, [Mutual Aid Part 2](#)

Movies: The [Response](#) (30 min), [Crisis Kitchen](#) (10 min), [Queer Dreams videos](#), The [Takeover](#) (this last one was created by a former student of mine - Emma Francis Snyder!! She took the precursor to this class (occupy your education! at Brooklyn College) over a decade ago!)

(watch one or more of these movies with your group - if you all feel like it. They're meant to offer you some food for thought for your projects - along with the next section of Dean Spade's book. In other words these are resources that might help you with your projects)

Tuesday September 13th (working without a boss in the room)

zoom me in if you need me though: <https://vcu.zoom.us/j/84882435737>

Workshop Session: [Mutual Aid \(2.1\)](#)

Thursday September 15th

Guest Speaker: Emma Francis-Snyder

Movie (we will start immediately at 330 so please try to get to class early or right on time!): The [Takeover](#)

Emma will be around past our class ending - until 5 or 515 or so, depending on student interest, so if your schedule allows please consider sticking around. (And later in the evening there is a SOCY club event about reproductive justice!)

Tuesday September 20th

Mutual Aid presentations

Assignment: process letter #2

Thursday September 22nd

Shared Experience: Meet in Monroe Park, by the central building in the middle of the park.

Discussion Session: Ecologies of Resistance

Readings: EZLN: [Principles and Practices](#), Kali Akuno and Sacajawea Hall, [Building Economic Democracy to Construct Ecosocialism from Below](#)

Skip these for now: Winne van Woerden, [What is commoning and why is it so important?](#) Deepa Iyer, [My Role in a Social Change Ecosystem](#),

Tuesday September 27th

Workshop: [Geofuturism 1](#)

Discussion: Climate Change and Social Transformation (or its absence)

Watch In-class: Shell Oil's [Rational Middle](#)

Readings: Tad Delay, [Denial Futures](#), [The IPCC Report, Between Nightmare and Revolution](#), Ulrich Brand and Markus Wissen, [The Imperial Mode of Living \(pp16-19\)](#),

Thursday September 29th

Fonticello Food Forest/Community Roots/Sankofa

Workshop: [Geofuturism 2](#)

Reading: [News from 2047](#) (fun ecosocialist/solarpunk short story)

Tuesday October 4th

Geofuturism workshop with Phoebe Wagner (this will continue past the normal class time for those that are able to stay, it will be fun and there will be food!)

Assignment: process letter #3

Thursday October 6th

Geofuturism wrap up

Podcast: Chris Gilbert on [Millenials are Killing Capitalism, "Commune or Nothing!"](#) (long but very interesting. You can skip the first maybe 20 min or so - and they start talking about ideas related to abolition midway through, get through as much as you can!)

Tuesday October 11th (ZOOM session!)

Reading: Class Struggle Unionism Ch2,3

Thursday October 13th

Workplace Mapping: [UFCW Steward Handout](#) (page1), IWW - [Mapping, The Basics](#)

Visit with members of local unions/organizers (UNITE HERE visit)

Tuesday October 18th

Visit: Fonticello Food Forest

Organizing Conversations: Readings: [An Introduction to 1-1 Organizing Conversations](#), [An organizing conversation](#) (Labor Notes)

Not for this time: Jessica Gordon Nembhard, [Building a Cooperative Solidarity Economy](#),

Thursday October 20th

Climate Justice Activism (guest Bill Muth)

[Anya Briy: Zapatistas: Lessons in community self-organization in Mexcio](#), Gari De Ramos, Intro to [Abolition Democracy](#).

Shared Experience: Visit Sankofa Community Orchard (Carpools and Facetime partners needed)

Tuesday October 25th

Workshop: [Abolition/Futures \(1\)](#)

For inspiration - check out [One Million Experiments](#)

Readings: Mariame Kaba, ["I live in a place where everyone watches you everywhere you go"](#) and ["Toward the horizon of abolition"](#).

Podcast: "Getting Ready For The Next Act" - On Rehearsals for Living with Robyn Maynard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (if you don't have time for the whole episode fast forward to about the 24th minute and go from there)

Thursday October 27th

Discussion: University Abolition

Read: Abolish the University? (this is a work in progress)

Listen: [Financialization and Student Anxiety](#) (podcast) (if you want to check out the article the podcast is mainly referring to - its [here](#). And a shorter, easier one is [here](#).)

Visit: Shift Space, Small Friend Books, Scuffletown Park (TBD)

Tuesday November 1st

Workshop: Abolition/Futures (2)

Assignment: process letter #4

Thursday November 3rd

Presentations: Abolition/Futures

This is an important session - where we will decide what sorts of projects folks want to focus on for the remainder of the term.

Visit: Shift Space, Small Friend Books, Scuffletown Park (TBD)

Tuesday November 8th NO CLASS**Thursday November 10th**

Discussion: Social Movements/Projects

Reading: [LandBack](#), [Extinction Rebellion](#), [Food Not Bombs](#), [Richmond Tenants Union](#), [Strike Debt](#)

Visit: Shift Space, Small Friend Books, Scuffletown Park (TBD)

Tuesday November 15th

Discussion: Festival

Readings: George Katsiaficas, [The Subversion of Politics \(on Christiania\)](#) pp 181-186, pp 309-313, Andrew Robinson, Bakhtin: [Carnival against capital](#), [Carnival against power](#), Rebecca Solnit, [A Paradise Built in Hell](#), pp165-174, 179-80.

Visit: Shift Space, Small Friend Books, Scuffletown Park (TBD)

Thursday November 17th

Workshop (1)

Visit: Shift Space, Small Friend Books, Scuffletown Park (TBD)

Tuesday November 22nd (Thanksgiving Break)**Thursday November 24th (Thanksgiving Break)****Tuesday November 29th**

Workshop (2)

Visit: Shift Space, Small Friend Books, Scuffletown Park (TBD)

Thursday December 1st

Project: Decolonial Futures Collective: [Education 2048](#)

Visit: Shift Space, Small Friend Books, Scuffletown Park (TBD)

Tuesday December 6th

Discussion: Checking in and Pulling it all together

Workshop (3)

Thursday December 8th

Discussion: We make the road by walking

Finals period:

Collectively planned presentations/events (times may vary)

Assignment: process letter #5

Official VCU Syllabus Statement:

Campus emergency information

Sign up to receive at alert.vcu.edu/signup/. It is essential to keep your information up-to-date within VCU Alert and to keep your permanent address and emergency contact information current in eServices.

VCU uses a variety of communication methods to alert the campus community about emergency situations and safety threats. Learn more about types of alerts at alert.vcu.edu/know/types-of-alerts/

Know the emergency phone number for the VCU Police (828-1234), and report suspicious activities and objects.

Class registration required for attendance

Students may attend only those classes for which they have registered. Faculty may not add students to class rosters. If students are attending a class for which they have not registered, they must stop attending.

Honor System: upholding academic integrity

The VCU Honor System policy describes the responsibilities of students, faculty and administration in upholding academic integrity. According to this policy, "Members of the academic community are required to conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty, ethics and integrity at all times."

Students are expected to read the policy in full and learn about requirements here:

<http://conduct.students.vcu.edu/vcu-honor-system/>

Computer and network use

All students are expected to know and comply with VCU's Computer and Network Use policy, which can be reviewed at

policy.vcu.edu/universitywide-policies/policies/computer-and-network-resources-use.html.

Important dates

Important dates for the semester are listed in the VCU Academic Calendar:

<https://academiccalendars.vcu.edu/>

Reading Days

No classes or exams are held on these days except in instances where a student is involved in clinical and field placements, practica, co-ops, internships and other work-related experiential learning activities. Faculty may not give an examination or an assignment on those days. Instead, students are encouraged to use these days for relaxation, study and/or review of class materials.

We care about your success!

Virginia Commonwealth University has launched an Early Alert initiative to support student success. As your professor, if I am concerned about your academic performance in the first few weeks of this class, you and your academic advisor may receive a Progress Report email with links to appropriate academic support

resources. You are encouraged to reach out to me after class or during my office hours for additional support. Your academic advisor, the Writing Center, and the Campus Learning Center may also follow up to provide additional layers of support to you.

Attendance and consequences of poor attendance

The instructional programs at VCU are based upon a series of class meetings involving lectures, discussions, field experiences, special readings and reporting assignments. Therefore it is important for each student to be in attendance on a regular basis. A student who misses a class session is responsible for completing all material covered or assignments made during the absence.

Students having attendance problems should contact their instructor to explain the reasons for nonattendance and to discuss the feasibility of continuing in the course. If the student has fallen so far behind that the successful completion of the course is impossible, the student should withdraw from the course before the end of the first 10 weeks of classes.

If the student continues to miss class and does not officially withdraw from the course, the instructor may withdraw the student for nonattendance with a mark of W before the end of the first 10 weeks of classes or may assign an academic grade at the end. Withdrawals are not permitted after the end of the first 10 weeks of classes. For classes that do not conform to the semester calendar, the final withdrawal date occurs when half of the course has been completed.

Career Services

Looking for ways to tie what you are learning in your class to your future career or professional goals? VCU Career Services provides career planning services for all current VCU students and alumni. Career Services can help students with finding a work-study job on/off campus, resume writing, internship development, interviewing,

preparing for graduate school, networking, or job searching,. Students are invited to attend career events and workshops, and schedule individualized career advising appointments. For more information and to make a career advising appointment, **visit the VCU Career Services website.**

Managing stress

Students may experience situations or challenges that can interfere with learning and interpersonal functioning including stress, anxiety, depression, alcohol and/or other drug use, concern for a friend or family member, loss, sleep difficulties, feeling hopeless or relationship problems. There are numerous campus resources available to students including University Counseling Services (804-828-6200 MPC Campus, 804-828-3964 MCV Campus) which provides brief therapy treatment, University Student Health Services (MPC 804 828-8828, MCV Campus 804 828-9220) and the Health Promotion and Well-Being Center [The Well] (804-828-9355). 24 hour emergency mental health support is available by calling (804) 828-6200 or utilizing the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-784-2433).

Mandatory responsibility of faculty members to report incidents of sexual misconduct

All employees, including faculty, department chairs and deans, are required to report any incidents of sexual assault, sexual exploitation and partner or relationship violence to the university's Title IX Coordinator.

Confidential offices which can provide support at VCU are: University Counseling Services, (804) 828-6200

For more information about Title IX, please visit <https://equity.vcu.edu/>.

Military short-term training or deployment

If military students receive orders for short-term training or for deployment/mobilization, they should inform and present their orders to Military Student Services and to their professor(s). For further information on policies and procedures contact Military Student Services at 828-5993 or access the corresponding policies.

Student email standard

Email is considered an official method for communication at VCU. Students are expected to check their official VCU email on a frequent and consistent basis (the university recommends daily) in order to remain informed of university-related communications. Students are responsible for the consequences of not reading, in a timely fashion, university-related communications sent to their official VCU student email account. Mail sent to the VCU email address may include notification of university-related actions, including disciplinary action. Students must read this standard in its entirety at

<https://ts.vcu.edu/media/technology-services/content-assets/university-resources/ts-groups/information-security/StudentEmailStandard.pdf>

Student financial responsibility

Students assume the responsibility of full payment of tuition and fees generated from their registration, all charges for housing and dining services and other applicable miscellaneous charges. Students are ultimately responsible for any unpaid balance on their account as a result of the University Financial Aid Office or their third party sponsor canceling or reducing their award(s).

Students representing the university – excused absences

Students who represent the university (athletes and others) do not choose their schedules. All student athletes should provide their schedules to their instructors at the beginning of the semester. The Intercollegiate Athletic Council strongly

encourages faculty to treat missed classes or exams (because of a scheduling conflict) as excused absences and urges faculty to work with the students to make up the work or exam.

Students with disabilities

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended, require that VCU provide "academic adjustments" or "reasonable accommodations" to any student who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity. To receive accommodations, students must register with the Office of Student Accessibility and Educational Opportunity on the Monroe Park Campus (828-2253) or the Division for Academic Success on the MCV campus (828-9782). Please also visit the Student Accessibility and Educational Opportunity website via <https://saeo.vcu.edu/> and/or the Division for Academic Success website via <https://das.vcu.edu/> for additional information.

Once students have completed the registration process, they should schedule a meeting with their instructor (s) and provide their instructor (s) with an official accommodation letter. Students should follow this procedure for all courses in the academic semester.

Withdrawal from classes

Before withdrawing from classes, students should consult their instructor as well as other appropriate university offices. Withdrawing from classes may negatively impact a student's financial aid award and his or her semester charges. To discuss financial aid and the student bill, contact the **Student Financial Management Center (RAMQ)** regarding the impact on your financial aid.

Faculty communication about students

VCU instructional faculty, administrators and staff maintain confidentiality of student records and disclose information in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). This means that VCU officials may disclose student record information without the consent of the student in certain situations. To support university operations, for example, VCU officials share information about students with other educational officials as necessary to perform their job duties. FERPA permits this disclosure to school officials who have a legitimate educational interest in the student information. In addition, VCU officials have obligations to report information shared by a student depending on the content of that information, for example, in compliance with VCU's policy on the duty to report. Unless FERPA permits a certain disclosure, VCU generally requires consent from a student to disclose information from their education record to another individual. You may find additional information on the VCU FERPA website:

<http://rar.vcu.edu/records/family-educational-rights-and-privacy-act/>.