



Course Syllabus: Red, White, and Who? Politics & Government in the Modern Classroom

Number of Credits: 2

Course Instructors: Damian J. Thompson

Course Description: As educators, it is a core responsibility that students are provided the resources to engage in civil and thoughtful political discussions in and outside of the classroom. Our current high school, middle schools, and elementary students will be shaping our nation's future in a very direct and significant way. It is a moral imperative that our future voters are not only taught how to be civically engaged but to also have respectful discussions in an increasingly polarized world.

The purpose of this course is to identify the unique problems facing educators in navigating politics in the classroom. Participants in this class will reflect on our nation's current political climate and the foundations that support our political system. This includes reflections on our nation's elections, political parties, and contemporary media landscape. At the conclusion of the course, participants will develop an implementation plan to increase civic engagement from students and ensure that politically charged discussions are handled in an appropriate manner.

Learning Objectives: Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate a basic knowledge of our nation's political parties and the basis of each party's respective political perspective.
- Recognize the importance of Iowa's role in our nation's electoral process.
- Analyze trends in our current media landscape and be able to educate students on proper media literacy.
- Understand their own political biases and how to navigate these in the classroom.
- Create a classroom lesson plan or school action plan to be implemented to teach civil discourse and help amplify student voice.

Resources: No texts are required to purchase to complete this course. All required reading will be provided to you in the course modules.

- Agarwal-Rangnath, R., Alison G. Dover, and Nick Henning. *Preparing to Teach Social Studies for Social Justice*. Teachers College Press, 2016.

This book provides examples and discussions of how teachers are responding to the Common Core State Standards, focusing on how they build curriculum, support students' literacy skills, and prepare students to think and act critically within and beyond the classroom. To provide direct classroom-to-classroom insights, the authors draw on letters written by veteran teachers addressed to new teachers entering the field. Part I of the book introduces the three approaches teachers can take for teaching for social justice within the constraints of the Common Core State Standards (embracing, reframing, or resisting the standards). Part II analyzes specific approaches to teaching the Common Core, using teacher narratives to illustrate key processes. Part III demonstrates how teachers develop, support, and sustain their identities as justice-oriented educators in standards-driven classrooms. Each chapter includes exemplary lesson plans drawn from diverse grades and classrooms, and offers concrete recommendations to guide practice.

- Agarwal-Rangnath, R. *Social Studies, Literacy, and Social Justice in the Common Core Classroom: A Guide for Teachers*. 2013.

This book provides a framework (grades 3-8) to help educators literacy and social students for social studies. This text frames the lessons with the Language Arts Common Core Standards while also making it applicable for the daily realities of the classroom. Each chapter explains how teachers can restructure, reshape, and work with mandated curriculum materials to teach from a critical perspective. The book also discusses how to meet Common Core Standards by teaching language arts and social studies as complementary subjects.

- Jamieson, Kathleen Hall and David S. Birdsell. *Presidential Debates: The Challenge of Creating an Informed Electorate*. Oxford University Press, 1988.

This text, while old, provides an excellent look at the way televised presidential debates shifted public opinion and shaped the political landscape in ways we had never seen before.

- Journell, Wayne. *Teaching Politics in Secondary Education: Engaging with Contentious Issues*. SUNY Press, 2017.

This book is essentially a handbook for anyone who is teaching politics and government at the secondary level. From creating an effective environment to discuss politics, to building skills that help students and teachers engage in these conversations effectively, Journell has suggestions.

- Sanacore, Joseph. *Teaching Critical Thinking in the Context of Political Rhetoric*. Routledge, 2022.

This books helps to explain why critical thinking skills are absolutely essential not only to making informed political decisions, but also in discussion politics, government, and other controversial issues in classrooms. Sanacore provides ideas about how to help students hone their critical thinking skills through questions and exercises.

Course Requirements: To receive full credit for the course, participants must complete ALL assignments and respond to specific questions outlined in each assignment. Failure to complete all assignments will result in a disqualification in the course and a failing grade.

Other Course Information:

Getting Started

- After registering for the course, you will be sent a confirmation email with your course dates. A few days before your course is scheduled to begin, you will receive an invitation from *Canvas Instructure* to join your course. Please follow the prompts in that email to log in and access your course.
- Access each assignment through the course home page or the “modules” tab in the left-hand navigation menu. All assignments will be submitted through the Canvas platform on each respective assignment page.
- Please save a backup copy of all course assignments and completed work.
- For all discussions you will be asked to respond to your classmates’ posts. If you are the first poster for an assignment, or if there are not yet enough posts for you to respond to the minimum number of posts, you are responsible for returning to lessons you’ve already completed to ensure you are participating in class discussions. Not doing so may result in losing participation points. If you are in a course with three or fewer students, your instructor will reach out with further instruction on meeting participation requirements.
- You may work collaboratively and submit similar responses on all assignments except for quizzes which must be done individually. Under no circumstances may you copy/paste the same response as a classmate, even if you collaborate on the assignment. Copying and pasting your classmates’ or colleagues’ responses will be treated as plagiarism and may be grounds for failing the course. Please contact your course instructor with any questions.

Participation

- You are not required to be present (i.e., online) on specific days or times. You will work at your own pace. The course is structured in 6 Weekly Units, and has a definitive course end date; however, you may work at your own pace within the three-week timeframe.
- All responses will be posted online. Large documents, files, photographs, or PowerPoint presentations may be attached as part of your response by using the “Submit A File” option.
- You may work collaboratively and submit similar responses on all assignments except for quizzes which must be done individually.

INTASC Standards that are addressed in this course:

- 2. The teacher understands how children learn and develop, and can provide learning opportunities that support their intellectual, social and personal development.
- 3. The teacher understands how students differ in their approaches to learning and creates instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners.
- 4. The teacher understands and uses a variety of instructional strategies to encourage students’ development of critical thinking, problem solving and performance skills.
- 5. The teacher uses an understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.
- 6. The teacher uses knowledge of effective verbal, nonverbal, and media communication techniques to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in the classroom.
- 7. The teacher plans instruction based upon knowledge of subject matter, students, the community, and curriculum goals.
- 9. The teacher is a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates the effects of his/her choices and actions on others (students, parents, and other professional in the learning community) and who actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally.
- 10. The teacher fosters relationships with school colleagues, parents, and agencies in the larger community to support students’ learning and well-being.

Check the Iowa Teaching Standards that are addressed in this course:

X	1. Enhance Student Achievement		5. Monitoring Student Learning
	2. Content Knowledge	X	6. Classroom Management
X	3. Planning and Preparation	X	7. Professional Growth
X	4. Instructional Strategies	X	8. Professional Responsibilities

Assignment Checklist

Topic/Activity	In Class	Out of Class
Getting to Know the Class; Additional Readings: Take some time to work through the “getting started” module; watch the welcome video from the instructor, review the Canvas 101 instructions, and peruse the readings for the course under the “files” tab. Before beginning the course participants are required to score 100% on a quiz on the transcript request procedure.		3 hrs
Week 1 – What Makes Politics Uncomfortable		

Discussion: Introductions – Participants will review the week 1 introduction from the course instructor before introducing themselves to their classmates in a discussion post. Participants will need to respond to a minimum of two classmates to fulfill all requirements for this assignment.	1 hrs	3 hrs
Discussion: What is a Democracy? – Participants will read Chapter 1 of <i>Teaching Politics in the Secondary Classroom</i> , “Creating Space for Political Instruction”. Then, they will watch a webinar explaining different types of democratic governments and read a series of news articles about governments in different countries across the world. In a discussion post, they’ll answer a series of questions about their hopes, fears, and concerns around teaching government and politics, and discuss their understanding of American Democracy. They’ll respond to at least two of their classmates.	1.5 hrs	3 hrs
Discussion: The Political Compass – Participants will analyze the contemporary political spectrum and identify where they fall on this “political compass”, identifying their own biases. Participants will reflect on these findings in a discussion post and respond to two of their classmates.	1.5 hrs	4 hrs
<u>Week 2 – Elections</u>		
Quiz: Rockin’ the Caucus – Participants will use resources from NPR and Iowa PBS to review Iowa’s history of the caucus leading up to presidential elections. Participants will take a quiz to assess their understanding.	1 hrs	3 hrs
Discussion: Discussing Televised Political Debates – Participants will read about presidential debates in the United States in selections from <i>Presidential Debates: The Challenge of Creating Informed Electorates</i> and evaluate their effect on public opinion and memory. Participants will discuss these findings with their peers and respond to at least two of their classmates.	2 hrs	3 hrs
Discussion: Elections – Participants will read Chapter 3 of <i>Teaching Politics in Secondary Education</i> , “Teaching Presidential Elections” and watch a CNN video of a middle school teacher who holds mock elections in her classroom to help students understand the process. Participants will discuss the ideas presented in the reading with their classmates, and respond to at least two posts.	2 hrs	4 hrs
<u>Week 3 – Part(ies) in the U.S.A.</u>		
Discussion: The Moral Roots of Liberals and Conservatives – Participants will watch a TEDEd video from political sociologist, Johnathan Haidt, on the moral values that contribute to our political identities. They will also examine the “flip-flop” of the Democratic and Republican parties in the 1930s. In a discussion post, they’ll examine the relationship between core values and political ideation/alignment, and respond to at least two of their classmates’ posts.	1 hrs	3 hrs
Discussion: Policy vs Personality – Participants will read two essays from the Political Science collection, <i>Political Psychology: The Role of Personality in Politics</i> , “The Role of Personality in Politics” and “Personality Goes A Long Way (for Some)”. They’ll also watch an NBC news clip on the topic. In a discussion post, participants will differentiate between personality and policy, and discuss how the two are occasionally intertwined. They’ll respond to at least two of their classmates.	2 hrs	3 hrs
Discussion: Third Parties – Participants will learn watch an Atlantic video on the history and increasing presence of third-party candidates in our political environment. They’ll also examine a lesson plan for discussing third parties in the classroom. Participants will reflect on this in a discussion post and respond to at least two classmates.	2 hrs	4 hrs
<u>Week 4 – Staying Engaged in Today’s Media Landscape</u>		

Discussion: Identifying Bias – This lesson makes use of the infamous AllSides Media chart by asking participants to identify where their preferred media source falls in relationship to liberal and conservative perspectives and reliable vs. unreliable information (they do not have to share where on the chart their sources fall if they do not wish). They will then read Chapter 6 of <i>Media Literacy in the K-12 Classroom</i> , “Representation, Bias, and Stereotypes” and watch a CrashCourse video, “The Dark Side of Media” on how bias sneaks up, even in major news sources such as CNN, Fox, and ABC. They’ll reflect in a discussion post.	1 hrs	3 hrs
Discussion: The Politics of Social Media – Participants will watch a TED Talk on how social media is shaping global politics and examine a PEW Research study that examines public opinion on the issue. Participants will reflect on how social media has revolutionized our political discourse and candidate communications and analyze these ideas in a discussion post. They’ll respond to at least two classmates.	2 hrs	3 hrs
Discussion: Teaching Media Literacy – In this lesson, participants will read an article Commonsense Media as well as Chapter 2 of <i>Media Literacy in the K-12 Classroom</i> , “Teaching Media Literacy” about the pressing nature of ensuring our students are engaging in media and information literacy lessons, in this time of rapid globalization. Participants will reflect on students’ constant access to information, and their own perspectives on some of the biggest challenges they face helping students to understand MIL.	2 hrs	4 hrs
<u>Week 5 – Teaching Strategies for Civil Discourse</u>		
Discussion: Teaching Social Justice – In this lesson, participants will read the introduction of the book <i>Social Studies, Literacy, and Social Justice in the Common Core Classroom: A Guide for Teachers</i> , as well as the introduction of <i>Preparing to Teach Social Studies for Social Justice</i> . They will then answer a series of discussion questions that prompt them to identify their “why” and respond to two classmates.	2 hrs	3 hrs
Discussion: Having Civil Political Discussions – In this lesson, participants will read Chapter 3 of <i>Teaching Critical Thinking</i> , “Promoting Critical Thinking” and Chapter 4 of <i>Teaching Politics in Secondary Education</i> , “Teaching Students to Think Politically”. They’ll then examine a variety of publications on tips for teaching sensitive topics put out by various education associations and departments. In a discussion, participants will compare these lists to find common suggestions, and reflect on what they think will be the most useful for them. They’ll respond to two of their classmates.	2 hrs	3 hrs
Discussion: Teaching Strategies for Politics & Elections – Participants will read Chapter 5 of <i>Teaching Politics in Secondary Education</i> , “Addressing Political Controversy in the Classroom” and Chapter 7 of <i>Hard Questions: Learning to Teach Controversial Issues</i> , “Teaching Controversial Issues through Democratic Discussion in the U.S. Midwest” and examine some resources put out by government teachers across the country. In a discussion post, they’ll reflect on how they might hold space for a conversation on politics in their learning space. They’ll respond to at least two of their classmates’ posts.	2 hrs	4 hrs
<u>Week 6 – Amplifying Student Voice</u>		
Discussion: Amplifying Student Voice - In this lesson, participants will watch a TED Talk about the intersectional views that students have and the value of including those perspectives in the classroom. They will understand why the lived experiences of students can enrich the classroom. Additionally, participants will reflect on student views and perspectives and how they would integrate that in their classroom.	2 hrs	3 hrs
Discussion: Fostering Student Engagement – Participants will read Chapter 2 of <i>Teaching Politics in Secondary Education</i> , “Making Politics Engaging for Students” and watch a	2 hrs	3 hrs

webinar about how small group discussions foster both engagement and problem-solving. Participants will reflect in a discussion post and respond to two of their classmates.		
Implementation Plan - For their final assignment, participants will use information from this course to design a lesson plan that they can use in their own classroom or learning environment. They'll follow the prompt and the rubric in this syllabus to demonstrate that they understand the course materials, and can apply them to their work. Participants can choose their preferred medium for this project.	1 hrs	4 hrs
Total Class Time	30 hours	60 hours

Coursework: Participants can earn up to 135 points total for the course. The following table depicts the breakdown of points possible for the required coursework

Activity	Points
16 Discussion Posts (5 Points Each)	80
1 Quiz (5 Points)	5
Final Implementation Plan/Paper	50
Total	135

Grading Scale – Graduate Credit

100-90% (135 - 122 points)	A
89-80% (121 - 108 points)	B
79-70% (107 - 95 points)	C
69-60% (94 - 81 points)	D
59%-Below (<81 points)	F

Grading Scale - License Renewal Credit

100-80% (135 - 108 points)	P
79%-Below (<108 points)	NP

Student Requirements Students are required to:

- Participate in **ALL** discussion forums and quizzes
- Complete a final implementation plan

Americans with Disabilities Act: If you are a student with a disability and require any auxiliary aids, services, or other accommodations for this class, please see the instructor to discuss your accommodation needs.

Statement of Plagiarism: Academic dishonesty results in failure of this course. Give credit where credit is due. Use the MLA or Chicago Publication Manuals found at Purdue OWL to cite references when needed. Not crediting ideas or words of others is unacceptable scholarship, as is submitting work that was done for a previous course or that is not your own origin in design or completion. Submit original assignments. Do not submit work for this course that you have done for other courses.

Grading Rubrics for Individual Activities

Discussions (80 points possible) Discussion Forums are asynchronous ways to engage in class discussions. They require you to submit an answer to a question and respond to the posts of other peers. Because they are an integral part of sharing strategies, analyzing research, and sharing ideas, discussion forums in this course comprise a significant percentage of your final grade. It's highly recommended that you read and respond to more than the required two peer postings because greater participation will facilitate a greater depth of understanding. Additionally, it's important to make posts in a timely manner to benefit from peer responses.

Grading Rubric for Discussion Forums		
		Points
Critical Thinking	Makes connections to the other content and real-life that are supported by reference(s) and example(s)	1
	Offers new ideas, connections, or applications	1
	Expresses and justifies personal opinion	1
Assignment Specific Criteria	Addresses all parts of the assignment, cites sources	1
Participation (Responses to at least 2 peer posts)	Responds to at least two classmates	1
Total Points Possible		5

Final Assignment (50 points possible)

The final assignment is a critical part of this course. Participants must complete a two-page final assignment. The paper is meant to be a reflection as well as a chance to state what you will use going forward. The rubric below will be used to grade the final assignment, but additional details will be provided within the course.

Grading Rubric for Implementation Plan		
		Points
Critical Thinking	Highlights any new knowledge gained as a result of course.	10
	Offers new ideas, connections, or applications	10
	Expresses and justifies personal opinion	6
	Discusses Overall Implications	4
Assignment Specific Criteria	Addresses all parts of the assignment, cites sources	4
Mechanics	Writing is clear, well developed, and organized, No or few grammar and spelling errors	4
Implementation	Clearly states ideas to use in the future	4
	States resources to be used	4
	Is realistic in their approach – understands limitations may exist	4
Total Points Possible		50