

POLS 371: GOVERNING THE SELF AND OTHERS

COURSE INFO

Instructor: Joel Alden Schlosser

Classroom: Dalton 212e (Bryn Mawr College)

Meeting Times: 2:25 – 3:45 pm (Spring 2022)

Office hours: Fridays, 2 – 4 pm (Dalton Hall 100C)

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS

What does it mean to call Bryn Mawr and Haverford self-governing institutions? Or to believe that we - citizens of various communities, nations, or states - govern ourselves? This seminar seeks to investigate alternative visions of governing the self and others as developed in recent writings from the perspective of queer, disabled, cyborg, Indigenous, and Afro-futurist writers. Our objective will be to develop and implement critical vocabulary for understanding and implementing what self-governance might mean, what conditions it requires, and what "best practices" community members and citizens committed to it might enlist to realize its potential for individual and collective flourishing.

PROMISES & PRACTICES

My goal for this course is that your participation energizes, replenishes, and fills you— rather than leaving you depleted and exhausted. Alongside this overarching aim this course seeks to help you to join others as we develop our imagination, creativity, honesty, and openness through earnest inquiry and adventuresome speculation. This will involve discussion, reading, and writing in virtual as well as actual formats. But you will also need to bring playfulness, enthusiasm, and a willingness to try things that I hope will take you to new visions of individual and collective possibility.

Given the subject matter of this course, many of our discussions in class will involve sensitive issues. You may find some of this material upsetting. My hope is that together we can foster an environment of respect and openness conducive to everyone's full and honest participation. Whatever success or pleasure the course might occasion depends in large part on what all of us bring and contribute.

To develop the habits of mind described above as well as to bring the aspirations listed into being, this course will consist in a number of activities:

1. **Energetic and involved discussion.** We will learn political theory by speaking political theory. To learn the difficult concepts and arguments, you need to practice putting them into your own words, explaining them to others, and listening to others' explanations. Excellent discussion requires preparation: review of previous class discussions, taking notes in advance of class meetings, and being present and alert as much as possible during every class meeting. Through our discussions you will develop

the essential speaking and listening skills necessary for developing and using the theories and applications of the theories we study.

2. **Disciplined and careful reading.** The readings for this course will require time, energy, and concentration. This course seeks to develop you as thoughtful, patient, imaginative, and critical readers capable of identifying multiple possible readings, examining assumptions, and ready to interpret different kinds of arguments.
3. **Frequent and varied writing.** This course begins from the premise that reading and writing are deeply intertwined; because writing and understanding develop together, this course asks that you write regularly in conversation with the readings.

ACTIVITIES

Because this course seeks to develop you as a speaker and a listener, a writer and a reader, and a critical thinker, we will focus our work in several areas.

1. **Contributions to class activities.** Consistent preparation for class as well as quality and appropriate contributions to class activities form an essential part for realizing the promises of this course. Enrolling in this course signifies your agreement to contribute to the education of your fellow students and to learn from them and your professor in turn. Contributing during class sessions provides an opportunity to practice speaking and the skills of persuasion, as well to listen to, critique, and develop the arguments and analyses of your peers.
2. **Collective Note Taking.** Once during the first half of the semester and once during the second half you will prepare notes on the reading and take notes during class in a collective notes GoogleDoc. I will give you a sample and instructions in the notetaking document. Please post your notes on the reading no later than 8 pm on the night before class. During class, you can take notes in the GoogleDoc directly. (You are of course welcome to comment, add, or link to your own separate notes from within this collective document too!)
3. **Short Essays.** As the schedule below outlines, you will write and bring to class 5 essays across the course of the term. Each of these essays should be approximately 5 double-spaced pages with standard formatting (one inch margins, 12 point font, etc.) We will workshop each of these essays in class in a variety of ways; after these workshops I will ask you to draft a brief revision plan to use for your final portfolio (if you desire). *These essays can take any form you deem appropriate, but I encourage experimentation in form, style, interlocutors, etc. (in keeping with the wide variety of forms and approaches we'll be studying).* The syllabus has prompts and I will suggest forms that resonant with the readings. I will distribute suggested criteria that we will discuss in class prior to the first essay.
4. **Final Portfolio and Reflection.** At the end of finals period, you will submit a portfolio of approximately 15 pages of writing from the semester as well as an approximately 5 page reflection on your work across the semester. The final reflection is an opportunity to reflect upon your development as a writer and thinker. You can choose your form for the reflection; whatever you do, think of it as a chance to articulate what you learned through the various experiments you undertook. Be specific about how you addressed areas that were not working in your writing (and thinking more generally), what steps

you took to improve those elements, and why you made those choices versus others. You might also include what you would still like to work on if you had more time, since even strong writing is never “finished” but, more honestly, abandoned. The portfolio should include essays you wrote during the semester, workshopped, and revised. You may choose to expand or extend one or two essays but you can also simply take three of the five. Whatever you choose, be clear about the purpose of each selection: what does it reveal about your growth as a writer and thinker and where do you want to go from here?

TEXTS

To quote Sarah Ahmed, these are our “companion texts” for the collective inquiry of the course. These books are available for purchase at the Bryn Mawr Bookshop and (with the exception of the Spade) for download at the Bryn Mawr Library and Moodle. If you are having trouble acquiring these books, please let me know well in advance of our discussion.

1. Dean Spade, *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the next)*. London and New York: Verso, 2020.
2. Eli Clare, *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.
3. Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.
4. Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013.
5. Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals*. Chico: AK Press, 2020.

EVALUATION

We will use a Grading Contract for this course. You can access the complete contract on the course Moodle page.

RESOURCES AND POLICIES

Overview

I am committed to creating and supporting a classroom community that is inclusive, equitable, and conducive to learning for all students, as well as sensitive to the specific, unique, and unpredictable challenges we will each and all encounter this semester. To this end, I have designed course activities and assignments meant to help you gain and demonstrate understanding of key course content in ways that are flexible and personally meaningful. Our class meetings will include time for group check-ins, and the syllabus includes structured occasions for one on one and small group conferences with me as well.

Academic Support.

I encourage you to reach out to the Academic Support and Learning Resources Specialist to explore effective learning, studying, test-taking, note-taking and time and stress management strategies that are essential to success in this course and college life. Bryn Mawr students can schedule a meeting with Rachel Heiser, the Academic Support and Learning Resources Specialist by calling the Dean's Office at 610.526.5375 or emailing Rachel at rheiser@brynmawr.edu. For more information, please visit [the Academic Support Website](#).

Accommodations.

I encourage any students who think they may need accommodations in this course because of the impact of a learning difference to meet with me early in the semester. Students who attend Bryn Mawr should also contact Access Services Coordinator Deborah Alder at dalder@brynmawr.edu or 610-526-7351 as soon as possible, to verify their eligibility for reasonable accommodations. Haverford Students should contact Patty Rawlings at the Office of Disabilities Services, prawling@haverford.edu or 610-896-1290.

Library

I encourage you to use the library resources. If you're curious about a topic, you can always schedule an appointment by emailing library@brynmawr.edu

Due Dates and Extensions.

If you are unable to attend class or complete an assignment by the due date, I ask that whenever possible you let me know ahead of time and work with me to determine when you will complete the work (from class or assigned). In this situation there will be no grade penalty for late work. If it is not possible to ask ahead of time, I ask that you maintain communication with me as much as possible so that we can work together to determine a good course of action. I encourage those of you who need more than a one-week extension to talk with your Dean to arrive at a practical and workable plan for completing the work.

Integrity.

I am committed to adhering to the standards regarding academic honesty contained in the Bryn Mawr and Haverford honor codes and the values of mutual trust, concern, and respect for oneself and for others upon which the bi-co community depends; I invite all of you to continue the conversation with me and with one another about how we can create the best intellectual community possible.

Moodle.

On our course Moodle site you can find electronic copies of course readings, a copy of the syllabus, and other useful information. Here all of our communications with the entire class will be archived under "Announcements" and course discussions conducted electronically will be archived.

Religious Observance.

While Bryn Mawr does not cancel classes for any religious holidays, it does respect the right of its students to observe holidays that are important to them. Absences around a religious holiday will be excused. I am committed to help you make up work missed because of such absences. If you foresee a conflict with a scheduled activity, please let me know so we can adjust accordingly.

Writing Center.

The Writing Center offers free appointments and experienced peer tutors who are there to help you at any stage of the writing process. The Writing Center is located on the first floor of Canaday Library. You can get more information at [The Writing Center's Website.](#)

Your Fellow Classmates

Your fellow classmates are your best and most available resource for making sure you get the most out of this course. I encourage you to exchange information and contact one another if logistical questions arise, if you have to miss a class and want to know what happened in your absence, or if you want to discuss readings or course topics outside of class. We will be creating an intellectual community together over the course of the semester, and you can contribute to this project by building relationships with one another just as you seek to build a relationship with your professor.

Your Dean.

In case of serious illness, family emergency, or any other situation that requires you to miss class and fall behind on coursework, please contact your dean as soon as possible.

Your Professor.

In addition to scheduled meetings, you are welcome to meet with me during office hours or at an alternative time if necessary. The best way to contact me outside of class is via email.

Zoom.

If it becomes necessary to pivot to online, we will be using Zoom for our synchronous class discussion. Please review the [Zoom Norms](#) for this course.

SCHEDULE

<u>DATE</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>To be prepared before class:</u>
1/18	Governing the Self and Others	Read syllabus and bring any questions to class We will discuss "governance" via a selection from Plato's <i>Republic</i> and the entry for "govern" in the Oxford English Dictionary. (I'll put these on Moodle before class.)
1/20	Mutual Aid	Dean Spade, <i>Mutual Aid</i> , Part I
1/25		Spade, <i>Mutual Aid</i> , Part II
1/27	Essay 1: What does mutual aid look like in practice?	Choose one of the examples listed in Spade's Teaching Guide (on Moodle), pp. 10 – 11 and write an essay that examines the principles of mutual aid illustrated (or not illustrated) by one example. Bring two hardcopies of your essay to class.
2/1	Cure	Eli Clare, <i>Brilliant Imperfection</i> , pp. 1 – 48 Note Clare's discussion of potential triggers on pp. xix – xxi.
2/3		Clare, <i>Brilliant Imperfection</i> , pp. 53 – 99
2/8		Clare, <i>Brilliant Imperfection</i> , pp. 103 – 147
2/10		Clare, <i>Brilliant Imperfection</i> , pp. 151 – 189
2/15	Essay 2: What does it mean to be human?	Clare in <i>Brilliant Imperfection</i> writes: "I feel great turmoil about being human" (p. 31). In light of this and our conversations about Spade and Clare, what does it mean to be human and why? Experiment with a form here, imitating one of Clare's many forms.

<u>DATE</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>To be prepared before class:</u>
		Bring two hardcopies of your essay to class
2/17	Making Kin	Donna Haraway, <i>Staying with the Trouble</i> , pp. 1 – 30 *Be sure to look at Haraway's endnotes while reading this book.
2/22		Haraway, <i>Staying with the Trouble</i> , pp. 31 – 57
2/24		Haraway, <i>Staying with the Trouble</i> , pp. 58 – 98
3/1		Haraway, <i>Staying with the Trouble</i> , pp. 99 - 168
3/3	Essay 3: TBD	Bring two hardcopies of your essay to class
3/15	Braiding Sweetgrass	Robin Wall Kimmerer, <i>Braiding Sweetgrass</i> , pp. 1 - 59
3/17		Kimmerer, <i>Braiding Sweetgrass</i> , pp. 61 - 117
3/22		Kimmerer, <i>Braiding Sweetgrass</i> , pp. 119 – 201
3/24		Kimmerer, <i>Braiding Sweetgrass</i> , pp. 203 – 300
3/29		Kimmerer, <i>Braiding Sweetgrass</i> , pp. 301 - 386
3/31		Catch up with Kimmerer
4/5	Essay 4: TBD	Bring two hardcopies of your essay to class
4/7	Undrowned	Alexis Pauline Gumbs, <i>Undrowned</i> , pp. 1 – 60
4/12		Alexis Pauline Gumbs, <i>Undrowned</i> , pp. 61 – 126
4/14		Alexis Pauline Gumbs, <i>Undrowned</i> , pp. 127 – 174

<u>DATE</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>To be prepared before class:</u>
4/19	Conferences with Joel	Conferences will be scheduled during class time. Use time to reflect on your final portfolio.
4/21	Essay 5: TBD	Bring two hardcopies of your essay
4/26	Sharing reflections	Presenters post "provisional reflection" on Moodle prior to class meeting; others read these prior to class
4/28	Sharing reflections	Presenters post "provisional reflection" on Moodle prior to class meeting; others read these prior to class
Final portfolio and reflection due at end of finals period		