

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY / SPRING 2021
EDU 310/610: AMERICAN SCHOOL (DISCUSSION SECTION)
WEDNESDAYS 2:15 – 3:35 PM / ZOOM (link on Blackboard)

Teaching Assistant

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Office Hours: By Appointment

"...[I]n the academy...we have elevated the concept of understanding without also insistently holding up humility as its counterpart...This is the paradox of learning: the more we learn, the less we know." — Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) (2016), "A Better World Becoming."

Description

In these discussions, the group will develop common understandings of the course materials and readings, critically examine and ask questions of the content, and make critical connections between materials and discussion points. Education as a practice of freedom (bell hooks [1995] *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*) requires critical engagement with systems and institutions that shape the "American School" while also recognizing and contending with how our own identities interact with these institutions and shape our knowledge and pedagogy.

It is the aim of these discussions to think about how larger systems of white supremacy and anti-Blackness, colonialism and Indigenous erasure, imperialism, capitalism, sexism, ableism, and cis-heteronormativity influence and shape schools, schooling, curriculum, and pedagogical models. The purpose then of these discussions will be to grapple with material in a way that allows us to ask more questions of it rather than to always seek to find answers. Some ways we can think about the material include operating in the "third space" outside of the usual binary discourse/debate on education. Students will be asked to think (among other things):

- What questions are *not* being asked?
- Who is dialoguing and who is not/left out?
- Who is making the decision?
- Who is not?
- What investments or what stakes do knowledge-holders have in particular knowledge claims?

"There will always be things we do not and probably never will entirely understand about one another...but these moments of...uncertainty...can be the moments when the most beautiful mysteries of human and other-than-human experience can be recognized and honored for themselves, not for what they reflect of ourselves." (Justice, 23).

“To engage in dialogue is one of the simplest ways we can begin as teachers, scholars and critical thinkers to cross boundaries, the barriers that may or may not be erected by race, gender, class, professional standing, and a host of other differences.” bell hooks (1994) in Teaching to Transgress.

Classroom Climate

This course is designed to tackle critical issues embedded within the American educational system. Some topics may be challenging to discuss, especially as we dialogue across difference, positionality/social location, contend with institutions/systems that shape how power is wielded and granted, and grapple with current events. Some of us may experience discomfort as we encounter privileges or advantages we did not ask for under these systems. This is not to be conflated with the *safety* and other concerns that those most marginalized under these systems experience, so we will use dialogue to navigate and create as safe a learning environment as possible. As a group, we will collaboratively foster and hold each other accountable to guidelines for class discussions to ensure everyone’s safety in the classroom and to help us move discussion forward to critically examine course content.

I ask that you all engage in self-reflectivity (a component of understanding one’s social location/positionality) as well as actively listen, think through, acknowledge, and respond to other perspectives different from your own in a respectful and appropriate manner. We will engage in equitable dialogic practices in the classroom recognizing that there is a difference between equity (justice-oriented) and equality. This can sometimes look like centering the experiences of those most marginalized because dominant/hegemonic viewpoints are already part of the canon; they have been given power granted by institutions/systems and have taken up a lot of space in dominant/mainstream learning environments and dialogic spaces.

To learn is to be challenged is often associated with the discomfort of having to *change*. Discomfort often indicates growth and coming to new knowledges this this discussion *encourages* students to *lean into the discomfort* as part of the learning process. Safety, on the other hand, is different and taken very seriously. Anti-Black and other racist communication, misogynist, transphobic, homophobic, ableist, other hate speech and other forms of discrimination/prejudice will not be allowed.

Technology and (Virtual) Class Etiquette

This discussion section will be held on Zoom (see link on Blackboard). To help increase the level of engagement, you are encouraged to turn on your camera during class time and in breakout sessions. To reduce noise and distraction, please keep your microphone muted during class when not speaking. If you have *any* difficulty connecting, are concerned with privacy issues, are struggling with course meetings as a result of the time zone from which you dial in, etc., do *not* hesitate to contact me. This is not a normal semester and this is not the new normal. We are

leaning together and any oversight to access I will do my utmost to help correct so you can safely and fully participate in class and achieve learning outcomes. Please see *Classroom Netiquette* on the lecture section syllabus for more information.

You may use additional technology in the classroom beyond Zoom for academic purposes only. If an emergency arises and you need to step away, please private message me through the chat feature and email me as soon as possible afterward to let me know.

Communication

Email communication should only be through the syr.edu email system. I will do my best to respond to you within 24 *business* hours. I try not to and encourage others not to email on weekends. Please be advised that if you email me at or after 5pm on a Friday, I will likely not respond to you until the following week.

I will occasionally email you with important notices and will do my best to provide a week's notice for any non-emergency announcements (i.e. syllabus changes, etc.) and will provide as much notice as possible for any class discussion cancellations due to emergencies, etc.

Attendance

Please refer to the lecture section syllabus for full details on the attendance policy. Low attendance may affect your ability to participate in discussion, which will negatively impact your grade. Students are encouraged to email with as much notice as possible regarding any attendance concerns or needs. See *Participation, Absences Due to Medical or Personal Reasons, and Faith-Based Observance Policy* on the lecture section syllabus for more information.

Additional Policies

Please refer to *Description & Goals, Grading, Major Assignments, General Policies, and the SU Academic Integrity Policy* the lecture section syllabus for remaining policies.

Grading and Assignments (40% overall Course Grade)

- **Participation/Attendance for Lectures and Discussion Section: 10%**

It is expected students come to class having reviewed all course materials and prepared to critically dialogue. Dialogue may take different forms depending on each students' needs be that verbal, written, or other forms of communication. Participation must, however, be demonstrated in a way that I am able to observe it. I will provide as many accommodations as possible for different ways to participate, outside of university accommodations, and also encourage students to communicate with me individually if they need additional accommodations we can develop collaboratively.

- **Critical Responses & Special Projects: 10% each (30% total)**
****DUE on Blackboard 12:00PM EST Tues before the discussion section for which you signed up. (Ex: If you sign up to work on your project for course content due Wed. 3/3/21, your project is due Tues. 3/2/21 at 12:00 PM EST on Blackboard).**

 - You will sign up to submit a small project related to a week's worth of content in the syllabus a total of **THREE (3)** times in the semester:
 - **ONE (1) of the projects must be Critical Reflection** per the following criteria:
 - Be approximately **200-250 words (about a half a page double-spaced)**;
 - Highlight the main points of the readings,
 - Not summarize, but ask *questions* of the main points, asks how the points might change in different contexts, critiques/analyzes arguments, etc.
 - **For the other two (2) remaining projects due, you may submit a Critical Reflection (as above) OR a creative project** (i.e. video, song/poem, art, creative writing, etc.)
 - Any creative project **MUST** be developed with me either on a call/video meeting or via email. You will be responsible for reaching out to me to discuss this no later than 12:00pm EST the Monday before the project is due.
 - Collaborative work is valued for these other 2 projects! If you submit a collaborative project, you will each be given an extra +5% on your grade.
 - On the weeks you sign up to submit your special project, you will co-host Zoom.
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WEEKLY SCHEDULE (Redacted)