

# IDH3034: Aesthetics, Values, and Authority

## Urban Inequality and HBO's *The Wire*

**Instructor:** Matt Acevedo

**E-mail:** [mmaceve@fiu.edu](mailto:mmaceve@fiu.edu)

**Text:** (305) 707-3083

**Office Hours:** By appointment

### Course Description

This two-semester course explores themes of urban inequality, issues of race and class, and topics related to social justice and the power of institutions, using the HBO program *The Wire* as a literary text. Mirroring the structure of the show, this course will examine the role of the war on drugs, labor, politics, education, and the media in contemporary urban life.

### About This Document

This course syllabus outlines certain mutual expectations (you and me) for engagement in this course, including the deliverables you should provide and corresponding timelines. However, this document should *not* be considered a contract. It is subject to revision at any time in any way that I deem is best for the educational experience of this course, although I will not make any changes that increase the amount of work expected from students or alter the due dates in such a way that will prove a burden on anybody. (Any changes will be in your favor.)

### Some Notes About This Course

We'll be watching a lot of TV in this course -- all five seasons of the critically acclaimed HBO drama *The Wire* over the two semesters. However, don't let that fool you into thinking that this will be an easy class. In addition to watching the show, there will be a *lot* of reading and engagement with other materials. Much of this material is at an advanced level -- on par with graduate-level work. **Expect to read, on average, up to 50 pages of academic writing each week.** Sometimes more.

That said, most of what you'll be expected to produce is reflective in nature. In other words, there aren't necessarily any right or wrong answers. However, I do expect that you think and write critically, substantiating your arguments as indicated for each assignment.

In short, as long as you engage with the materials and contribute at a level that is clearly outlined, you should earn a grade you are happy with. But expect to put a great deal of thought and effort into your engagement and contributions. More information about this can be found in the "Grading" section below.

Lastly, consider our learning environment to be a place where we are all free to express our thoughts and opinions without fear of academic recourse (barring any threatening or hate-like speech). I tolerate, welcome, and expect dissenting opinions and debates that are conducted in civil ways.

## And Now Some Disclaimers About *The Wire*

As you've figured out by now, we're going to be watching a show from HBO in this class. Please be advised that this show contains graphic imagery related to violence, drug use, and sexuality. Watching this show will expose you to "adult" language and themes. If this poses a problem for you, it is best that you find another course to take before the add/drop period ends. No accommodations will be given based on any objections to any themes in this course.

## Course Objectives

Upon completion of first semester, students will be able to:

- Use narrative fiction to analyze real world issues.
- Evaluate policies and practices regarding urban policing, gang activity, and the War on Drugs.
- Explain the relationship between neoliberalism, urban and global poverty, economic inequality, and the decline of organized labor.

### Global Learning Outcomes:

**Global Awareness-** Students will demonstrate knowledge of the interrelated global dynamics (social-cultural, political, economic, etc.) that shape aesthetics, values, and authority in diverse cultural contexts.

**Global Perspective-** Students will be able to analyze the multiple global forces that shape their understanding of aesthetics, values, and authority — economic, political, sociological, technological, cultural, etc.

**Global Engagement-** Students will be able to develop solutions to local, global, international, and/or intercultural problems and be able to articulate the causes and contributions to these problems through the paradigm of aesthetics, values and authority.

More information about this course's learning objectives can be found in the Learning Objective Map in the course.

### Global Learning Co-curricular Activity

Students will perform at least ten hours of Community Service per semester either through the Honors College service partnerships (Sweetwater, Overtown Youth Center, etc.) or through other community service projects and/or events. If you want to apply this service to your graduation portfolio, be sure to document your hours.

## Contacting the Instructor

As the instructor of this course, I believe that I have both a professional and a moral obligation to be reasonably available to you to discuss any matters related to the subjects of this course, your performance in this course, or anything else that a student and a faculty member would reasonably discuss. This obligation is amplified by the fact that this course is carried out at a spatiotemporal distance (we generally won't meet at the same place or same time).

The best way of reaching me is via email ([mmaceve@fiu.edu](mailto:mmaceve@fiu.edu)). I'll respond to you within 24 hours in most cases, but usually quicker. You can also text me at (305) 707-3083 for immediate concerns.

Another aspect of the aforementioned professional and moral obligation is to provide you with timely feedback so that there is never a question about how you're doing in the course. I will grade all weekly assignments with a week following their respective due dates. Culminating assignments (Final Projects) might take a little longer, but not much.

## Required Materials

There is no textbook in this class. You will need access to the first three seasons of *The Wire* (we will cover the last two seasons next semester). There are several ways of going about this.

I recommend using [Amazon Prime Student](#) to watch *The Wire* in a streaming, on-demand format. Amazon offers a six month free trial for new users. After the free trial, Amazon, offers students 50% off the regular prices of \$99 per year or \$10.99 per month. So, in the worst case scenario, you've already used up your Prime Student trial; you'd be looking at less than \$30 for the fall term.

If you are an HBO subscriber, you can watch *The Wire* on-demand using HBO GO with your existing account.

If you're not an HBO subscriber, you can use HBO NOW for \$14.99 per month.

You can also go old school and purchase Blu-Ray or DVD collections, but this is generally more expensive than the streaming options.

All reading materials will be provided in the learning environment in PDF format.

## Grading

First, a super important note about grading. This is a class dealing with complex societal issues and themes. Accordingly, there are no "right" or "wrong" answers. Additionally, a big part of this class involves advanced readings, some of which you (or I) may not fully understand. That's okay. You will not be graded on correctness, accuracy, degree to which you understand things, or the extent to which I agree or disagree with your viewpoints.

What I do expect is that you engage with all of the course materials to the best of your abilities, put in reasonable effort to complete all assignments, and submit them on time. The rubrics that I

provide outline these expectations of reasonable effort. In the event that you have fundamentally and profoundly missed the point of an assignment, I will provide feedback and ask you to resubmit it.

I don't believe in grading on bell curves. This isn't a competition. We're here to learn from each other. The material we're dealing with will be very challenging and will require a substantial amount of effort to engage with, but this is not a class where you should worry about your grade.

Below is a grading table that outlines the point value of the course requirements and a table that maps the number of points earned to the final letter grades.

<b><u>Assignment</u></b>	<b><u>Points</u></b>
Reflections (14 at 5 points each)	70
Final Project	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

94-100	A
90-93	A-
85-89	B+
81-84	B
77-80	B-
73-76	C+
70-72	C
Below 70	F

## Assignments

There are two types of assignments in this class: **Reflections** and a **Final Project**. All assignments are due on Sunday at 11:59pm of each corresponding week listed in the Course Outline below. Late work is not accepted.

## Reflections

Reflections are responses to writing prompts that will typically require you to relate the week's reading to what you've watched in *The Wire*. Think of them as short papers or essays. These are generally subjective in nature and I expect you interject your own opinions and thoughts into your responses. These are graded based on effortful contributions, not on accuracy or correctness. It's okay to not understand everything, and it's okay to say so.

Reflections are posted to the [Discussions](#) area, and you'll have to submit your post before seeing the posts of others. You are encouraged, but not required, to respond to other students' posts when you feel it's appropriate. The idea here is to create an engaging and supportive learning environment, not to post "Wow, I agree with you that [copy and paste]. Great point." It's okay to disagree, to debate, and to defend.

There are 14 reflections, each worth 5 points.

## Final Project

The Final Project is your opportunity to synthesize different topics and aspects of the class in a culminating effort. You have two options for your project, described below.

**Both Final Project options may be completed individually or collaboratively in groups of 2 or 3.** If you choose to do so, it's up to you to determine your groups. Please let me know (via email) who is in your group.

The Final Project is worth 30 points. You'll submit it as an assignment by the last week of class. If completing the project as a group, one person can turn it in; make sure everyone's name is on it.

Further details of the project options, including expectations and rubrics, can be found on the Final Project Information page in the course.

### Option #1: Police Ride-Along Audio Documentary

First, you will make arrangements with any local police department (Metro Dade, Miami PD, Miami Springs PD, Homestead PD, Miami Beach PD, etc.) to go on a police ride-along, in which you spent time shadowing police officers on a shift. You will then produce a 3-7 minute audio documentary in which you document the experience and relate your observations to topics discussed in class.

Arranging a police ride-along takes time, and I do not assist in making these arrangements. You generally have to undergo a background check to be cleared for this. It's in your best interest, should you select this option, to get started as early as possible.

### Option #2: Scholarly Book Review

For students who do not feel comfortable spending time in the field with police, may not be able to pass a background check, or otherwise prefer a more academic option, the second option is to write a review of a scholarly book. You will select a book related to one of the topics in this course (economic inequality, the War on Drugs, racism, organized labor, neoliberalism, etc.) and write an 8-12 page review in which you summarize the main points of the book, relate it to the first three seasons of *The Wire*, and provide an evaluation of the book.

The book itself must not be about *The Wire*. **Any books not on the recommended list below must be approved by me. Email me with your proposed book selection if it's not on the list.**

These books are long, so get started early.

**Recommended books:**

- *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*, Desmond
- *No Way Out: Precarious Living in the Shadow of Poverty and Drug Dealing*, Duck
- *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Harvey
- *Cracks in the Pavement: Social Change and Resilience in Poor Neighborhoods*, Sánchez-Jankowski
- *Social Justice and the City*, Harvey
- *Homeless: Poverty and Place in Urban America*, Howard
- *Profits Over People*, Chomsky

**Course Outline**

Assigned episodes of *The Wire* are listed in "Episode x.y" format, where x is the season and y is the numerical episode in that season. For example, "Episode 2.3" is the third episode of Season 2.

A complete list of assignments and corresponding due dates is at the bottom of the syllabus in the Course Summary section.

<u>Dates</u>	<u>Topics, Materials, and Assignments</u>
<p><b>Week 1: August 21st to August 27th</b></p>	<p><b>Getting Started</b></p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Wire</i> trailer</li> </ul> <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read about the Final Project</li> <li>• Complete Reflection #1</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 2: August 28th to September 3rd</b></p>	<p><b>"...when it's not your turn." (Episodes 1.1-1.2)</b></p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 1.1-1.2</li> <li>• Penfold-Mounce, R., Beer, D., &amp; Burrows, R. (2011). The wire as social science-fiction?. <i>Sociology</i>, 45(1), 152-167.</li> </ul>

	<p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete Reflection #2</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 3: September 4th – September 10th</b></p>	<p><b>"The king stay the king." (Episodes 1.3-1.5)</b></p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 1.3-1.5</li> <li>• Fine, M., Freudenberg, N., Payne, Y., Perkins, T., Smith, K., &amp; Wanzer, K. (2003). "Anything can happen with police around": Urban youth evaluate strategies of surveillance in public places. <i>Journal of Social Issues</i>, 59(1), 141-158.</li> </ul> <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete Reflection #3</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 4: September 11th to September 17th</b></p>	<p><b>"A man must have a code." (Episodes 1.6-1.8)</b></p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 1.6-1.8</li> <li>• Fagan, J. (1989). The social organization of drug use and drug dealing among urban gangs. <i>Criminology</i>, 27(4), 633-670.</li> </ul> <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete Reflection #4</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 5: September 18th to September 24th</b></p>	<p><b>"Dope on the damn table." (Episodes 1.9-1.11)</b></p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 1.9-1.11</li> <li>• Smith, B. W., &amp; Holmes, M. D. (2003). Community accountability, minority threat, and police brutality: An examination of civil rights criminal complaints. <i>Criminology</i>, 41(4), 1035-1064.</li> </ul> <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete Reflection #5</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 6: September</b></p>	<p><b>"All in the game..." (Episodes 1.12-1.13)</b></p>

<p><b>25th to October 1st</b></p>	<p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 1.12-1.13</li> <li>• Nunn, K. B. (2002). Race, crime and the pool of surplus criminality: or why the war on drugs was a war on blacks. <i>J. Gender Race &amp; Just.</i>, 6, 381.</li> </ul> <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete Reflection #6</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 7: October 2nd to October 8th</b></p>	<p><b>"They can chew you up, but they gotta spit you out." (Episodes 2.1-2.3)</b></p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 2.1-2.3</li> <li>• Monbiot, G. (2016). Neoliberalism—the ideology at the root of all our problems. <i>The Guardian</i>, 15.</li> <li>• Podcast: <i>A Beginner's Guide to Neoliberalism</i>. New Economics Foundation.</li> </ul> <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete Reflection #7</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 8: October 9th to October 15th</b></p>	<p><b>"If I hear music, I'm gonna dance." (Episodes 2.4-2.6)</b></p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 2.4-2.6</li> <li>• Clawson, D., &amp; Clawson, M. A. (1999). What has happened to the US labor movement? Union decline and renewal. <i>Annual review of sociology</i>, 25(1), 95-119.</li> </ul> <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete Reflection #8</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 9: October 16th to October 22nd</b></p>	<p><b>"The world is a smaller place now." (Episodes 2.7-2.9)</b></p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 2.7-2.9</li> <li>• Marsh, J. (2011). "The Paths of Inequality Lead But to the Grave," In: <i>Class dismissed: Why we cannot teach or learn our way out of inequality</i>. NYU Press.</li> </ul>

	<p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete Reflection #9</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 10: October 23rd to October 29th</b></p>	<p><b>"Business. Always business." (Episodes 2.10-2.12)</b></p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 2.10-2.12</li> <li>• Kiely, R. (2007). Poverty reduction through liberalisation? Neoliberalism and the myth of global convergence. <i>Review of International Studies</i>, 33(03), 415-434.</li> </ul> <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete Reflection #10</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 11: October 30th to November 5th</b></p>	<p><b>"The Gods will not save you." (Episodes 3.1-3.3)</b></p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 3.1-3.3</li> <li>• Bronstein, N. (2014). Police management and quotas: Governance in the CompStat Era. <i>Colum. JL &amp; Soc. Probs.</i>, 48, 543.</li> </ul> <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete Reflection #11</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 12: November 6th to November 12th</b></p>	<p><b>"Just a gangster, I suppose." (Episodes 3.4-3.6)</b></p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 3.4-3.6</li> <li>• Leuw, E. (1991). Drugs and drug policy in the Netherlands. <i>Crime and Justice</i>, 14, 229-276.</li> </ul> <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete Reflection #12</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 13: November 13th to</b></p>	<p><b>"...while you're waiting for moments that never come." (Episodes 3.7-3.9)</b></p>

<b>November 19th</b>	<p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 3.7-3.9</li> <li>• Bobo, L., &amp; Gilliam, F. D. (1990). Race, sociopolitical participation, and black empowerment. <i>American Political Science Review</i>, 84(02), 377-393.</li> <li>• Podcast: "Harold." This American Life.</li> </ul> <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete Reflection #13</li> </ul>
<b>Week 14: November 20th to November 26th</b>	<p><b>Thanksgiving Holiday</b></p> <p>No assignments. Start putting the finishing touches on the Final Project.</p>
<b>Week 15: November 27th to December 3rd</b>	<p><b>"We ain't gotta dream no more, man." (Episodes 3.10-3.12)</b></p> <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete Reflection #14</li> </ul>
<b>Week 16: December 4th to December 9th</b>	<p><b>Wrapping Up</b></p> <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submit the Final Project to the Assignments area</li> </ul>

## Policies

### FIU Academic Misconduct Statement

Florida International University is a community dedicated to generating and imparting knowledge through excellence in teaching and research, the rigorous and respectful exchange of ideas, and community service. All students should respect the right of others to have an equitable opportunity to learn and honestly to demonstrate the quality of their learning. Therefore, all students are expected to adhere to a standard of academic conduct that demonstrates respect for themselves, their fellow students, and the educational mission of the University. All students are deemed by the University to understand that if they are found responsible for academic misconduct, they will be

subject to the Academic Misconduct procedures and sanctions, as outlined in the Honors College Student Handbook.

Academic misconduct includes:

**Cheating** – The unauthorized use of books, notes, aids, electronic sources, or assistance from another person with respect to examinations, course assignments, field service reports, class recitations or other work; or the unauthorized possession of examination papers or course materials, whether originally authorized or not. Cheating violates both University and College codes.

**Plagiarism** – The use and appropriation of another work without any indication of the source, and the re-presentation of such work as the student's own. Any student who fails to give credit for

ideas, expressions or materials taken from another source, including Internet sources, commits plagiarism. Plagiarism violates both University and College codes.

**Unacceptable behavior** – Students who show repeated or egregious disrespect for classmates or instructors, are disruptive, or consistently violate course rules are subject to the sanctions of the Honors College.

Registration in this course implies an acceptance of and compliance with the Honors College policies for students and the FIU Code of Academic Integrity. Please refer to the following documents for additional information:

FIU Code of Academic Integrity – <http://www.fiu.edu/~dwyere/academicintegrity.html>

FIU Honors College Student Handbook – <http://honors.fiu.edu/handbook0910.html>

FIU Honors College Plagiarism Policy – [http://honors.fiu.edu/current\\_policy\\_plagiarism.html](http://honors.fiu.edu/current_policy_plagiarism.html)

### **Religious Observances**

Every effort will be made, where feasible and practical, to accommodate students whose religious practices coincide with class requirements or scheduling. Please make sure to notify your instructor at the beginning of the semester of which dates you will be absent or any anticipated problems with completing course work.

### **Physical, Mental and Sensory Challenges**

Every effort will be made, where feasible and practical, to accommodate students who are so challenged. Should you require accommodations, contact the Disability Resource Center, if you have not done so already.

## **HONORS COLLEGE REQUIREMENTS**

### **Citizenship Requirements**

All members of the Honors College are expected to be active citizens of the College, the university, and the community at large. To be a committed Honors College student is to take advantage of enhanced learning opportunities and to assume a leadership role in the world. All College members are expected to participate in the community-building activities listed below:

1. Attend one Honors Excellence Lecture per academic year and one Honors Colloquium per semester (fall and spring). (Attendance will be taken).
2. Participate in the Honors College Convocation each fall semester. (Attendance will be taken).
3. Attend at least three Honors Hour sessions per semester or enrichment events specified by the Honors College as satisfying this requirement. (Attendance will be taken).
4. Perform at least ten hours of Community Service per semester either through the Honors College service partnerships (Sweetwater, Overtown Youth Center, etc.) or through other community service projects and/or events. If you want to apply this service to your graduation portfolio, be sure to document your hours.
5. For more information on Honors citizenship requirements, see the Honors College Student Handbook or visit [http://honors.fiu.edu/current\\_policy\\_citizenship.htm](http://honors.fiu.edu/current_policy_citizenship.htm).

### **Student Portfolios**

The Honors College will be using a portfolio method to assess student learning outcomes. The portfolio method allows for maximum flexibility in gauging student learning. Students decide (with instructor consultation) what “artifacts” or assignments to include for consideration in their portfolios to demonstrate successful achievement of each of the student learning outcomes over the 4-year Honors experience. Portfolios provide a rich context for students to show what they have learned and to explain their learning process. Because the Honors curriculum is meant to be thought-provoking and reflective, student self-assessment through portfolios will facilitate learning and provide in-depth assessment. Each course will include at least one assignment that could potentially fit portfolio requirements. For more information on the student learning outcomes and constructing a portfolio for your senior year, see <http://honors.fiu.edu/portfolios>. Late work is not accepted, except in the case of documented emergencies, such as your or a family member’s being admitted to the hospital.