

IDH3035: Aesthetics, Values, and Authority
Urban Inequality and HBO's *The Wire*

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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.

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 education practices and systems in urban environments
- Identify causes of media bias using the Propaganda Model

Contacting the Instructor

As the instructor of this course, I believe that I have both a professional and a moral obligation to be 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). I'll respond to you within 24 hours in most cases, but usually quicker. You can also text me at (786) 449-0880 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 reflection assignments with a week following their respective due dates. Projects might take a little longer, but not much.

Required Materials

There is no textbook in this class. You will need access to the fourth and fifth seasons of *The Wire*. 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 Canvas 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.

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Points</u>
Reflections (6 at 10 points each)	60
Projects (2 and 20 points each)	40
Total	100

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

In this class, the assignments include **Reflections** and **two Projects**. All assignments are due on Sunday at 11:59pm of each corresponding module listed in the Course Outline below.

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 6 reflections, each worth 10 points. [View the grading rubric for the reflections.](#)

Projects

Unlike last semester, where we had one final project, this semester we will have two projects. **Both Projects 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.

You don't have to have the same group for each project. You can choose to do one project individually and the other with a group.

Each project is worth 20 points. You'll submit it as an assignment per the due dates in the outline below. 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 projects, including expectations and rubrics, can be found in the course modules in Canvas.

Project #1: Community Asset Map

A Community Asset Map is an analysis of the assets in a given community or neighborhood, including its physical, economic, human, historical, and institutional assets, and an exploration of how the unique qualities of a community can be highlighted and encouraged to promote the community's success. For this project, you will select an urban community (any neighborhood in Miami-Dade County is appropriate) and produce a Community Asset Map in the form of a presentation or a video.

Project #2: Media Bias Analysis

In the second half of this semester, we will engage with an idea developed by Chomsky and Hermann called the Propaganda Model, which is a framework for identifying and analyzing sources and causes of media bias. For this project, you will select a current newsworthy event and apply the Propaganda Model to identify and evaluate how it is selected and portrayed by the media.

To be clear: unlike last semester, this time you're doing both projects - each at different points in the semester.

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.

Unlike in the fall, the spring class is divided into multi-week modules.

<u>Dates</u>	<u>Topics, Materials, and Assignments</u>
<p>Weeks 1-3: January 8 - August 27</p>	<p>"Lambs to the slaughter here." (Episodes 4.1-4.5)</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 4.1-4.5 • Carter, P. L. (2003). " Black" cultural capital, status positioning, and schooling conflicts for low-income African American youth. <i>Social problems</i>, 50(1), 136-155. <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin Project #1: Community Asset Map • Complete Reflection #1
<p>Weeks 4-5: January 22 - February 11</p>	<p>"We got our thing, but it's just part of the big thing." (Episodes 4.6-4.9)</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 4.6-4.9 • Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. <i>Journal of personality and social psychology</i>, 69(5), 797. <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue Project #1: Community Asset Map • Complete Reflection #2

<p>Weeks 6-7: February 12 - February 25</p>	<p>"World goin' one way, people another." (Episodes 4.10-4.13)</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 4.10-4.13 • Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (1976). Education, inequality, and the meritocracy. <i>Schooling in the Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life</i>, 102-124. <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue Project #1: Community Asset Map • Complete Reflection #3
<p>Week 8: February 26 - March 4</p>	<p>Community Asset Mapping</p> <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete and submit Project #1: Community Asset Map
<p>Weeks 9-11: March 5 - March 25</p> <p>(Includes Spring Break)</p>	<p>"The bigger the lie, the more they believe." (Episodes 5.1-5.4)</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 5.1-5.4 • Podcast: This American Life, Episode 460, "Retraction" <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete Reflection #4
<p>Weeks 12-13: March 26 - April 8</p>	<p>"A lie ain't a side of a story. It's just a lie." (Episodes 5.5-5.8)</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 5.5-5.8 • Excerpt: <i>The Propaganda Model</i> <p>Assignments:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin Project #2: Media Bias Analysis • Complete Reflection #5
Weeks 14-15: April 9 - April 22	<p>"...the life of kings." (Episodes 5.9-5.10)</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 5.9-5.10 <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue Project #2: Media Bias Analysis • Complete Reflection #6
Week 16: April 23 - April 28	<p>Wrapping Up</p> <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete and submit Project #2: Media Bias Analysis

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 an- other per-son 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

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 <https://honors.fiu.edu/honors-policies/>.

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 will be accepted in the case of documented emergencies, such as your or a family member’s being admitted to the hospital or at my discretion. Please contact me if you anticipate needing an extension on any work.