

IDH3034: Aesthetics, Values, and Authority

Urban Inequality and HBO's *The Wire*

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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.

The first semester covers the first three seasons of the show and related topics.

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, you should 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.

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). I'll try respond to you within 24 hours in most cases.

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 generally 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.

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 and don't want to use Amazon, you can use HBO NOW.

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

This is a class dealing with complex societal issues and themes. Accordingly, there are many times where 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 try to submit them on time. The rubrics that I provide outline these expectations of reasonable effort.

Important: Learning is a process, not a product. Few things in life are ever perfect the first time around. *If for whatever reason, you get a grade on assignments you aren't happy with, you can revise and resubmit. E-mail me if you want to do this.* (Because of the timing of the Final Project, this means you can/should submit drafts to me before the due date, but I'm afraid I can't accommodate revisions after final grades are posted).

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 (13 at 3 points each)	39
Discussion Engagement	30
Final Project	30
1 point for free just for being you	1
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

There are three types of assignments in this class: **Reflections**, **Discussion**, and a **Final Project**. All assignments are due on Sunday at 11:59pm of each corresponding week 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.

There are 13 reflections, each worth 2.5 points.

Discussion Engagement

For every set of episodes, there is a general, open-ended discussion board prompt. You'll typically be asked to share any thoughts about the episodes, particularly about the reading. You are also expected to frequently respond to your colleagues in meaningful ways. Please feel free to discuss, debate, question, probe, bring new information or perspectives, and share your own experiences. I will also chime in on occasion, but I think your voices are more important than mine for this.

I do not use rubrics for these discussions. There is no set number of times you should post or reply. Maybe some weeks it's a lot if the topic resonates with you; maybe other weeks it's not at all. I do ask and expect you to be a contributing member of meaningful discussion during the course of the semester.

For your final Discussion Engagement grade, I will ask you to honestly self-evaluate your contributions to the discussion boards on a 30 point scale. I will use this grade unless I have a compelling and justifiable reason to override it.

This should go without saying, but for the record: this should be a place where you are free to share your candid thoughts and feelings. You can have controversial opinions. You can disagree with one another. However, please be mindful of doing so in respectful and civil ways.

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.

Some possible books (feel free to look for other reasonable options):

- *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>
Week 1: August 20 to August 26th	Getting Started Materials: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>The Wire</i> trailer Assignments: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read about the Final Project

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 1 Discussion
<p>Week 2: August 27 to September 3</p>	<p>"...when it's not your turn." (Episodes 1.1-1.2)</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 1.1-1.2 • Penfold-Mounce, R., Beer, D., & Burrows, R. (2011). The wire as social science-fiction?. <i>Sociology</i>, 45(1), 152-167. <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 2 Discussion • Reflection #1
<p>Week 3: September 3 – September 9</p>	<p>"The king stay the king." (Episodes 1.3-1.5)</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 1.3-1.5 • Fine, M., Freudenberg, N., Payne, Y., Perkins, T., Smith, K., & 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. <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 3 Discussion • Reflection #2
<p>Week 4: September 10 to September 16</p>	<p>"A man must have a code." (Episodes 1.6-1.8)</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 1.6-1.8 • Fagan, J. (1989). The social organization of drug use and drug dealing among urban gangs. <i>Criminology</i>, 27(4), 633-670. <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 4 Discussion • Reflection #3

<p>Week 5: September 17 to September 23</p>	<p>"Dope on the damn table." (Episodes 1.9-1.11)</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 1.9-1.11 • Smith, B. W., & 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. <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 5 Discussion • Reflection #4
<p>Week 6: September 24 to September 30</p>	<p>"All in the game..." (Episodes 1.12-1.13)</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 1.12-1.13 • 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 & Just.</i>, 6, 381. <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 6 Discussion • Reflection #5
<p>Week 7: October 1 to October 7</p>	<p>"They can chew you up, but they gotta spit you out." (Episodes 2.1-2.3)</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 2.1-2.3 • Monbiot, G. (2016). Neoliberalism—the ideology at the root of all our problems. <i>The Guardian</i>, 15. • Podcast: <i>A Beginner's Guide to Neoliberalism</i>. New Economics Foundation. <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 7 Discussion • Reflection #6
<p>Week 8: October 8 to October 14</p>	<p>"If I hear music, I'm gonna dance." (Episodes 2.4-2-6)</p> <p>Materials:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 2.4-2.6 • Clawson, D., & 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. <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 8 Discussion • Reflection #7
<p>Week 9: October 15 to October 21</p>	<p>"The world is a smaller place now." (Episodes 2.7-2.9)</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 2.7-2.9 • 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. <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 9 Discussion • Reflection #8
<p>Week 10: October 22 to October 28</p>	<p>"Business. Always business." (Episodes 2.10-2.12)</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 2.10-2.12 • Kiely, R. (2007). Poverty reduction through liberalisation? Neoliberalism and the myth of global convergence. <i>Review of International Studies</i>, 33(03), 415-434. <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 10 Discussion • Reflection #9
<p>Week 11: October 29 to November 4</p>	<p>"The Gods will not save you." (Episodes 3.1-3.3)</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 3.1-3.3

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bronstein, N. (2014). Police management and quotas: Governance in the CompStat Era. <i>Colum. JL & Soc. Probs.</i>, 48, 543. <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 11 Discussion • Reflection #10
<p>Week 12: November 5 to November 11</p>	<p>"Just a gangster, I suppose." (Episodes 3.4-3.6)</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 3.4-3.6 • Leuw, E. (1991). Drugs and drug policy in the Netherlands. <i>Crime and Justice</i>, 14, 229-276. <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 12 Reflection • Reflection #11
<p>Week 13: November 12 to November 18</p>	<p>"...while you're waiting for moments that never come." (Episodes 3.7-3.9)</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Wire</i>, Episodes 3.7-3.9 • Bobo, L., & Gilliam, F. D. (1990). Race, sociopolitical participation, and black empowerment. <i>American Political Science Review</i>, 84(02), 377-393. • Podcast: "Harold." This American Life. <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 13 Reflection • Reflection #12
<p>Week 14: November 19 to November 25</p>	<p>Thanksgiving Holiday</p> <p>No assignments. Start putting the finishing touches on the Final Project.</p>
<p>Week 15: November 26 December 2</p>	<p>"We ain't gotta dream no more, man." (Episodes 3.10-3.12)</p> <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 15 Reflection

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection #13 • If you want feedback on your Final Project, send me a draft!
Week 16: December 3 to December 8	Wrapping Up Assignments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit the Final Project to the Assignments area

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.

Honors College Academic Misconduct Statement

In the Honors College, the term "honor" refers both to academic accomplishment and character. Students in Honors should therefore adhere to and be held to the highest standards of personal academic accountability. Academic dishonesty in any form, including plagiarism, is antithetical to the very definition of being an Honors student at FIU. Consequently, an Honors College student found responsible for academic misconduct will be dismissed from the College.

Procedures and Penalties

An Honors faculty member may bring charges of academic misconduct against an Honors student if the faculty member suspects plagiarism or other forms of academic misconduct. The faculty member will decide whether to pursue informal resolution, file formal resolution charges, or take no further action, and will follow the procedures outlined in the Honors College website (<http://honors.fiu.edu/honors-policies/>), and the Academic Misconduct Procedures, available at <http://integrity.fiu.edu/misconducts.html>

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://integrity.fiu.edu/index.html>

FIU Honors College Plagiarism Policy – <http://honors.fiu.edu/honors-policies/>.

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 and Activities

Citizenship Requirements

Beginning in Fall 2014, Honors College students are required to accumulate at least 20 citizenship points each academic year (Fall and Spring) by attending Honors College activities. Students attending only one semester (Fall or Spring) are required to accumulate 10 citizenship points. See <http://honors.fiu.edu/current-students/citizenship/>. 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.

For more information on Honors citizenship requirements, see http://honors.fiu.edu/current_policy_citizenship.htm.

Honors Education in the Arts (HEARTS)

The HEARTS program is designed to give Honors College students opportunities to explore and appreciate different artistic and cultural traditions and modes of artistic expression. HEARTS will also serve as a clearinghouse (and curatorial framework) for our students to experience the arts on campus and in the community by providing them with information about cultural activities and access to performances with free or discounted tickets. See <http://honors.fiu.edu/hearts/>

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.

Global Learning Outcomes:

Global Awareness: Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of the interrelatedness of local, global, international, and intercultural issues, trends, and systems.

Course Learning Outcome: 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 Perspectives: Students will be able to develop a multi-perspective analysis of local, global, international, and intercultural problems.

Course Learning Outcome: Students will be able to analyze 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 demonstrate a willingness to engage in local, global, international, and intercultural problem solving.

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 through MyHonors.

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