The Course:

This course is designed as a research seminar. We will be considering a central issue of liberal theory, the tension between individual rights and the community good. We will look at this tension in current debates about individual rights and group rights in the context of multiculturalism and identity politics. Much of our discussion will focus on the philosophical and practical tensions to be found in our conceptions of liberalism and democracy: an appeal within liberalism to “universal human rights” accompanied by a simultaneous appeal to the self determination of communities (whatever their basis for claims of a shared existence) according to the democratic ideal of self-governance. Is the particularity expressed in the demos of popular and democratic sovereignty simply at odds with the universality of liberal moral and political equality? Is democratic sovereignty the “best” practical way to express our hope for universal rights? We shall see….

Readings:

The readings, which may be found on e-reserve, reflect debates on identity, culture, and rights among such authors as Iris Young, Vernon Van Dyke, Will Kymlicka, Seyla Benhabib, Anne Phillips, and Chandran Kukathas. As you shall see, this debate has changed considerably between the last decade of the twentieth century and the “post-9/11–world” of the twenty-first century. As we proceed, I will suggest connections to mid-twentieth–century works on civil rights and nineteenth-century works on empire and imperialism that you may wish to considered in your research.

Requirements:

This research seminar requires one major paper for the term. The topic for this paper should be selected very early in the term, to facilitate your research strategy and our class discussions (which will include time for your own research questions to be addressed).

You will present your 20 page paper orally and in writing. Please note the schedule for turning in topic proposals, drafts, etc.

Twice during the term we have a look in detail at a range of views on a central philosophical problem in liberalism. Our first excursus is on the tension in liberal theory concerning the particular and the universal, focusing on the ideal of ethical universalities (a global standard concerning ethics and human rights) and the actual diversity among civil societies (and diverse perceptions of what is right). Our second excursus concerns the great liberal virtue, toleration. In addition to preparing the common readings for these topics, you will join one of three groups to study several additional readings on a particular aspect of these topics. On both “Exursus Day” each groups will present its readings in class and you will write a 5-7 page analytical paper covering some point in your readings as it relates to our common reading. Your papers are due in class (Moodle Upload) on the class meeting day following each of these Excursus Days.

Grades are based on: two short analytical papers, participation in two group presentations of readings, a research paper, an oral presentation of your research paper, and general class participation (evidence that you’ve read the material assigned for our class meetings and show up to discuss the materials). Participation grades are set initially at a “B” or 8.5 points. Your actual effort in the course will move that score up or down, accordingly. There is no additional final exam; the research paper is due in class during our last meeting. The schedule for turning in topics, bibliographies, drafts, and all papers is very strict. Only a medical or other serious emergency situation will qualify as an event justifying a late assignment. Unexcused late papers will result in a “0” for the assignment and likely a failing grade in the class. Class attendance is also vital to the proper function of a seminar. Two unexcused absences will result in a failing participation grade, lowering your overall grade by at least one letter.

Grades:
Assignments will be counted toward your final grade as follows:
Written research paper
(includes research design, drafting, and editing to improve drafts) 40 %
Oral presentation 10
Excursus paper I 20
Excursus paper II 20
Participation 10
Total 100 %

Assignments:

Part 1 Enduring Tensions in Liberal Theory: The Particular and the Universal, Individual Rights and Community Cohesion, Toleration as a Liberal Virtue
Thurs Jan 5  Introduction

Tues Jan 10  Multiculturalism as a political issue and as a puzzle in liberal theory

Recommended on late–twentieth-century conceptions of identity and recognition rights:

Thurs Jan 12  Liberalism and Multiculturalism

I. Liberal Theory and Multiculturalism

II. Feminist Theory and Multiculturalism

Tues Jan 17  The Liberal Aporia—The Ideas of Chandran Kukathas

Part 2 Culture, Right, and Ethical Universalism

Thurs Jan 19 Dilemmas of Culture

********* Initial Research Proposal (Topic/Title) Due in Class*********

Tues Jan 24 Excursus I: On Ethical Universalism and Particularism:


Three Groups Reporting on:

AND

Plus the following documents:

And


Plus the following documents:


And


Plus the following documents:


*********Analytical Paper from Excursus I Due in Class*********

Part 3 Toleration and Other Liberal Virtues

Tues Jan 31 Excurses II: On Toleration as a Liberal Virtue


Three Groups Reporting on:


Thurs Feb 2 “Group,” “Collective,” and “Community”—The Ideas of Iris Young


********Analytical Paper from Excursus II Due in Class********

Mon Feb 6
MID TERM BREAK

Tues Feb 7
Individual Rights and Collective Rights II—The Ideas of Anne Phillips

********Refined Research Proposal Due in Class******
*(Statement of Question/Title, Paragraph Description, Initial Bibliography, Method/Approach)*

Part 4 Theory Becomes Practice

Thurs Feb 9
The Cosmopolitan Ideal—The Ideas of Seyla Benhabib

Tues Feb 14
The Virtue of Hospitality—The Ideas of Seyla Benhabib Continued


Rec as an Example: Deaf Culture as Languaculture

*****Draft Literature Review Due in Class****

Thurs Feb 16
Conceptualizing and Realizing “The Individual”

Tues Feb 21  
Conceptualizing and Realizing [Political? Cultural?] “Community”  

Thurs Feb 23  
The Problem of “Sovereignty” The Ideas of Seyla Benhabib Continued  

**********Draft of Research Paper Due in Class**********

Tues Feb 28  
The Summarizing the Problem of “THE State”  

Thurs Mar 2  
Institutional Evolution  

Tues Mar 7  
Possibilities  

Tues Mar 9  
Class Presentations  
***************Final Research Paper Due in Class*****************