

LIB 311.01: MEANING

FALL 2015
TUES. 6 - 8:50PM/
CON 214

Course Description

This interdisciplinary and theoretically engaged course is designed to understand, theorize, analyze, and experience meaning—or lack thereof—in our world, including our individual, social, economic, cultural, spiritual, and creative lives. Throughout the semester we will ask and address a cluster of interconnected questions related to our critical interrogation and examination of meaning itself: What is meaning? Or what is the meaning of meaning? Is meaning given and fixed? Or is meaning always created and produced? Can we create meaning out of nothing or beyond history? Whose meaning is it anyway? Is meaning ideologically, politically neutral and innocent? Also, does the production of meaning—or a meaning-making activity—have class, race, gender, and cultural implications?

We will investigate meaning through exploring the concepts of humanity, humanitarianism, and humanitarian aid. We continue to grapple with issues concerning whose lives hold value and meaning. #BlackLivesMatter and the deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, among other unarmed men of color highlighted the way in which systemic violence and racism continue to impact communities of color disproportionality. The lack of international response to the missing girls and continued acts of violence of the Boko Haram in Nigeria juxtaposed with the immediate calls to action following the killings of journalists at French satire magazine *Charlie Hebdo* raises questions of whether victim typology matters. This is also evident when considering how adoption is considered a humanitarian act of rescue with little regard for how adoption simultaneously places judgments on who may parent children. Finally, we will consider how conflict and crisis shape the dispersal of humanitarian aid. When the parameters of modern warfare dispense with traditionally understood rules of engagement, humanitarian intervention is left with no clearly defined boundaries.

Course Objectives

- To understand, theorize, analyze and experience meaning in a variety of contexts—personal, domestic, social, national, international as well as economic, political, and cultural contexts;
- To interpret the social constructions of meaning and accounts for the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, religion, and age in socially marked or charged meanings;
- To develop theoretical and analytical tools to deconstruct how meaning travels across space, place, and time; and
- To engage critically, creatively, and dialectically in written and oral communication.

Kimberly McKee, PhD

Email: mckeeki@gvsu.edu

Phone: 616-331-8196

Office: LOH 315

Blackboard IM: mckeeki

Website: www.mckeekimberly.com

Office Hours (In-person/Blackboard IM): Tuesdays, 10:00am – 12:00pm; Wednesdays, 3:00pm – 4:30pm; By appointment

Email is usually the best way to contact me. **Please include LIB 311 in the subject line.** Emails should always include a subject, greeting, and signature. . Emails not addressed in this way will not be answered. **Please remember that email is a professional mode of communication. I will respond to your email within 24-hours** on weekdays, and by Sunday evening on weekends. *Students must check their emails every 48 hours to ensure they are aware of communications sent by Prof. McKee.*

Content

Requirements	2-3
Course Policies	3-4
Course Schedule	5-7

Required Texts

- Terry Eagleton, *The Meaning of Life: A Very Short Introduction*
- Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism*
- Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*
- Kathryn Joyce, *The Child Catchers*
- Additional articles/readings will be available on Blackboard
- Chalk and Wire Portfolio Software (Liberal Studies Majors)

Course Requirements

Class Discussion	20%
Discussion Facilitation	15%
Reflection on Meaning	10%
Research Paper	20%
Integrative Statement	35%

Class Discussion: 20%

The course will be conducted as a seminar in which we shall discuss specific topics based on the assigned readings and other materials as case studies. It is crucial that students come to class having read all assignments and prepared to participate meaningfully in class discussions.

You should come prepared with specific questions or comments based on the readings for each class. To fully participate, students are expected to bring readings and relevant notes to class. Discussions are meant to encourage us to think critically about both course content and the world around us. Together, we will be producing knowledge rather than merely consuming it.

Personal opinions play a role in class dialogues but do not substitute a concerted effort to grasp the scholarly material. Understanding the material does not mean you have to embrace all or any of the viewpoints represented. However, it does require that you read it, think about it, and discuss it.

Please refrain from arriving late or leaving early. Doing so is disruptive. **If you arrive more than ten minutes late to class, you will be marked absent for the day.** At the same time, please do not pack up early. Please make sure that cell phones or any other electronic devices are off or on vibrate once you enter the classroom.

How is participation graded?

To earn a **C-range participation grade**, you must fulfill five basic requirements:

- Arrive on time and remain in class for the entire period.
- Be ready to discuss readings.
- Be prepared with the textbook and/or Blackboard material in class.
- Maintain a respectful demeanor, whether talking or listening.

SAFE SPACE: We represent a multitude of diverse backgrounds, beliefs, and opinions. Please do not attack your fellow students for voicing their opinions. The inclusion of multiple, and even contrasting, viewpoints will help us to synthesize course material. In order for this course to be a productive learning environment, it is imperative that we all treat one another with respect and courtesy.

- Engage actively and productively in group work, class discussion, and other in-class activities.

To earn a **B-range participation grade**, you must **consistently fulfill requirements for C-range participation** and:

- Volunteer questions/points of interest from readings to generate discussion.
- Make substantive comments/ points that clearly demonstrate you thoughtfully read the text
- Identify essential issues or questions of the text
- Point to the author's thesis
- Willingly offer ideas in class, making sure your contributions are topical and thoughtful.

To earn a **A-range participation grade**, you must **consistently fulfill requirements for B-range participation** and:

- Show leadership in class discussion (break uncomfortable silences; respond to open-ended questions; ask difficult questions).
- Deepen the level of class discussion
- Ask clarifying questions
- Summarize the arguments of the text and paraphrase the author's main points
- Challenge an idea or present an alternative interpretation
- Respond to other students' ideas (not just mine) by asking questions or building on their points.
- Contribute questions/ comments that demonstrate that you're making broader connections to other lectures, readings, and society-at-large

Discussion Facilitation: 15%

In groups of 2-3 people, students are expected to develop questions on one article or chapter from the assigned readings and co-lead discussion. Questions should reflect students' engagement with the readings and demonstrate their analytical skills. Each student must contribute a minimum of two questions. Select **ONE** chapter from a book or single journal article and provide questions based on the following:

Make sure you write down your discussion facilitation date and exchange contact information with your partner(s).

- How the text relates course readings from previous weeks
- Whether the text's content is applicable to a contemporary event or social structure.

Groups must **submit their questions to Prof. McKee via email 48 hours prior to their assigned date.** You should provide the class with a handout that outlines your discussion questions.

Reflection on Meaning: 10%

This 800 –1,000 word reflection (2-3 double-spaced pages) requires students to consider the concept of “meaning.” Prof. McKee will review the assignment in class on the date listed on the Course Schedule.

Research Paper: 20%

This 1,800 – 2,000 word paper requires students to select one complex emergency or conflict in terms of the issues raised about humanitarianism, humanity, or humanitarian operations. Prof. McKee will review the assignment in class on the date listed on the Course Schedule.

Integrative Statement: 35%

This is an autobiographical and reflective statement that demonstrates your passions and commitments. Prof. McKee will review the assignment in class on the date listed on the Course Schedule. This assignment is due Week 16. Students will also be required to complete an oral presentation during Week 16.

For Non-Liberal Studies Majors: This 2,000 – 2,500 word statement will include the following components: 1) explains the meaning of liberal education and why you chose your particular major; 2) describes your coursework's impact on your education; and 3) explains what you expect to do with this major after graduation.

For Liberal Studies Majors: This 2,000 – 2,500 word statement will include the following components: 1) explains the meaning of liberal education and why you chose to complete an interdisciplinary degree; 2) describes your emphasis area and how your coursework integrates around that emphasis (what did you learn from the courses and how do they make sense together?); and 3) explains what you expect to do with this major/emphasis after graduation.

Liberal Studies Majors, please don't lose your document even after final submission, for it will be still your work-in-

progress that you would need as a requirement for your senior capstone course later. This document is read by the chair and the dean before she signs off on your graduation audit, and it becomes a permanent part of your records here at GVSU. When submitted with your final Study Plan during graduation audit (usually during the Senior Seminar course), it becomes part of your official credentials.

Liberal Studies majors must submit this assignment via Chalk and Wire to their portfolios. If you have not already purchased Chalk & Wire Portfolio software, please do so through the GVSU Bookstore. For technical assistance, contact the Liberal Studies Dept. Program Coordinator Marion Mathisen: mathisem@gvsu.edu. For further information about Chalk & Wire Portfolio, please visit: <http://www.gvsu.edu/liberalstudies/chalk-and-wire-faq-107.htm>.

Course Policies

Attendance Policy

You are expected to attend every class session. **Students are allowed two unexcused absences.** Please use these absences wisely. For every additional absence you will lose three points per absence from your overall course grade. For example, if you miss three additional classes, nine points will be deducted from your final grade. ***Please notify the professor if you have a personal emergency or health issue causing you to miss class. Proper documentation is required for these absences to be considered “excused.”***

Written Assignment Guidelines

Standard grammar and essay guidelines should be followed. All written assignments must be completed in 12 point Times New Roman font, double-spaced with one-inch margins. Assignments must be in Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) format. ***No other formats will be accepted.***

All written assignments must be submitted by 5pm EST on their respective due dates.

All citations must be standardized (i.e. please be consistent with your use of MLA, Chicago, or APA). For questions about citations, please visit sites such as EasyBib.com or Purdue OWL. **Your Work Cited should be on a separate page** than the rest of your essay. In Microsoft Word, go to Insert > Page Break. This will allow you to create a subsequent page for your Work Cited.

If Prof. McKee provides you with comments or edits on paper drafts, you are responsible for integrating the feedback into your written work to enhance your paper

during the revision process. Failure to do so with result in grade deductions at the discretion of the professor and you must revise and resubmit your paper.

Late Assignment Policy for Written Work

Late assignments must be submitted with **48 hours of the deadline** via correct Blackboard folder. **Fifteen points** will be deducted from assignments submitted **within twenty-four hours of the deadline**. **Twenty points** will be deducted from assignments submitted **between twenty-four and forty-eight hours of the deadline**. Prof. McKee will not grant extensions unless prior arrangements have been made in consultation with her. Proper documentation is required for extensions.

Academic Misconduct and Plagiarism

All students are responsible for doing their own work and plagiarism will NOT be tolerated. Plagiarism, or the use of another's words without proper citation, or any form of cheating during the midterm, will result in an F for the assignment and possibly the course. A report will be made to the student's dean and the Center for Academic Integrity so that they may also take appropriate disciplinary action. You may refer to GVSU Student Code Section 223.01 for GVSU's policy. All of the following constitute plagiarism:

- Using someone else's idea without citing the source where you found that idea.
- Using someone else's structure or organizing strategy without citing it. This often occurs when a writer takes a paragraph out of a source and simply paraphrases each sentence while leaving the original author's structure intact.
- A verbatim (copied directly) phrase/passage that is not quoted

Avoid plagiarism by properly citing your sources. You should use a citation when you directly quote another source or paraphrase someone else's ideas. **Remember, the purpose of citations is to give credit to another's work.** When you use direct quotes or paraphrases, you are not using your original thoughts.

Resources

I strive to create a fully inclusive classroom, thus I welcome individual students to approach me about distinctive learning needs. I encourage students with disabilities to visit [Disability Support Resources](#) (616-331-2490). Please provide me documentation from Disability Support Resources, which will outline accommodations needed. If you require writing assistance, please visit [The Fred Meijer Center for Writing](#) (616-331-2922).

Grading

If Prof. McKee provides students a rubric for the assignment, she highly suggests students review the rubric to ensure they are meeting all of the assignment benchmarks. In other words, make sure you are fulfilling all of the necessary components of the assignment.

Grade Definitions:

[A] Outstanding. Work displays thorough mastery of material, exceptionally good writing, and genuine engagement with the subject-matter.

[B] Good. Work displays accurate understanding of the material; writing is clear and free of mechanical errors.

[C] Fair. Work displays basic grasp of material, though there may be the occasional misunderstanding or inaccuracy. Writing quality acceptable.

[D] Marginal. Work displays a grasp of the material adequate for credit, but quality of work indicates lack of effort or aptitude.

[F] Unacceptable. Excessive absences, assignments not completed, or assignments unworthy of credit.

Grade distribution:

A = 100-93	A- = 92-90	B+ = 89-87	B = 86-83
B- = 82-80	C+ = 79-77	C = 76-73	C- = 72-70
D+ = 69-67	D = 66-60	F = 59-0	

Please consider the **Three Before Me rule**. Before emailing me re: technical questions or other class logistics, try learning your answer through three other means first:

1. For technical support, contact the Help Desk by phone (616.331.2101) or email: helpdesk@gvsu.edu.
2. You can also review the support documents in our Blackboard course site or by clicking the "Help" button at the top of your Blackboard window.
3. Refer to course resources (e.g. syllabus, important deadlines, assignments) on our Blackboard site. Check the FAQ Forum on our discussion board. Everyone is welcome to post and answer questions that are posted there!
4. Email a classmate.

Course Plan

Information on this course schedule is an outline and is subject to change either due to professor or collective class decisions. Students will be told in advance of the change and an updated syllabus will be posted to Blackboard.

Additional articles provided by Professor McKee in class may also supplement course readings. Students will be required to complete this reading in addition to the readings listed in the syllabus unless otherwise notified.

Date Due	Topic	Reading/Activity Due
Week 1 T, 9/1	Welcome: The Meaning of Meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In class reading: Selections from <i>The Meaning of Life: A Reader</i>, edited by E.D. Klemke and Steven M. Cahn (Oxford University Press, 2008) (Available on Blackboard) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leo Tolstoy, "My Confession," pp. 7-16 David F. Swenson, "The Dignity of Human Life," pp. 17-26. Susan Wolf, "Meaning in Life," pp. 232-235.
Week 2 T, 9/8	NO CLASS: LABOR DAY RECESS	
Week 3 T, 9/15	What do we mean by "meaning"?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Butler, Judith (2001) "Giving an Account of Oneself." <i>Diacritics</i> 31 (4): 22-40. (Available via Blackboard) Ahmed, Sarah (2014, October 24) "Heavy Histories." <i>Feminist Killjoys</i>. Available: http://feministkilljoys.com/2014/10/24/heavy-histories/ (Available via Blackboard). Ahmed, Sarah (2014, February 17) "The Problem of Perception." <i>Feminist Killjoys</i>. Available: http://feministkilljoys.com/2014/02/17/the-problem-of-perception/ (Available via Blackboard). <p style="text-align: center;">Reflection on Meaning Assignment Guidelines Provided</p>
Week 4 T, 9/22	What do we mean by "meaning"?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eagleton, <i>The Meaning of Life</i> (complete book) Discussion Facilitation #1
Sept. 23, 2015	Reflection on Meaning Due	
Week 5 T, 9/29	The Racialized Politics of Meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excerpts from Frantz Fanon's <i>Black Skin, White Masks</i>: Chapter 1, Chapter 5, Chapter 8 Discussion Facilitation #2
Week 6 T, 10/6	Humanity and Humanitarianism: What's at stake?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alexander, Introduction – Chapter 2 Blakinger, Keri. (2015, January 21) "Heroin Addiction Sent Me to Prison. White Privilege Got Me Out and Into the Ivy League." <i>The Washington Post</i>. (http://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/01/21/heroin-addiction-sent-me-to-prison-white-privilege-got-me-out-and-to-the-ivy-league/?hpid=z4; Available on Blackboard) Please watch Goffman, Alice. (2015, March) "How we're priming some kids for college – and others for prison." <i>TED Talks</i>. (http://www.ted.com/talks/alice_goffman_college_or_prison_two_destinies_one_blatant_injustice; Available on Blackboard) Discussion Facilitation #3 <p style="text-align: center;">Research Paper Guidelines Provided</p>
Week 7 T, 10/13	Humanity and Humanitarianism: What's at stake?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alexander, Chapters 3 – 4 Apuzzo, Matt. (2015, March 1) "Justice Department to Fault Ferguson Police, Seeing Racial Bias in Traffic Stops." <i>The New York Times</i> (http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/02/us/justice-department-report-to-fault-police-in-ferguson.html) Puente, Mark. (2014, September 28) "Undue Force." <i>The Baltimore Sun</i>

		<p>(http://data.baltimoresun.com/news/police-settlements/)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion Facilitation #4
Week 8 T, 10/20	Humanity and Humanitarianism: What's at stake?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alexander, Chapters 5 – 6 • Badger, Emily. (2015, April 29) "The Long, Painful and Repetitive History of How Baltimore Became Baltimore." <i>The Washington Post</i> (http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2015/04/29/the-long-painful-and-repetitive-history-of-how-baltimore-became-baltimore/) • Rothstein, Richard. (2015, April 29) "From Ferguson to Baltimore: The Fruits of Government-Sponsored Segregation." <i>Economic Policy Institute</i> (http://www.epi.org/blog/from-ferguson-to-baltimore-the-fruits-of-government-sponsored-segregation/) • Giorgis, Hannah. (2015, April 30) "We need racial justice and economic justice. We can't breathe if we can't eat." <i>The Guardian</i> (http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/apr/30/racial-justice-economic-justice-baltimore-we-cannot-breathe-if-we-cannot-eat) • Discussion Facilitation #5
Week 9 T, 10/27	Humanity and Humanitarianism: What's at stake?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joyce, Preface – Chapter 2 • Discussion Facilitation #6
Week 10 T, 11/3	Humanity and Humanitarianism: What's at stake?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joyce, Chapters 3 – 5 • Discussion Facilitation #7 <p>In Class Peer-Editing Workshop: Students Must Bring One Printed Copy of their Research Paper Draft to Class.</p>
Week 11 T, 11/10	Humanity and Humanitarianism: What's at stake?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joyce, Chapters 6 – 8 • Fronek, Patricia. (2015, May 24) "Your child is missing. Would you want their adoption to be easier?" <i>The Conversation</i>. (http://theconversation.com/your-child-is-missing-would-you-want-their-adoption-to-be-easier-42108; Available on Blackboard) • Discussion Facilitation #8
Week 12 T, 11/17	Humanity and Humanitarianism: What's at stake?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barnett, Introduction and Part 1 • Selections from Iriye, et. al., <i>The Human Rights Revolution</i> (Oxford University Press, 2012) (Available via Blackboard) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ William I. Hitchcock, "Human Rights and the Laws of War: The Geneva Conventions of 1949" • Discussion Facilitation #9 <p>Integrative Statement Guidelines Provided</p>
Nov. 18, 2015	Research Paper Due	
Week 13 T, 11/24	Humanity and Humanitarianism: What's at stake?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barnett, Part 2 • Selections from Iriye, et. al., <i>The Human Rights Revolution</i> (Oxford University Press, 2012) (Available via Blackboard) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Samuel Moyn, "Imperialism, Self-Determination, and the Rise of Human Rights" ○ Mark Philip Bradley, "Approaching the Universal Declaration of Human Rights" • Discussion Facilitation #10
Week 14 T, 12/1	Humanity and Humanitarianism: What's at stake?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barnett, Part 3 and Conclusion • Discussion Facilitation #11 <p>In Class Peer-Editing Workshop: Students Must Bring One Printed Copy of their Integrative Statement Draft to Class.</p>

<p>Week 15</p> <p>T, 12/8</p>	<p>Rethinking Meaning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briggs, Laura. (1998). "Discourses of 'Forced Sterilization' in Puerto Rico: The Problem with the Speaking Subaltern." <i>Differences</i>. (10)2 (Available on Blackboard) • Selections from Iriye, et. al., <i>The Human Rights Revolution</i> (Oxford University Press, 2012) (Available via Blackboard) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Akira Iriye and Petra Goedde, "Introduction: Human Rights as History" ○ Kenneth J. Cmiel, "The Recent History of Human Rights" ○ Elizabeth Borgwardt, "'Constitutionalizing' Human Rights: The Rise of the Nuremberg Principles" ○ Allida Black, "Are Women 'Human'? The U.N. and the Struggle to Recognize Women's Rights as Human Rights" • Discussion Facilitation #12
<p>Week 16</p>	<p>Integrative Statement Reflection Roundtable</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will meet on Tuesday, December 15 at 6pm (regular class time) to discuss your integrative statements (oral presentations) and reflect on the semester. <p style="text-align: center;">Integrative Statement Due, Wednesday, December 16</p>