

## Political Science 390 Senior Capstone Seminar "Identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century"

Directing the Seminar: Prof. Richard Farkas, Political Science Department

This course is intended to serve as a reflective experience in which each student appraises what changes have impacted on him or her during the university experience. It is also intended to help examine and understand the complex of factors that define who we are. All of this matters as we pursue our futures.

*The integrating theme I have designated for the course is: **IDENTITY**  
I expect it to be effective because of the inescapable relevance to every student at a time in their lives when each is searching for and defining his or her own identity. From societies, to communities, to businesses, to individuals -- each person will need frameworks for approaching and retaining images of the global human tapestry.*

*Students relish this opportunity to think about and refine their sense of self and to juxtapose that sense with the broad patterns of rapid change in our world.*

*The premise is that as modern persons, we all have a plethora of identities. In many senses, we are cautious NOT to bring them all into focus because this would require that we order or prioritize them. In lieu of this, we simply change identities like students change socks to fit the mood or the circumstances. Encouraging focus and recognition of these often intrinsically contradictory snapshots of ourselves is a seminal undertaking. It can be life-affirming but is more likely to be fundamentally disturbing. I submit, it is essential to the student's preparedness for post-university endeavors.*

*The range of identities commonly embraced by our students is remarkable. To think about them and examine them is to approach our world and our being with a dizzying array of disciplines. Students will bring perspectives from their various classes and from their personal experiences.*

*Given my academic focus in comparative politics, the course will bring a broad international dimension to the examination of identities. I expect it to be effective because of the inescapable relevance to all students especially at a time in their lives when they are searching for and defining their own identity through a variety of encounters. America is an immigrant society with broad global reach in virtually all things that we do from communication to commerce. A rough sketch of the realms we hope to tap follows.*

*As stated above, the range of categories of identities is vast. Common labels include race, politics, geography, group or family history, gender, religion, class, occupation, ethnicity and a host of other less recognized clusters built around power, psychology, sociology, technological and intellectual affinity. The course proposes to deal with these in creative ways. For example, race will be viewed through new discoveries in DNA-related science as well as the typical color and sociological labels. Political identity is typically conceived as ideological or party based. We will also examine the subject / participant distinction and the 'politics is central' vs. politics is extraneous' distinction. Geographic labels will be expanded to differentiate growers from grabbers and urban from rural. History examined through the lens of a 'proud' (presumably superior) people vs. 'victims.' Gender identities scrutinized as 'natural' differences or 'stifling.' Religious labels scrutinized as promoting tolerant or intolerant views. Do occupational identities define who we are (i.e. you are what you do) or are they simply a vehicle to achieve a level of disposable income?*

*Then there are the more complex identities to be probed. Do I do "it" to others or do they do "it" to me? Am I defined by my fears? Am I a technophile or technophobe? Do I aspire to be a scientist or a humanist?*

To reiterate, the central question that will be explored with you from the outset is whether all of us living in societies (complex and otherwise) have a **hierarchy** of identities. If so, we seldom acknowledge this explicitly. As issues and challenges present themselves, we find these identities in conflict and perhaps turn to the hierarchy as a means of resolving the conflict. Normal as this process may be, it is not done consciously. Nor do we recognize those moments when we **re-order** the hierarchy. We are inclined to ignore that the hierarchy exists. This can veil our understanding of ourselves and others. Behavior and perception clearly stem from a platform of ideas. As the examples above imply, these identities are not simply endogenous to our individuality. To the contrary, many are exogenous. Students can be drawn into recognition of how these factors interact and how sea change effects can be experienced.

If it is not already transparently clear, permit me to suggest how central this sort of realization is to your ability to deal with the challenges that lie ahead of you. None of these “identities” in your life will be constant. Indeed, they will be challenged and changing. This will be especially true of the exogenous influences. “Lifelong learning” then could not be more meaningfully framed for students than with a framework for recognizing and managing those changes. “Parent,” “volunteer,” “leader,” “mentor,” “teacher,” “learner,” “adventurer,” “changer” as well as many other identities are the roots and the branches of our lives.

Imagine this course as an intellectual experiment in thinking about YOU and your world.

*Prescriptions for our Course:* Student responsibilities ...

1. Students should NOT miss any Zoom sessions !
2. Any assigned reading must be completed for the scheduled discussion.
3. All written and oral assignments MUST be prepared by the specified date.
4. Students must approach this course with intellectual openness and zeal.
5. Given the seminar format, students MUST engage themselves in the class dialogue.

*Professor’s Obligation:* To organize an agenda for discussion that is heuristic, provoking and beyond the framework experienced to date by the students.

*GRADES:* It shall be prohibited from raising any issues relating to grades or evaluations during any zoom session. Ideally, students will also constrain themselves from focusing too much on this dimension of the course. If the subject must be raised, it shall be appropriate ONLY in communication with Prof. Farkas.

Zo0m participation	25 points	
Written and Oral essays (3)	30 points (total)	
Inventory	10 points	
Exercises	20 points	
Portrait	20 points	110 pts possible

All of the elements of the course specified in this syllabus will be factored into a final grade. However, this is literally a SEMINAR. That means that your meaningful engagement in our classes is absolutely required. Non-participation is not excusable. You will not satisfactorily complete the course with any passing grade if you choose not to participate. Participation will be recorded for every class session.

*Dialogue Outside of Class:* Students would be well advised to seize every opportunity to discuss the substance of our seminar with the professor.

*Office Hours & Contact Information:*

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*Reading list:* (some assignments involve selections from these volumes)

Sykes, Bryan, Seven Daughters of Eve, Norton, 2002

This is a geneticist's empirical vision of identities and the common sources of biological identities in our world. It finds evidence of seven common "mothers." To be clear, all living human beings with European heritage can be traced to seven women living just 20,000 years ago.

Danko & Stanley, The Millionaire Next Door, Simon & Schuster, 1998

A study built around occupation and wealth in contemporary America. It empirically examines what "kinds of people" have accumulated over \$1 million in assets.

Kroeger, Brooke, Passing: When People Can't Be Who They Are,

Public Affairs, 2003. This is a fascinating collection of stories involving quandaries for real people wrestling with misperceptions of their identities.

Commencement Speeches:

You will be required to listen to a number of commencement speeches during the term. Exercise #1 will grow out of your commitment to this task.

**Inventory:** *Create the most complete inventory of your "identities." Do not omit anything that you can include. Create a single column vertical list.*

**Written essay 1:** *Create a three page essay in which you reflect on how Trump's values are different from yours. This essay must be refined and polished to the point that it is the very best three pages you have ever submitted. Proofread, write and re-write as much as necessary to make it perfect. Say what you mean to say succinctly, clearly and using language in the most refined way you can. Think carefully about the words you choose and use the most effective words.*

**Oral Essay:** *You will create and record a five minute long oral essay. The topic is: "My Lifetime Financial Goals and Their Realization." This is to be an MP4 file placed on the D2L website (submissions button). The language must be carefully crafted and smooth. Words should be chosen carefully and the manner of presentation matters. It will be measured by how cogent and articulate it is. There should be no hesitations, fumbles or corrections. Be sure to avoid "like" type stammers. The substance and thoughtfulness of what you have to say also "counts."*

**Written essay 2:** *Write a three page essay in which you select and make a case for a profession /job that does NOT exist today. As you learned in class a large percentage of you will face adapting to a workplace and/or a job that will come into being in the next ten years. Think carefully and opt for one that you see "over the workplace horizon." Include why you think you are suited for that job and why it is important for it to be done well. This essay must be refined – that is written very carefully with effective language and word usage. Re-write until lucid and as perfect as you can make it.*

**Portrait:** *You will spend hours thinking about your life at 50 years old. You will write a detailed portrait of that picture including every detail that you can include. Be sure you recognize the range of identities that you are embracing as you flesh out the portrait. While it is perfectly clear that none of you has a crystal ball to see the future, you do have notions about the paths and choices that you will confront. Paint the picture the way you think it will realistically play out. Only by including meticulous detail will you recognize the inherent choices you will have made along*

the way. I say again, include everything! Limit yourself to eight pages but do not use that as a vehicle for leaving anything out. Be efficient with your space. Write carefully and clearly. First drafts or “stream of consciousness” will not be acceptable.

“**Exercise # 1**” Carefully reflect on the totality of your university coursework. (a) identify the most valuable course you have taken. (b) identify the least valuable course you have taken, (c) name a course that you wish had been offered in Political Science but wasn’t. ,

“**Exercise #2**” After listening to all of the assigned “commencement” speeches, identify three central ideas that you want to argue could be most valuable in your life. Bullet points only!

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_lfxYhtf8o4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_lfxYhtf8o4)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmCTQ\\_mkzHU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmCTQ_mkzHU)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yaQZFhrW0fU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJxmLSjoPYg&list=PL54F08A8E49DBC917> Gupta

You’re not special

McConaughy

Adm. McRaven

### USING ZOOM:

The extraordinary situation we face requires that we find a way to discuss the things we are trying to learn about and understand. This has been made far more difficult. Our interim solution is ZOOM. This course requires you to become very familiar with the software BEFORE we begin. We have few options without meeting. It will take dedication and flexibility to have the robust conversations we need to have. Be diligent and prepare for this challenge. We need to pull together to make this work productively. Formal zoom sessions EVERY Wednesday 11:20-1:00.

<b>Class schedule:</b> (subject to change)	<u>Reading &amp; Other:</u>	<u>Tasks:</u>
Module 1	Your IDENTITIES: “political identity”	“observational skills”
Module 2	Your TECHNOLOGY PROFILE	
Module 3	Your BIOLOGY	Sykes (sections) video
Module 4	Your PREJUDICE	Gupta speech inventory
	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJxmLSjoPYg&amp;list=PL54F08A8E49DBC917">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJxmLSjoPYg&amp;list=PL54F08A8E49DBC917</a>	
Module 5	Your LIFESTYLE	Wellsley speech written essay #1
	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_lfxYhtf8o4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_lfxYhtf8o4</a>	
Module 6	Your MONEY	Danko & Stanley (all) oral essay
Module 7	Your WORK	McConaughy speech written essay #2
	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmCTQ_mkzHU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmCTQ_mkzHU</a>	
Module 8	Your IMAGE	Kroeger (all) exercise # 1
Module 9	Your RESPONSIBILITY	McRaven speech exercise # 2
Module 10	Your FUTURE	Portrait

*What does it take to be a “life-long” learner?*

