HNRS 4000: Honors Seminars Fall 2023

(Seminars are for any interested honors student. All seminars are 1 credit.)

## *Charity and Aid in the Global Context*

***HNRS 2000, section 1001, course number: 76935 Instructor: Dr. Foell***

The premise of this class is global inequality and what to do about it. We’ll begin with some values clarification, as students discuss their own experiences with and attitudes towards charity. We will consider statistics about global inequalities, which are not limited to income inequality, but also encompass access to infrastructure, education, healthcare, and other aspects of well-being that we may take for granted. The concepts of absolute and relative poverty will be introduced. We will discuss the existence of such inequalities not only between, but within countries!

Armed with this information, we’ll discuss whether we have any moral obligation, or practical need, to alleviate these inequalities. Most world religions recommend some form of charity; but from a secular philosophical perspective, Peter Singer’s “drowning child” argument is compelling, as is the “enlightened self-interest” motive of preventing mass migration from the global south to the global north.

We’ll then consider the difference between “charity” and “aid” and when each is appropriate. Everyone knows the adage about “teaching a man to fish”; but when the lake is dried up (as increasingly happens with climate change), you really need to hand out some fish so that people don’t starve! How do we identify the differences between crisis situations (where charity is appropriate) and systemic challenges that call for development aid?

Finally, we’ll consider the “who, what, and how” of aid and charity by looking at different types of organizations engaged in these activities, from governments and IGOs to NGOs. For example: USAID (the US government international aid organization) has never attained the level of funding demanded by the non-aligned movement 50 years ago, and its practices often direct money straight back to US manufacturers;

the World Bank and IMF, created under the Bretton Woods system, are supposed to aid poorer countries by extending loans at low or no interest, but in recent decades(!) these organizations have demanded structural adjustments (SAP) that hobble the ability of countries to deliver social services;

well-meaning charities like World Vision, a reputable organization that seeks to aid children, may distribute Bibles along with meals; while some other organizations like “Feed My Starving Children” arguably have an ineffective model for delivering food. What do we think of this? we will also consider local charities with a guest speaker from the Falcon Food Pantry as we seek to understand how hunger/food insecurity persist in the world’s wealthiest nation.

Students should leave this class with a better understanding of their place in the world, and perhaps some ideas about where and how they will direct their volunteer efforts and charitable

donations, both now and in the future. Students will also receive guidance about BGSU classes where they can explore these issues further.

# The Holocaust and Me: The Roots and Residual Effects of Antisemitism

## *HNRS 2000, section 1002, course number: 76936* Instructor: Dr. Murnen

While it is a common misperception that antisemitism died with the defeat of the Nazis at the end of World War II, antisemitism is currently on the rise in the US and across the globe. In the US alone in 2021, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) recorded a 34% increase in antisemitic incidents over 2020. Social media appears full of hate speech, with a disproportionate amount aimed at Jews. Celebrities and public figures openly court and espouse antisemitic ideas.

Electronic billboards on the interstate employ antisemitism.

To understand antisemitism and its impact on our lives today, we need to understand the roots of antisemitism. This course will explore the origins of antisemitism laid down long before the 1930s and 1940s; it will explore how Nazi Germany and others leveraged antisemitism during the early part of the 20th century; and it will explore how antisemitism is still employed today. We will explore how antisemitism is similar to and different from other forms of hate. Students will have the opportunity to research, read, discuss, and share in an effort to deepen our understanding of antisemitism and its importance in our understanding of human rights.

Student work will encompass weekly reading of texts, viewing video, listening to podcasts, participating in Zoom events, possible field trips, engaging discussion boards, writing short papers, and developing a research project. And of course critical thinking.

**Popular Music and Politics Around the World *HNRS 2000, section 1003, course number: 76937 Instructor: Dr. Piroth***

This course will explore the relationship between popular music and politics from a variety of perspectives in an international and comparative context. The first part of the course will focus on the music business and discuss how the music industry functions in a changing technological environment. We will consider the role that governments play in protecting intellectual property and promoting popular culture. The course will emphasize the tension between profit seeking and efforts to sustain cultural diversity.

Next, the course examines how music promotes and sustains identities and languages, particularly among minority groups. We will investigate the tendency toward cultural homogenization that results from globalization and the ways in which local actors have sought to protect and preserve local cultures and languages.

Popular music can be a powerful tool for political mobilization and protest. The last part of the course will consider how music has been a tool for both those challenging authority and for those seeking to maintain the status quo.

Course readings and discussions will provide a framework for studying these relationships, but much of the course will consist of students identifying and interpreting examples of the interactions between popular music and politics and presenting their findings to the class.

Bowling Green's annual Black Swamp Arts Festival will also be incorporated into the course, and students will be expected to attend and discuss this event.

# Narrative Comprehension and the Social Construction of Reality

***HNRS 2000, section 1004, course number: 76925 Instructor: Dr. Busselle***

The reality in which we live, or believe we live, is largely constructed by the stories we tell and are told. These narrative accounts of the immediate and distant world take the form of interpersonal conversations, news reports, and the books, movies, and TV shows that inform and entertain us. This seminar will be about how we comprehend narratives, how we evaluate their authenticity, and what motivates us to seek, avoid, accept, and reject the accounts of reality we encounter every day.

We will begin by exploring the idea of a narrative as the representation of a situation or a version of reality that we did not experience directly. This is a broader category than it initially appears. Some examples are a roommate explaining why they took your sweater, a friend telling us about a holiday trip, a news report about Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, or a television series about a high school for outcasts with magical powers. We will learn about the processes that allow us to construct mental models of people, places, and situations in order to understand a specific narrative and how specific narratives interact with our understandings of the real world.

Once we have addressed the mechanisms that allow us to comprehend narratives, we will turn to the processes that allow us to recognize that something is amiss -- a friend exaggerating, a news report being incorrect, or a mystery containing a plot flaw. It will also require philosophical discussions of truth as correspondence with the real world or coherence among proposition, as well as discussions about how our cognitive systems consciously monitor stories for violations of correspondence and coherence.

In the third section we will explore our motivations to look for and to overlook false, unrealistic, or inauthentic information and how these motivations correspond to our goals when selecting, consuming, and interpreting news and entertainment content. These motivations include, for example, our need to be informed (or to feel informed), our biases toward information that is consistent with our cultural perspective, our instinct to avoid information that makes us uncomfortable or challenges our beliefs, and our desire to be distracted or amused.

An essential theme that will underlie all our discussions is the interaction between psychological processes that are universal to all humans and selection and judgment processes that depend largely on our individual experiences and cultural backgrounds. For example, almost everyone attends to news about a tragic event. But how we interpret the news and whether we seek or avoid more information depends on our own identities and biases.

Readings and discussion will allow us to ask interesting and unusual questions, such as…

Are video games representation or real life?

Can we say that a portrayal of Spiderman is unrealistic when Spiderman is already fictional? Why are we more afraid of shark attacks and plane crashes than automobile accidents?

Are the “negative proof fallacy” and the “slippery slope argument” helpful or harmful to democracy?