

Politics & Reality

Prof. David V. Edwards

Gov 335M/SPRING 2012

#38685/ Tuesday & Thursday 8-9:15 in Mezes 1.102

Office hours in Batts 3.126:

**Tuesday and Thursday 9:30-10:45 and Tuesday 3:30-4:00
and anytime you find me in my office outside of office hours
or by appointment via email: dedwards@mail.utexas.edu**

In this course we'll be reading and discussing various ideas about why different people experience reality differently, and how the differing ways people experience reality and then act upon that experience can result in changes in reality--for them and for others--over time. We'll then ask how we and others can use this knowledge to create changes we or they desire.

Much of our study will focus on basic aspects of everyday life, especially interpersonal and intergroup relations. Most of that study will be theoretical, combining aspects of psychology, philosophy, sociology, theology, anthropology, and other aspects of the human sciences. From time to time, however, we'll also consider some aspects of political action.

The Readings

The basic readings will be the following three paperbacks available in the Co-op (and likely in used bookstores):

Ronald Laing/ *The Politics of Experience*/Ballantine
Peter Berger & Thomas Luckmann/ *The Social Construction of Reality*/ Anchor
Owen Barfield/ *Saving the Appearances*/Wesleyan University Press

We will also have supplementary readings from time to time throughout the semester, and the last quarter of the class will consist entirely of such readings, which will be available in a course packet. I shall select these readings as the semester progresses to critique, complement and expand upon the readings listed above. I'll make specific reading assignments in class from session to session rather than in advance, because specific assignments will depend in part on how the course progresses. I shall also select various supplementary readings as they become appropriate, and they will be available either via Blackboard or from a local copyshop.

I shall expect you to do each of the reading assignments carefully and thoughtfully before the class session in which we'll be discussing it, and to come to class ready to discuss it or at least to ask questions about anything in it you did not understand.

If you should have to miss a class session, it is vital that you use available electronic systems or personal contact immediately to find out what you missed and to get the assignment for the next session if you haven't received it from me by email. You will be able to email me or fellow class members through the course website on Blackboard. I shall also use Blackboard to email you about class assignments and activities.

The Class Sessions

Class sessions will consist primarily of discussion, usually guided in part by me and perhaps in part by a designated student volunteer, as explained below. I will give occasional lecturettes when the subject, the reading, or class interest seems to suggest its value.

Our Class Presence on the Web

Our class has a **Blackboard site**. It will allow a wide variety of activities, from the posting of topics for class discussion, in particular the “commencements” described below, to ongoing interactive discussions about class readings, class discussions, etc. and chats that take place at your initiative.

In addition, I may put links to materials elsewhere on the Web by and/or about our authors and topics on the site from time to time.

The Writing Assignments

This course is an officially recognized “writing flag” course. You will write four major papers during the semester, on topics and with specified maximum lengths that I’ll assign. They will usually be due in the class period immediately following the one in which I assign them, because they will build directly upon our reading and discussion, and will not be research papers. Exactly when they will be due will depend on how our course progresses.

I require that you **submit each paper in duplicate, typed double-spaced**. That allows me to return one copy with my comments and grade and keep one so I have a record of your progress.

I shall grade your papers on both their substantive content and the quality and effectiveness (that is, organization, diction, grammar, and spelling) of the writing. Your grade on a paper may be as much as 20 points lower than its substantive content alone would merit if the paper is quite poorly written.

The first three of these papers will involve your readings in the three texts listed above plus some supplemental readings. Each will probably be limited to a maximum of 1000 words or less. The last paper, due either the last class period or approximately at the time a final exam for this course would be scheduled, will be somewhat longer and more demanding. There will be **no exams** in the course.

I’ll also assign occasional shorter written assignments, some of them to be done immediately in class, which you can think of as part of your class participation. The first of these, described below, is due the second class period.

The Grading

I’ll determine your course grade by assigning your first major paper 10 percent, your second and third 20 percent each, your fourth 30 percent, and your class participation 20 percent. By class participation I mean your participation in our system of “commencements” (described below) if we do them, your vocal participation in class discussion, whether by answering or asking questions, or commenting upon whatever is being discussed, in addition to attending class regularly. ***Missing class sessions more often than occasionally will lower your participation grade.***

All grading will be on a scale of 100 to 0, and your final course grade will be an arithmetic average, weighted as indicated above, converted to a letter grade on a 10-points-per-letter scale, including pluses and minuses. *Late paper grades will be*

reduced by 10 points for each 24 hours or less that they are late, in the interests of both the class as a whole and your own progress. There will be no extra credit opportunities other than any in-class assignments I may decide to make from time to time.

“Commencements”—if any

Once the semester is underway, **depending on how discussion develops**, we may usually use a system I call “commencements.” If I decide to do this, before each class period, **every class member will be encouraged to prepare a brief statement of reaction to or commentary on the assigned reading** and post it on the course Blackboard website. **One member will be responsible for reading whatever statements are posted by an agreed-upon time the evening before each class period and then preparing a set of several possible discussion questions or topics** for the next session, which he or she will then post on Blackboard and email to class members. **Every class member** will be expected to print that list, think about the questions/topics, and bring it to class, ready to discuss each of them. **The student who prepared the commencement will be in charge of leading discussion of at least one of those questions or topics. One or two other student volunteer(s) will be the designated responders for that session**, and he/she/they will be expected to be prepared to open the class response to the posted question(s), after which **all class members will be expected to participate in subsequent discussion of the chosen question.** All the submissions to the website and every preparation of a commencement will be considered part of a student’s class participation. **At the outset, if we use them, I will probably ask for volunteers to prepare our commencements, but I may decide to assign that task in particular cases.**

My Commitment

I commit myself to making this course a fundamental examination of major processes in social life--one that will probably change significantly the way you think about and act in various aspects of your life, including what we usually think of as politics.

Your Commitments

In return, I request that you commit yourself (1) to *doing all the readings on time, regularly, in a thorough and thoughtful way.* I further request that you commit yourself (2) to **participating in our “commencements” process if we adopt that,** (3) to **attending class regularly, on time, alert,** and (4) to **participating in your own mind even when you are not speaking to the rest of the class.**

These commitments will be especially important when they are most burdensome: when the course gets difficult, frustrating, or unnerving--as it probably will from time to time for many of you--and even for me. The benefits of this course to you will almost certainly depend on your being committed to sustained active participation--and so will the benefits to the other class members.

If you are not able and willing to make and keep these commitments, I request that you select instead another course better suited to your own particular commitments.

Disabilities

The University requires that the following notice be included in this syllabus: “If you have a learning disability or another disability that requires special

arrangements for examtaking, you may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259, following which you should consult with your TA well in advance of each exam to work out appropriate approved arrangements.” However, in this course there are no exams, and there is no TA.

Honesty, Dishonesty, and Plagiarism

The University recommends that the following notice be included in this syllabus: “Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are serious offenses punishable by failure of the course. The administration asks that you familiarize yourself with the U.T. Honor Code and the nature of plagiarism by consulting the following site: <http://registrar.utexas.edu/catalogs/gi09-10/ch01/index.html>. “

Counseling and Related Assistance

The UT Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC): <http://cmhc.utexas.edu/> has asked that I make available the following information about valuable campus resources available to you:

- --For information about students with urgent needs :
<http://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/talktosomeone.html>
- --CMHC's 24/7/365 Telephone Counseling Line: 471-CALL/2255;
<http://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/24hourcounseling.html>
- --To find out about making an appointment:
<http://cmhc.utexas.edu/appointments.html>
- --For information about our Be That One Suicide Prevention Program, check out <http://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/bethatone/>

* Behavior Concerns Advice Line- Concerned about someone on campus? BCAL provides a central resource for UT faculty, students, and staff who may have concerns about the behavior or well-being of another member of the campus community. BCAL is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For more information contact 512-232-5050 or www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal

Religious Holidays

The University requests that I include the following notice in this syllabus: “By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.”

Emergency Evacuation

The University requests that I include the following notice concerning emergency evacuation from the Office of Campus Safety and Security, 512-471-5767 in this syllabus:

“Occupants of buildings on the UT Austin campus are required to evacuate buildings when a fire alarm is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside.

“Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building.

“Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructor in writing during the first week of class.

“In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors.

“Do not re-enter a building unless given instructions by the following: Austin Fire Department, UT Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office.

“Link to information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at: www.utexas.edu/emergency.”

Assistance with Writing

The Writing Center has asked that I include the following paragraph: “The Undergraduate Writing Center, FAC 211, 471-6222: <http://www.uwc.utexas.edu/>) offers free, individualized, expert help with writing for any UT undergraduate, by appointment or on a drop-in basis. Any undergraduate enrolled in a course at UT can visit the UWC for assistance with any writing project. The consultants there work with students from every department on campus, for both academic and non-academic writing. Whether you are writing a lab report, a resume, a term paper, a statement for an application, or your own poetry, UWC consultants will be happy to work with you. Their services are not just for writing that has “problems.” Getting feedback from an informed audience is a normal part of a successful writing project. Consultants help students develop strategies to improve their writing. The assistance they provide is intended to foster independence. Each student determines how to use the consultant's advice. The consultants are trained to help you work on your writing in ways that preserve the integrity of your work.”

In past semesters, some of my students in Politics & Reality have used the Center and found it helpful.

Suggestions and Comments

In continuing to develop and improve the course, I am especially dependent on your suggestions, comments, and criticisms of the course, both during the semester and at its conclusion. For this reason, we'll take class time at midsemester and at the end of the semester for special evaluations I have developed.

I encourage you, however, to give me your reactions and suggestions whenever they occur to you during the semester, either in person or by email--which may be anonymous if you prefer. I, and probably your classmates as well, will appreciate your assistance in improving the course experience.

The First Assignment

Write two short papers, to be submitted in class Tuesday September 4, *in duplicate*, on separate sheets of paper, of 250 words or less each, one on the topic "What Is Reality?" and the other on the topic "What I Know Best". These papers should be single-spaced. (All subsequent papers must be double-spaced.) Never waste a tree by attaching a cover sheet; your name, the date, and the title of your paper are sufficient. I do not expect you to do any reading or research in writing these papers--just careful thinking about your own beliefs. We'll discuss them in class on Tuesday.

Conclusion--or Beginning

If all of us work conscientiously to keep our commitments, this course should be a very valuable experience for all of us. It should help to transform your understanding of the nature of reality, of the politics of possibility, and of the theory and practice of change—personal as well as social and political.