

## **What Are Universities For?**

Research Seminar—Fall 2025

University of Florida

Office Hours: M 3-5PM, T 10:30-11:30

& happily by appt.

Prof. Wise

208 Keene Flint Hall

352.273.3363

benwise@ufl.edu

This seminar will examine the history of higher education in the twentieth century with particular attention to conflicts over the purpose and value of universities. Americans have disagreed about this—what does it mean to become educated? What are the practical, ethical, and social outcomes of going to college? What role should the government have in funding higher education, shaping content, and regulating universities? In this class, we will read a diversity of viewpoints on higher education over the past hundred years, and students will write an independent research project they develop over the course of the semester.

### **Course Objectives**

- Students will learn about historical issues central to higher education in the twentieth century.
- Students will acquire and apply research skills learned through use of print and electronic resources.
- Students will critically assess and interpret primary and secondary sources.
- Students will identify a historical research topic related to the focus of the research seminar, develop knowledge of the topic through research, and create historical arguments using evidence effectively with clear prose.
- Students will produce an effectively written analytical research paper based in research of primary sources, framed within the secondary literature, and offering a coherent historical argument supported by the evidence.

### **Required Reading**

Books to purchase:

Keith Whittington, *You Can't Teach That!: The Battle Over University Classrooms*

Will Bunch, *After the Ivory Tower Falls: How College Broke the American Dream and Blew up our Politics—And How to Fix It*

Andrew DelBanco, *College: What it Was, Is, and Should Be*

Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities*

Selected Readings on Canvas, online, or handed out in class

### **Grading**

Participation—25%

Response Essays & Assignments—15%

Research Proposal—10%

Writing Workshop—10%

Final Presentation & Essay—40%

# Course Policies

## Attendance

Since this is a discussion-based seminar that only meets once a week, unexcused absences are not allowed. If you must miss class due to an excused absence, notify me beforehand and we will work out a way for you to make up the work. If you do not notify me and have an unexcused absence, this will adversely affect your participation grade; if you have three unexcused absences, you will receive a failing mark on the participation portion of your final grade.

Do not text in class. Arrive on time to class.

## Participation

A significant portion of your final grade (25%) will be tied to your participation in class. The participation grade has three parts:

--*class attendance*: come to class and be on time.

--*class participation*: read the texts for that day carefully and thoughtfully; come to class prepared to discuss them. Speak up. Ask questions. Debate and discuss with your peers.

--*quality of participation*: I expect you not just to speak in class, but also to speak in a way that is productive, thoughtful, and demonstrates deep reading.

Here's a general rubric for how I grade participation:

A range	This student has not only done the reading but has actively engaged with its main themes, completed homework thoughtfully, and participated in class discussion in such a way that demonstrates a command of the material.
B range	This student has completed the readings and the homework but may have done so cursorily; speaks in class occasionally in a way that demonstrates satisfactory but not excellent engagement with the material.
C range	This student may or may not have done the reading, and the homework does not reflect active engagement with the themes of the text; student does not speak in class, or occasionally does but does not demonstrate engagement with the material.
D range	This student demonstrated all the characteristics of a C range student, but may also have been disruptive to class and/or exhibited behavioral issues that compromised a constructive learning environment.

All work is due on the date listed on the syllabus. Late work will be penalized by one letter grade per day.

## Academic Honesty

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge, which states "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code." On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Conduct Code specifies

a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. [See the UF Conduct Code website for more information.](#) If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor in this class.

### **Accommodations**

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center. [See the “Get Started With the DRC” webpage on the Disability Resource Center site.](#) It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

**This course complies with all UF academic policies. For information on those policies and for resources for students, please see [this link](#).**

## **Schedule**

### **Week One**

**Tues Aug 26**

#### **What are Universities For? — Part 1**

##### **READ:**

Scott Yenor, “Higher Ed Reform in Red States,” *American Reformer*, January 17, 2023

Nicholas Confessore, “‘America is Under Attack’,” *New York Times*, Jan 20, 2024

Ana Peterson, “Did One of My Students Hate Me Enough to Lie to Get Me in Trouble?” *New York Times*, May 7, 2025

Ellisa Nadworny, “All the Ways Trump is Going After Colleges and Universities,” *NPR*, June 10, 2025

Christopher Rufo, et al “The Manhattan Statement,” July 17, 2025

### **Week Two**

**Tues Sep 2**

#### **What are Universities For? — Part 2**

##### **READ:**

Richard Ely, “American Colleges and German Universities” (1880)

DG Gilman, “The Benefits Which Society Derives From Universities”(1885)

William James, “The Social Value of the College Bred” (1907)

Carter Woodson, “The Mis-Education of the Negro” (1933)

Martin Luther King, “The Purpose of Education” (1947)

### **Week Three**

**Tues Sep 9**

#### **What Are Universities For? — Part 3**

##### **READ:**

Andrew Delbanco, *College: What it Was, Is, and Should Be* (2023)

**Week Four**  
**Tues Sep 16**

**Why is College So Expensive?**

READ:

Will Bunch, *After the Ivory Tower Falls* (2022)

DISCUSS: How to Find a Research Topic

**Week Five**  
**Tues Sep 23**

**The Conservative Critique over Time**

READ:

William F. Buckley, *God and Man at Yale* (1951)

Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987)

Roger Kimball, *Tenured Radicals* (1990)

Dinesh D'Souza, *Illiberal Education* (1991)

David Horowitz, *The Professors* (2006)

John Ellis, *The Breakdown of Higher Education* (2021)

Charlie Kirk, *The College Scam* (2022)

DISCUSS: Primary Sources

**Week Six**  
**Tues Sep 30**

**Race and the Universities**

READ:

Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities* (2014)

Ahmad Brown, et al, "Slavery and the University of Florida," *Alpata* (2021)

DISCUSS: Thesis and Argumentation

DUE: List of possible paper topics

**Week Seven**  
**Tues Oct 7**

**Race and the Universities, Part 2**

READ:

Christopher Rufo, "Critical Race Theory: What it is and How to Fight it," *Imprimis* (March 2021)

Heritage Foundation, "Reject Critical Race Theory"

Benjamin Wallace-Wells, "How a Conservative Activist Invented the Conflict Over Critical Race Theory," *The New Yorker*, June 18, 2021

Robin D.G. Kelley, "The Long War on Black Studies," *New York Review of Books*, June 17, 2023

Bradford Vivian, *Campus Misinformation*, Intro and Ch 1

DISCUSS: Academic Honesty

**Week Eight**  
**Tues Oct 14**

**Academic Freedom**

READ:

Louis Menand, "Academic Freedom Under Fire," *New Yorker*, April 29, 2024.

Henry Reichman, "The Future of Academic Freedom" (2019)

AAUP, 1915 Declaration of Principles

Stanley Kurtz, "What, to a Conservative, is Academic Freedom?" *National Review*, April 28, 2025

DISCUSS: Writing Style

**Week Nine**  
**Tues Oct 21**

**The Crisis of the Humanities**

READ:

Nathan Heller, "The End of the English Major," *New Yorker*, February 27, 2023.

Jackson Lears, "The Radicalism of Tradition: Teaching the Liberal Arts in a Managerial Age," *The Hedgehog Review*, Fall 2000.

Louis Menand, *The Marketplace of Ideas: Reform and Resistance in the American University*, ch. 2, "The Humanities Revolution," (2010)

DISCUSS: Citation

DUE: Project Proposals

**Week Ten**  
**Tues Oct 28**

**Institutional Neutrality**

READ:

AAUP, "On Institutional Neutrality" (2025)

Harry Kalven et al, "Kalven Committee: Report on the University's Role in Political and Social Action" (1967)

Peter W. Wood, "The Illusion of Institutional Neutrality," *National Association of Scholars*, April 22, 2024.

**Week Eleven**  
**Tues Nov 4**

**Writing Workshop**

**Week Twelve**

Tues Nov 11                No Class, Veterans Day

**Week Thirteen**

Tues Nov 18                CLASS: Presentations

**Week Fourteen**

Tues Nov 25                No Class, Thanksgiving

**Week Fifteen**

Tues Dec 2                CLASS: Presentations

Final Essays Due at NOON Tuesday Dec 9 on Canvas