HC 219 The Fight for Human Rights: One Woman's Crusade

Course Information:

Wednesday evenings, March 28\textsuperscript{th} – June 6\textsuperscript{th}, 5:45-9:15 pm, Loop Campus, Lewis 106
Faculty: Fred Wellisch, fwellisc@depaul.edu, 312-362-8046.

Course Description:

Sister Helen Prejean is a leading human rights activist in the United States. For the past 30 years, she has shaped conversation about equal treatment of all within the criminal justice system, especially persons of color and the materially poor. *Dead Man Walking*, the non-fiction account of her experience accompanying two condemned prisoners to their execution, has had a major influence on the discussion of violence, poverty, civil rights, criminal law, and social justice in the United States. As a compelling first-hand description, it inspired a film, an opera, and a play, which have been seen by millions of people worldwide. She also completed *The Death of Innocents*, a first-hand account of her years with two convicts whom she is convinced were innocent. In this book she discusses both the legal issues and social justice arguments surrounding capital punishment. Her written work and activism on behalf of victims of crime as well as prisoners and their families have impacted decisions by Pope John Paul II, numerous governors, senators, prosecutors and defense attorneys. In this course, we will study her work, discuss those issues, and consider what it takes to become a leader/advocate for human rights and social justice.

In 2011, Prejean donated her papers to the archives of the DePaul University library. The papers include correspondence with prisoners, families of victims, as well as persons of influence. Some of these have been digitized and embedded in the D2L course website. However, you will also have the opportunity to view her papers first-hand during our April 11\textsuperscript{th} class session. This will take place at the Richardson Library on the Lincoln Park campus.

Each spring Sister Helen spends a week at DePaul and is available to discuss with students and faculty the compelling issues she has written about. This year she will be in residence at DePaul the week of April 16\textsuperscript{th}. You will be able to meet her when she visits our class on April 18\textsuperscript{th}. During the same week you will be asked to attend as many other Sister Helen events as you can.

Course Competencies

In this course, you will develop one or two of the following competencies:

L-3 Can assess the social and personal value of civic engagement for achieving change. The L-3 competence is addressed by a focus on national and local civic issues from a systemic perspective.

H4 Can analyze power relations among racial, social, cultural, or economic groups in the US. The H4 competence is addressed by a focus on issues of race and class within the prosecution of crime, the choice of sentence, and the practice of execution.
H5: Can analyze issues and problems from a global perspective. Students demonstrate the
H5 competency by discussing how local communities (in the U.S and elsewhere)
frame and deal with global concerns.

FX: (For students whose Focus Areas are social justice, non-profit or change management):
Can assess strategies of individuals and groups seeking to bring about major social change.
The FX competence is addressed by a focus on the approaches to dissent, particularly an
assessment of the impact of each.

Course Learning Goals

Learning Experience

We will use a variety of learning strategies, including reading sources, watching films, participating in
class discussions, viewing primary materials in the archives, attending on-campus events involving Sister
Helen, maintaining a journal, and writing a short research paper for each competence.

Expected Outcomes

L-3: By the end of the course, students taking the course for L-3 should be able to:

1. Explain the impact an engaged citizen can make to improve the effectiveness of a society.
2. Articulate a strategy for personal civic engagement.
3. Engage in an activity that positively contributes to the civic life of a community.

H4: By the end of the course, students taking the course for H4 should be able to:

1. Identify major arguments regarding capital punishment in the U.S., and assess implications
   for social, economic, and cultural policy regarding race and class.
2. Describe and assess methods of peaceful dissent in advocating for social justice.

H5: By the end of the course, students taking the course for H5 should be able to:

1. Identify and analyze regional and global differences in the imposition of capital
   punishment.
2. Assess the United States’ approach to capital punishment in light of global practices.

FX: By the end of the course, students taking the course for FX should be able to:

1. Identify and illustrate skills and attribute required to engage in social activism.
2. Describe effective approaches to bringing about social change in the past.
3. Explain what an activist must do in order to change public opinion on a charged issue.

Course Resources
To buy your books, go to http://depaul-loop.bncollege.com.

Required Texts/Sources All Students:


The required sources below will be available either on the D2L website, on-e-reserves or directly through the instructor.

*For L3 and FX Competencies Only:*


*For H4 and H5 Competencies Only:*

Readings will be distributed by the instructor.

Recommended websites (useful for some assignments and final papers):

**Amnesty International**

[www.amnesty.org/en/death-penalty](http://www.amnesty.org/en/death-penalty). AI, as an international organization focused on human rights, strongly opposes execution and supports efforts to exonerate the falsely accused.

**Balanced Politics**

[www.balancedpolitics.org/death_penalty.htm](http://www.balancedpolitics.org/death_penalty.htm). This website offers pro and con arguments for multiple issues. It provides succinct summaries of points of view of proponents and opponents of execution by the state.

**Bridges to Life**

[www.bridgestolife.org](http://www.bridgestolife.org). This organization, founded by the family of a victim, brings together victims and incarcerated prisoners to promote mutual healing.

**Catholics Mobilizing Against the Death Penalty**

[catholicsmobilizing.org](http://catholicsmobilizing.org). This is the organization Sister Helen Prejean founded in 2010 to provide an educated workforce to support anti-death penalty legislation at the state level.

**Constitute**
https://www.constituteproject.org/. This website contains the constitutions of all the nations in the word and can be searched for specific rights and provisions, including those pertaining to crime and capital punishment.

Death Penalty Information Center

www.deathpenaltyinfo.org. This organization provides the most accurate and comprehensive data on capital punishment in the U.S. and other countries.

Innocence Project

http://www.medill.northwestern.edu/. This organization at Northwestern University Medill School of Journalist investigates cases of persons on death row who claim to be wrongfully convicted.

Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights

www.mvfr.org. This national organization of families of victims opposes the death penalty.

Restorative Justice

www.restorativejustice.org. This group emphasizes healing the wounds of victims, offenders and communities affected by crime.

Southern Poverty Law Center

splcenter.org. SPLC is a nonprofit civil rights organization dedicated to fighting hate and bigotry and seeking justice for the most vulnerable members of society.

United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner

http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CoreInstruments.aspx. This website contains the major international agreements and statements regarding human rights, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Wikipedia


Assessment of Learning

Course Grading Scale

A = 95 to 100  A- = 91 to 94  B+ = 88 to 90  
B = 85 to 87  B- = 81 to 84  C+ = 77 to 80  
C = 73 to 76  C- = 69 to 72  D+ = 65 to 68
Grades lower than a C- do not earn credit or competence at the School for New Learning.

It is assumed that you are taking the course for a letter grade. It is possible to take the course on a Pass/Fail basis. If you wish to do so, you must inform me of that wish by the end of week two. See additional information pertaining to the grade designations for undergraduate grades. See Pass/Fail Grading Options.

Course Structure

This course consists of 10 modules. The estimated time to complete each module is 1 week. Readings and Assignments listed under each module on the course calendar will be due at the beginning of class the following week.

Percentage distribution of Assessments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grading Category</th>
<th>Final Grade:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Journal entries</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Paper(s)</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Grading Policies and Practices

To complete the course, you must complete each of the assignments as described in the course calendar and submit them by the assigned deadline, usually at the beginning of the next class session. In addition, you must participate in class discussions.

One point will be deducted for each day work is late.

Evidence Students Will Submit

Class Participation

You are expected to do the appropriate reading for each class session by the specified due date. You are required to demonstrate that you have done so by participating in class discussions.

Journal Entries

In weeks 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11, you will submit a journal entry (around two-three typed double-spaced pages in length) on readings, sources or experiences from the course. This will make for a total of 5 journal entries by the end of the course. I will give you specific prompts on which to base your journals.
Papers

One 4-5 page research paper as specified for each competence. I will give you guidelines for these papers.

Criteria for Assessment

In assessing your class discussion, journal entries and final papers, I look for evidence that: a) you have absorbed and comprehended the various sources and events provided in the course; b) can relate those sources/events to your own experience as well as compare and contrast them with other material studied in the course; and c) thoughtfully engage with the larger socially-relevant issues, questions or conflicts raised or implied by the material. Evidence of one of these elements equates roughly with a C; evidence of two, with a B; evidence of three, with an A. Other factors such as class participation and attendance can also affect final grades.

In assessing written submissions, I expect work to conform to college-level standards of mechanics and presentation. I am happy to work with you on these points, on a draft-revision basis, if you so desire, within set deadlines. In making such assessments, I strive to be clear, flexible, forthright and empathetic.

Policies

Policy on Attendance

Students are expected to attend all class sessions and participate in all discussions. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to check with me or a fellow student about any information or handouts you may have missed. If you miss more than two classes, it will be difficult for you to meet the requirement for a passing grade.

Policy on Incompletes

It is expected that students will complete course assignments by specified due dates within the quarter. In circumstances that the instructor determines to be exceptional, when the student is unable to complete required coursework by the established due dates, the student may request that a grade of Incomplete (IN) be issued. This requires must be made formally, in writing, by completing an IN Contract Form signed by both student and professor. The form specifies the final date by which all outstanding coursework must be completed. Failure to submit outstanding work by the specified due date will result in a grade change from I to F or FX for each enrolled competence, along with serious academic and/or financial consequences. After the final submission deadline (specified on the contract) the student will have no further opportunities to submit work for a passing grade. See also: Incomplete Policy

This course includes and adheres to the college and university policies described in the links below:

Academic Integrity Policy
Course Withdrawal Timelines and Grade/Fee Consequences
Accommodations Based on the Impact of a Disability
Protection of Human Research Participants
Course Resources
University Center for Writing-based Learning
SNL Writing Guide
Dean of Students Office