

SSP90
THE POLITICS OF MORALITY IN AMERICA

Fall 2004
Tuesdays and Thursdays 1:10-2:25pm
Maginnes Hall 475

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This course examines the social and moral debates that have become politically divisive in the United States. From pornography, sex education and gay rights, to capital punishment, abortion, physician-assisted suicide and gambling, we will examine the social origins of moral politics, the emergence and growth of social movements around these issues, and the ways in which battles over morality continue to shape our society. The seminar will begin with a focused look at the abortion debate—one of the most divisive issues in the country today and the only issue over which public opinion has grown more polarized over the last thirty years. We will then broaden our discussion to consider other moral issues selected by seminar participants.

The seminar is different than most courses at Lehigh in that the readings, discussion, and assignments are not set in advance by the professor, but instead come from the interests and questions of the students as the seminar progresses. This syllabus is thus necessarily incomplete; we will begin with a case study of the abortion debate in the United States as an example of the politics of morality, but what topics we examine after this case study is up to the group.

The readings and discussions seminar participants choose will serve as the backdrop for the most important part of the course: original survey-based research projects. Seminar participants will each formulate a research question around one or more politicized moral issues, collect data on their question using a survey, then write an original research paper based on the results. We will design the survey together, and every seminar participant will have some responsibility for administering it to people around the Lehigh Valley. As the tutorial progresses, we will devote increasing amounts of class time to discussions of survey design, the wording of survey questions, survey response rates, interpretation of survey results, and other issues that arise as each seminar participant works through their own project.

Learning in this seminar is based not on lectures, but on the active participation of everyone in the class. In many ways, your final grade in the class will depend on the work of others because so much depends on how well the seminar formulates and prepares the survey as a group. You will leave the seminar with hands-on experience with every step in the process of social research—something many seniors at Lehigh never have the opportunity to do. You will also leave with a better understanding of how the politics of morality operate and affect all of us in the United States.

Course Requirements

1) Attendance and participation: Much of the course depends on group projects and the teamwork of everyone in the class. Preparation for and attendance at every tutorial session and active participation in discussion is thus particularly important in this course. Students who miss more than two sessions over the course of the semester—*for any reason*—will have their participation grade for the course reduced. This is also true for students who come to class without having completed the assigned readings and/or who do not take an active role in seminar discussions.

2) Group projects: Every seminar participant will be part of a small group that must research and write a report on a particular moral issue that has become politicized in recent years. Each report should be 5-7 pages should include an annotated bibliography of the 4-8 most important books or articles on the topic. These reports will also be presented to the class as a whole. They are due September 14th. Don't worry; we will talk a lot more about these projects in class!

3) Survey: We will be conducting a survey as a team, and every seminar participant will administer the survey to different people in the Lehigh Valley. The exact procedures and expectations for the survey will depend on the specific topics and focus chosen by everyone, but they will certainly include distributing the survey and collecting and entering the results into a common seminar data bank. Surveys must be administered and all data entered no later than October 28th.

4) Research papers: Everyone in the seminar must write a 10-12 final paper analyzing a research question of their choosing based in the politics of morality. These papers must be written individually, but seminar participants are encouraged to discuss their research questions as a group and make use of the data collected by everyone through the seminar survey. Final papers are due November 30th.

Final grades will be determined as follows:

15% completion of data collection and entry for seminar survey

20% group presentation and report

25% class attendance and participation

40% final paper

Special situations: Any student who has a documented disability and is in need of academic accommodations should notify me and Cheryl Ashcroft, Director of the Office of Academic Support Services (610-758-4152). Accommodations will be individualized and in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1992.

An important note about academic honesty: Plagiarism and cheating are both forbidden by University policy (see your Student Handbook). Ideas as well as every word in your writing must be your own unless contained in quotation marks and properly cited. This

includes text taken from the Web. Plagiarism or cheating will, *at minimum*, result in an F for the entire course along with other sanctions by the university. If you have questions or concerns about acceptable ways to use and cite outside material in your writing, please see me; I'm happy to help. Lehigh also has a special website devoted to academic integrity: <http://www.lehigh.edu/~indost/integrity.html>

Initial Class Schedule

August 24: Introduction to the course

Read course syllabus thoroughly; make sure you understand course goals, expectations and requirements, and deadlines

August 26: The roots of the abortion debate

Luker, Kristin. 1984. *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Chapters 2-3 (pp.11-65)

August 31: Understanding the contemporary politics of abortion

Luker, Kristin. 1984. *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Chapters 4-6 (pp.66-157)

September 2: What do people believe about abortion?

Luker, Kristin. 1984. *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Chapters 7-8 (pp.158-215)

September 7: Impassioned pleas on abortion

Hill, Paul J. 1993. "Should We Defend Born and Unborn Children with Force?" (unpublished but widely circulated essay)

Muller, Jerry Z. 1995. "The Conservative Case for Abortion," *New Republic* 218 (issue 8-9, August 21 & 28): 27-29.

Sloan, Don. 1997. "Abortion Is Not Murder," pp. 40-47 (chapter 4) in *Abortion: Opposing Viewpoints*, Tamara L. Roleff, ed.. San Diego CA: Greenhaven Press.

September 9: Beginning to think about survey research

Schuman, Howard. 2002. "Sense and Nonsense About Surveys," *Contexts* 1(2):40-46.

September 14: GROUP PRESENTATIONS

September 16: GROUP PRESENTATIONS

September 21: Digging in

Converse, Jean M., and Stanley Presser. 1986. *Survey Questions: Handcrafting the Standardized Questionnaire*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Other Important Dates

October 7: Pacing Break; no class

October 28: Deadline for administering surveys and entering data

November 25: Thanksgiving; no class

November 30: Student presentations of final papers

December 2: Student presentations of final papers