

Core 102  
History and the Modern World  
Roger Williams University  
2:00 - 3:25, 3:30 - 4:55, T, F  
SE 201  
Fall Semester, 2004

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Hours: T, Th: 11:00-12:30  
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## **COURSE INTRODUCTION**

I can start by introducing myself, I guess. I'm Mike Swanson of the American Studies and History programs in the Feinstein College of Arts and Sciences. My background is cultural history. I took my Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy degrees from Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland Ohio, majoring in American Studies. I began here in the American Studies program in 1972 (wow, that's a long time).. I've always had an interest in material culture (the study of things people make) as well as intellectual history, and that interest took me into the historic preservation field about twenty years ago. I proposed the first Historic Preservation major here, and I expect to continue teaching in it from time to time, though I returned to my roots here in the College of Arts and Sciences in the fall of 2000.

## **ABOUT THE CORE PROGRAM ITSELF:**

The Core Program at Roger Williams University centers on three recurring questions in Western thought: "Who am I?" "What can I know?", and "Based on what I know, how should I act?". No single academic experience can provide satisfactory answers to these questions: five of them, working in concert, at least introduce the perspectives, which traditionally have provided tentative answers to these questions. Core 102 uses the disciplines of History and Political Science to look at socio/political answers to the question "Who am I?", the methodology of history and political science to explore "what can I know?", and at the results of behavior based on former answers to these questions to suggest avenues of responsible action in today's society

The course description gives an insight into the content of Core 102. It is more opaque concerning the rationale for a Core Curriculum in the first place. There was a time when the idea of a Core Curriculum would have made no sense: not because the idea seemed ridiculous, but because there was within the western world, at least, a universal agreement concerning what constituted a fit education. Throughout most of the periods we're studying, this was the case. Though the content varied across time, the categories of content proved remarkably stable. It wasn't until a little over a century ago that the idea of "electives" was put forth in academic circles. The culprit was a President of Harvard University.

A decade or two before, the idea of specialties began: not as an undergraduate mode of investigation, but as what one did in graduate school. Here, the first American venture was based on a German model, and Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore was the grand innovator. Now, of course, specialty education is shattering the cohesion of what Thomas Jefferson called the "Academical Village". Perhaps that's a bit too strong: "threatening to shatter" might be a more appropriate turn of phrase. Core Curricula such as the one at Roger Williams University are responses to this sense of fragmentation. We are participating in an attempt to forge a universal educational experience for all members of the Roger Williams student community, regardless of major, regardless of age, regardless of the majors they take

or the schools in which those majors are located. This might be a brilliant exercise: it might also be a noble folly. I have the kind of mind that can hold both of these views simultaneously. It is worth the effort, in my judgment, to bring this diverse group into a common enterprise. I'm planning to have a good time doing it.

Each faculty member of the Core 102 team shapes the general content of the course to his or her individual interests and expertise. My sections will use different materials and in a different sequence, than you'll find in the other sections. At this stage of its development, the Internet is perhaps the most democratic medium ever invented. It is certainly the most potent educator since the invention of moveable type. I make that statement fully recognizing we've a few other means of disseminating information which have been invented since Gutenberg's day: movies, radio, television, to name the big three. Yet none of these allows the level of public access that the Internet does.

My convictions about the potential of the Internet have caused me to emphasize its use in all the courses I teach, including this one. My sections of Core 102 have their own website:

<http://ideaofdemocracy.homestead.com>

Notes on each week's reading and discussion activities will be found there. Assignments and links to additional resources will, as well. Bookmark the URL. There will be one page of notes and assignments per week, and these will develop as the semester progresses. All required reading assignments will be posted on the class website. **Shortly I will cease distributing a paper version of the syllabus. Those who want to have a paper copy can print the Internet version themselves.**

## THE WORK AHEAD

The Core Readings:

At the center of Core 102 are a series of classic texts which frame the central idea of this course, *The Idea of Democracy*. Faculty commonly refer to this as the "Core Canon". We will use these texts to explore some of the nuances of Democracy, and some of the challenges to it, as well. This year we are publishing a revised and expanded version of the Core Canon. As sometimes happens, the project is running a little behind schedule, and on the date I write this (August 26, 2004), I'm not certain of the date on which it will be delivered to the University. Not to worry, however, I have all the documents in electronic form, and will post them to the class website. *You will need a three ring notebook into which you will place the documents you download. One of the things I'm asking you to do is to mark up these documents, using both highlighting and marginal notes. I will evaluate this. More later.*

Additional readings will be assigned from the Internet. These will also be included in your notebook, as will occasional research projects and other activities I assign. .

## YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES.

1. Keep Current with the assignments of the week, and the work of the day. These you will find at <http://ideaofdemocracy.homestead.com>. On the left hand side of the home

page you'll see a week by week list. Click to reach the assignments of the appropriate week. You will notice that there is a special mailbox for this class: core102@verizon.net. Use this if you have any questions, or if you need to inform me about an absence. I will have the notes for the following week posted by 9:00 the Thursday night previous. You are responsible for visiting the class website before Friday's Class.

This semester I'm linking the class to the **Blackboard** system. Every Roger Williams University student has a **Blackboard** account. Teachers who opt to use this system have a number of useful communications tools, including e-mailing abilities, message boards, augmented calendar possibilities and a "mailbox" which allows easy delivery of student papers. Because you're all new to Roger Williams, I've invited the Internet Technology person in charge of the Blackboard system to come to class and introduce it to you. I will also distribute written instructions about the system.

**ALL WORK FOR THIS COURSE WHICH IS WRITTEN OUTSIDE OF CLASS MUST BE SUBMITTED THROUGH THE BLACKBOARD MAILBOX UNLESS OTHER INSTRUCTIONS ARE GIVEN.**

2. Come to class prepared. To keep track of whose being faithful and who isn't, I will take attendance daily. Be more than a warm body, however. Do the readings, and come prepared to discuss them and to raise issues about things you don't understand. Use the class e-mail address to ask questions, too.

3. I will be requiring you to read a number of documents which are located on the internet. Purchase a 3-ring loose leaf binder, download and print these, enter them into your notebook, and bring them to class. If you don't have a computer and printer, remember that you have access to those in the Library and on the second floor of the Gabelli School of Business.

#### **EVALUATION AND GRADES**

I don't like to do it but it comes with the territory. One of my goals for this course is to help you become more articulate and persuasive in presenting your ideas at the same time you are learning to frame questions, access information and form judgments and solutions. Consequently I'm going to have you do as much writing for me as I can find time to evaluate. Your Mid-term Examination will be take-home, and parts of your final examination will be take-home, as well. In terms of proportions of your grade, I expect to use the following:

**MIDTERM** (date to be announced) **20%** **This must be submitted through Blackboard.**

**FINAL EXAM** (date to be announced) **25%** **The take-home part of this must also be submitted through Blackboard.**

**PAPERS (2) 30%.** I will weight the last paper more heavily than the first. The first will count approximately 10%, the second, 20%

**YOUR NOTEBOOK** will count **15% for its content.** I will be looking at how well you located the information I asked you to locate, and at how well you solved the problem or thought about the issue involved. The *completeness* of the journal will count as well, both here and as I evaluate your Class Participation.

**CLASS PARTICIPATION** Including Preparation for Class, 10%

I will have one hard point of data here: your signatures on the class sign in sheets. Another will be your turning in your work on time! In addition, I will recognize your frequency of participation in class, your use of e-mail to clarify what you're working on, your use of my office hours, and other evidence of the level of work you're putting into things.

**SPECIAL EVENTS.** This section of Core 102 is participating in the Freshman Year Experience. We're sponsoring some special evening events, approximately one per month. I'll be taking attendance at them (and, of course, going myself).

**YOUR FINAL PAPER.** Length: no more than 5 pages, typed, double spaced.

**DUE:** Friday, December 10<sup>th</sup> (the last Friday class)

**TOPIC:** I will ask you to give your consideration to the following:

Two of the ideas which we have been considering all semester are **REASON** and **DEMOCRACY**. I want you to think about the relationship of these two ideas in the context of a society. In other words...

**IS DEMOCRACY NECESSARY FOR A SOCIETY BASED ON REASON, AND IS REASON NECESSARY TO MAKE DEMOCRACY OF BENEFIT TO THE SOCIETY PRACTICING IT? IF SO WHY, AND IF NOT, WHY NOT?**

As you write this paper, you will be required to use at least these documents: **Cicero's *On the Laws***, **John Milton's *Areopagitica***, and **Emanuel Kant's *What is Enlightenment?***. The best papers will use many other documents from the course as well.

#### **CLASSROOM PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES**

Our primary focus will be the documents in The Core Canon. These are primary source materials, written by thinkers spanning 2,500 years. Primary materials are the bricks out of which narrative history is constructed. The readings I have chosen are designed to focus on several crucial themes, among them:

1. What is "The Democratic Idea," as first espoused by the Greeks and then modified by the Romans in Classical Times?
2. Civic Theory: What is "society" and how can "Reason" be applied to creating rational government? What is the appropriate relationship between "Authority" (government) and the civil state (the governed)?
3. Who should participate in a democratic society, and what does participation mean? How has that meaning changed across time?
4. Is "Democracy" appropriate for all societies and cultures? Is it appropriate for any?
5. Does Democracy have a future?

I spend a lot of time in "close reading" of texts; probing for implications in the structure of the argument. Your readings will be open and used during class, but only if you have them along. So...

### **ALWAYS BRING YOUR "NOTEBOOKS WITH ASSIGNED READINGS WITH YOU**

Generally my classes are pretty informal. I talk, you talk, and out of the conversation comes knowledge of a sort. We are not going to construct a linear narrative this semester. I am aiming to provide you with a richer, more complex, and more sophisticated understanding of *The Democratic Idea*. Much of your final understanding will result from what you piece together yourself. Some of you will be much more comfortable with this approach than others will be, at least initially. If you are a person who requires a *lot* of structure you're going to have to switch gears and trust the system I'm using. If this is difficult or impossible for you, there are other sections of Core 102 that are organized differently. Enrolments are very full, but you may be able to find someone who would trade sections with you

### **ATTENDANCE POLICY**

I do take attendance on a regular basis, using a sign-in sheet which circulates around the room. You are responsible for making sure you sign in on the sheet. I try to be as liberal in excusing absences as I can be. Excuses for illness, family emergency, and the like are freely given, as long as I am notified by e-mail. USE THE CLASS E-MAIL ADDRESS. [core102@verizon.net](mailto:core102@verizon.net) Despite your absence, you are still required to keep up with what's going on. Use the website: <http://ideaofdemocracy.homestead.com>

The class meets twice a week, so each unexcused absence is the equivalent of a half week's work missed. **More than three unexcused absences will have a negative impact upon your grade. More than five unexcused absences and I'll suggest you withdraw from the course.**