# First Year Preceptorial Prof. Stephen Schmidt

# FPR 100-12 Fall 2016

**MWF 10:30-11:35 Lippman 010**

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and by appointment

Nexus Web page: http://nexus.union.edu/

## Learning Outcomes

First year preceptorial is a course in reading, writing, and thinking. The goal of the course is to increase your ability to form and articulate opinions about complex critical issues. To do this, you need to develop three skills. The first is to be able to read the ideas of others and understand the arguments they advance. The second is to be able to discuss those ideas with your classmates and offer constructive commentary on them. The third is to synthesize your own views about those ideas and express them in well-constructed (and carefully revised) writing. You will rely on these skills both during your time at Union, and beyond; they are the foundation on which a successful college education is built.

This section of preceptorial will focus on the problem of inequality. We live in a society that maintains that all men are created equal – but political, social, and economic inequality surround us. What are the consequences of this inequality? What causes it? What can we do about it, and what should we do about it, or not do about it? In this section we will look at historical, biological, social, religious, and philosophical viewpoints about the nature of inequality and the problems it creates. We will consider a variety of explanations of why inequality exists and how we should deal with it in our own lives.

## Course Requirements

The primary requirements of this course are four papers, one on each of the first four sections of the reading list. The first draft of each paper will be worth 10% of your grade, and the final draft will be worth another 10%. The course will also feature a number of shorter written assignments, some of them online, which will count for 10% of your grade. Performance in class discussion will count for the final 10% of your grade.

## Grading Policy

## Papers must be handed in at the start of class on the due date unless you have arranged an extension with me in advance of the due date. Late papers will be penalized 10% per day late. Participation in class discussion is mandatory, and I will call people randomly to ensure that everyone in the class is given an equal chance to participate. On any day you are not in class, you are not participating in discussion, and will receive a 0 for that day’s discussion unless you have conferred with me about your absence in advance and have an acceptable reason for being absent.

## Nexus

This course will use the Nexus online software for a variety of course-related tasks, including course announcements and online discussion of the readings. The Nexus software is at <http://nexus.union.edu>, and you should already be registered as a student in First-Year Preceptorial, FPR-100, section 12.

## A Note on the Readings

In this class we will be reading a variety of authors with different perspectives on the question of inequality. On occasion their views will disagree with one another. You should not assume that I agree with (or disagree with) any particular author; part of the goal of this course is to develop the skill of understanding and assessing conflicting opinions for yourself. You also will not agree with everything you read in this course. In such cases, identify what you do think, and why you do not agree with the author; then present your reasoning in class discussion and on written assignments.

**Understanding the Readings**

The purpose of this course is not to merely read the material, but to understand it and to understand how it relates to the other readings in the course. I will hand out study questions for most of the reading assignments and will expect you to prepare answers to those questions for class discussion. I will also expect you to prepare your own questions as you read the assignment that you can present in class discussion. I may ask additional questions in class that are not on the study guide, and I may ask you to compare two readings while we are discussing one of them. I strongly recommend that you read each assignment twice; once to get the gist of it, and a second time to prepare answers and your own questions, and to consider the material in the context of the other readings. Some of the more difficult assignments may require a third reading; those will be short enough to give you time to go over them three times, or more times if you feel you are continuing to get new meaning from them.

**Online Discussion of the Readings**

This course will include an online component, through the Nexus software, in which we discuss the readings in a written form as well as in class discussion. About once every week or two, I will assign a question for written response online – it may be one of the study questions, or a separate question. Each student will post their written response on the Nexus discussion board, and make two follow-up posts replying to another student’s initial response. Both your initial response and your follow-ups will count towards your grade on short written assignments.

**Accommodations**

Union College provides reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions and temporary disabilities resulting in difficulties accessing learning opportunities. All students needing services must first register with Accommodative Services, located in Reamer 303. It is strongly recommended that students request accommodations in the first two weeks of the term. Last minute requests can be denied.

**Rescheduled Class**

There will be no classes on Monday, October 3rd, due to Rosh Hashanah, nor on Wednesday, October 12th, due to Yom Kippur. There will be makeup classes to replace them; I will consult the class about possible times before scheduling the makeup.

**And a Small Note of Caution**

There are two professors named S. Schmidt at Union College, and to make it worse, both of us are economics professors. I am Stephen J. Schmidt; my namesake is Shelton S. Schmidt. We’re not related, and we don’t look anything alike, so it’s easy to tell us apart in person. Most paperwork will list us either by our full first names, or by our middle initials – I am Schmidt, S.J., and he is Schmidt, S.S. I hope there will not be too much confusion, but if you have to do paperwork with the Registrar or some other arm of the college, please make sure they know which of the two S. Schmidts is the one you are dealing with.  
  
**Reading List**

1. The Experience of Inequality (Weeks 1-2)

\* Douglass, Fredrick. *Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass*

Fitzhugh, George. *Cannibals All!*, selections

Stanton, Elizabeth Cady, selected writings

2. The Causes of Inequality (Weeks 3-4)

\* Gould, Stephen Jay. *The Mismeasure of Man*  
 \* Sowell, Thomas. *Race and Culture*  
 \* hooks, bell. *Where We Stand: Class Matters*

3. Understanding Inequality: Religious Perspectives (Weeks 5-7)  
 + *The Bible*

\* *The Qur’an*

*\* Bhagavad Gita*, selections  
 \* Tzu, Lao. *Tao Te Ching*

4. Understanding Inequality: Philosophical Perspectives (Weeks 8-9)

\* Plato, *The Republic*

### Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. “Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among

Men,” part 2

Marx, Karl. “The Communist Manifesto” and other selected writings

Nietzsche, Frederick, selected writings

5. Reflections on Inequality (Week 10)

\* Bradbury, Ray. *Fahrenheit 451*.

Books marked \* are required and may be purchased at the college bookstore. The book marked + (the Bible) is required, but many students own one already; you may use any version you have, even if it is not the same version that is on sale at the bookstore. You are also welcome to use different translations of the books in sections 3 and 4 (none of which were originally written in English) if you happen to already have them. Other readings will be distributed in class or on the Nexus website.