PSCI 241
Meritocracy
Spring 2017

Professor Darel E. Paul
Schapiro 227
597-2327
dpaul@williams.edu

Office Hrs.: Tuesdays 2:00-3:00pm, Fridays 10:30am-11:30am, and by appointment

Course Description

Although an infinitesimal number American undergraduates and graduate students have degrees from Harvard or Yale Universities, 33% of the top decision makers in the second Obama administration did. Is this fact a positive sign that the United States is governed by its most talented and capable members who have risen through hard work and equality of opportunity? Or a negative one pointing to the power of a corrupt and self-selecting elite?

This course explores the theme of meritocracy – rule by the intellectually talented – in comparative perspective. We will look at both old and new arguments regarding the proper role and definition of merit in political society as well as take the measure of meritocracy in present-day Singapore, France, and the United States. The course concludes with a focus on the current debate over class, power, and inequality in America.

Readings

This course is a seminar. The level and amount of reading is challenging but certainly not beyond any student’s capabilities. All students will be expected to keep up with the readings during the semester and contribute constructively to class discussion.

This course is structured around four books and a course reader in two parts. The books are:

1. Stuart Ritchie, Intelligence: All That Matters (2016)

You may pick up Part I of the reader in the packet room (51 Park St.) now. All books excepting the Gumbel text are available for purchase at Water Street Books or from your favorite on-line retailer. Bourdieu is also available on 4-hour reserve at Sawyer Library. The library is working on access to the other titles.
Gumbel is only available in English as an ebook which must be purchased through Amazon. If you read French, you might consider a physical copy of the original French version, *Élite academy: Enquête sur la France malade des ses grandes écoles* (2013). You can order the French text through Water Street Books or your favorite on-line retailer.

**Course expectations**

Our course is a seminar, not a lecture. That means everyone is expected to participate in class discussion, which will occupy the bulk of our time together each day.

In order for all of us to get the most out of this course, all students are expected to faithfully keep up with the readings throughout the entire term. Readings assigned for a particular class session will be the topic for that day’s discussion, and therefore should be completed prior to class. Please come to each class prepared to discuss and to learn from one another.

Finally, regular attendance and participation is valued, expected, and essential for you to succeed both in this course and at Williams generally. Please notify me (preferably by email) if you will be missing class for any reason.

**Course requirements**

- **Two course papers** – During the semester you will write two analytic papers responding to a prompt based on the readings. The first paper is based on the ‘Theories of meritocracy’ section of the course while the second is based on the ‘Meritocracy in comparative perspective’ section. Prompts will be handed out in class approximately one week before the paper is due. Papers should have cover pages, 1-in. margins, double-spacing, and 10-pt. font minimum. Details on length and due dates are as follows:

  1. Theory paper: 1700-2500 words, due Friday, March 10, 5:00pm
  2. Comparative paper: 2500-3500 words, due Friday, April 21, 5:00pm

- **Take-home final exam** – At the end of the semester you will write a final exam. This will be a take-home format to be completed over a 24-hour period of your choosing during the week May 13-21. The exam will be focused on the final ‘Class and democracy in contemporary America’ section of the course but will also ask you to draw upon the previous sections as well.

- **Discussion questions** – A minimum of twelve (12) times you will submit one or two insightful and/or interesting questions for discussion based on the assigned reading(s) for that day. Possible questions might explore unclear passages in the readings, point out notable gaps in an author’s discussion, or offer critiques of an author’s argument. The best questions will be framed by a brief (<300 words) discussion. I will use these questions to guide class discussion each day, including calling on you in class based on your remarks! Please use our course Glow page to turn them in. Questions are due by
8:30am the day of class. Glow will be locked automatically at that time and will not accept any questions submitted after the deadline. If you are a late riser, submit your questions the night before class. Questions will be graded on a check plus-check-check minus scale.

- **Class participation** – Regular attendance and contributions to discussion are important, valued and expected. You are allowed two free passes for missing class without an excuse. Excused absences include personal illness, family emergencies, religious holidays, job interviews, and the like (*note that the Thursday before spring break is NOT an excused absence*). Three or more unexcused absences will result in a reduction in your class participation grade.

**Honor Code**

While you may consult with your friends, fellow classmates, professors, and printed sources regarding the ideas discussed in this class, all written work must ultimately be yours and yours alone. **On papers, be scrupulous in avoiding plagiarism.** Be sure to use quote marks when quoting directly and cite appropriately. **On the take-home final exam, do not consult any secondary sources (this includes the internet) and do not discuss your ideas or your written work with anyone.**

**Grades**

Your final course grade will be determined by the formula:

- Theory paper 20%
- Comparative paper 30%
- Take-home final exam 30%
- Discussion questions 10%
- Class participation 10%

A NOTE ON DEADLINES

Papers are due at 5:00pm on the days mentioned in the syllabus. Early papers are always welcome; **late papers will be penalized one partial letter grade per 24 hours late** (e.g. from A to A- for 1-24 hours late, A to A-/B+ for 25-48 hours late, etc.).

This is a very mild penalty. If you find that you are unable to make a deadline due to forces under your control – and that includes work in other classes! – **please do not ask for an extension.** Take the late penalty and use the extra time to write the best paper you can. A poor paper turned in on time is rarely better than an excellent paper a day or two late.

Sometimes being late is simply part of leading a busy life. You are all adults and can make adult choices about how to perform in this class. Weighing costs and benefits in a world of finite time is very much part of being an adult. No stigma at all is attached to late papers. However, a late penalty will be.


# Course calendar

## INTRODUCTION TO MERITOCRACY

### Wednesday
**Feb. 1**
**Introduction to the class**
- no readings

### Tuesday
**Feb. 7**
**The 2016 backlash against meritocracy**
- a medley of recent opinion pieces on Brexit, Trump, and populism

### Thursday
**Feb. 9**
**Meritocracy, equality, democracy**
- Daniel Bell, “On meritocracy and equality,” *The Public Interest* 29 (Fall 1972), 29-68.

### Tuesday
**Feb. 14**
**The inevitable elite I: History**

### Thursday
**Feb. 16**
**The inevitable elite II: Biology**

## THEORIES OF MERITOCRACY

### Tuesday
**Feb. 21**
**An aristocracy of virtue I: Ancient Greece**
Thursday
Feb. 23

**An aristocracy of virtue II: Ancient China**

**Tuesday
Feb. 28

**Aristocracy and republican government**

Thursday
March 2

**Aristocracy and democracy**

**MERITOCRACY IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE**

Tuesday
March 7

**Meritocracy in Singapore I**
Thursday  
March 9  
**Meritocracy in Singapore II**


Tuesday  
March 14  
**Meritocracy in Singapore III**


Thursday  
March 16  
**Meritocracy in France I**

- Bourdieu, Prologue & Part I

*SPRING BREAK*

Tuesday  
April 3  
**Meritocracy in France II**

- Bourdieu, Part II

Thursday  
April 6  
**Meritocracy in France III**

- Bourdieu, Part III

Tuesday  
April 11  
**Meritocracy in France IV**

- Bourdieu, Parts IV-V

Thursday  
April 13  
**Meritocracy in France V**

- Gumbel, entire book
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Textures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Meritocracy in America I</td>
<td>Frank, Introduction &amp; chs. 1-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Meritocracy in America II</td>
<td>Frank, chs. 4-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Meritocracy in America III</td>
<td>Frank, chs. 9-11 &amp; Conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Meritocracy in America IV</td>
<td>Buckley, chs. 1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Meritocracy in America V</td>
<td>Buckley, Part III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Meritocracy in America VI</td>
<td>Buckley, Part IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Meritocracy in America VII</td>
<td>Buckley, Part V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Meritocracy: the problem or the solution?</td>
<td>TBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>