



# WashU Fall 2018 Instructor Report for FL2018.L57.RelPol.275.01 - The Politics of Religion Crime and Punishment in the United States (Cyrus O'Brien)

Project Title: **WashU Fall 2018 Course Evaluations**

Project Audience: **20**

Responses Received: **19**

Response Ratio: **95.00%**

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## Report Comments

Welcome to your Instructor Report for WashU Course Evaluations. Below you will find response data from the specified course section. Responses to personalized questions appear at the bottom of the report.

The intention of this report is to provide feedback, and also to prompt improvement in areas that may be lacking. This report is accessible to appropriate department level and school level users, as determined by your school. We appreciate your dedication to our learning community at Washington University.

If you have questions about this report, please contact [evals@wustl.edu](mailto:evals@wustl.edu)

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Creation Date: **Tue, Jan 08, 2019**

## Course and Instructor Evaluation

Past research shows that the students' answers to any one question can be noisy, more prone to biases, and provide less useful data for evaluating courses and instructors. Since interpreting individual questions, including their relative highs and lows, can easily lead to inaccurate conclusions due to low reliability, individual question responses are not available in any standard report.

However, combining students' responses to several questions aimed at measuring the same underlying attribute can improve the quality of the measures. Therefore, the statistics displayed for each attribute (mean, median, mode, and standard deviation) are calculated from the grouped responses to all the questions in each topical block.

All questions below use a 5-point response scale: 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree

### Learning

Competency Statistics		Value
Mean		4.57
Median		5.00
Mode		5
Standard Deviation		0.57
1. I have found the course intellectually challenging and stimulating	2. I have learned something which I consider valuable	
3. My interest in the subject has increased as a consequence of this course	4. I have learned and understood the subject materials of this course	

### Organization

Competency Statistics		Value
Mean		4.33
Median		5.00
Mode		5
Standard Deviation		0.86
1. Instructor's explanations were clear	2. Course materials were well prepared and carefully explained	
3. Proposed objectives agreed with those actually taught so I knew where the course was going	4. Instructor gave lectures that facilitated taking notes	

### Enthusiasm (Cyrus O'Brien)

Competency Statistics		Value
Mean		4.70
Median		5.00
Mode		5
Standard Deviation		0.54
1. Instructor was enthusiastic about teaching the course	2. Instructor was dynamic and energetic in conducting the course	
3. Instructor enhanced presentations with the use of humor	4. Instructor's style of presentation held my interest during class	

Individual rapport (Cyrus O'Brien)

Competency Statistics		Value
Mean		4.79
Median		5.00
Mode		5
Standard Deviation		0.47

1. Instructor was friendly towards individual students	2. Instructor made students feel welcome in seeking help/advice in or outside of class
3. Instructor had a genuine interest in individual students	4. Instructor was adequately accessible to students during office hours or after class

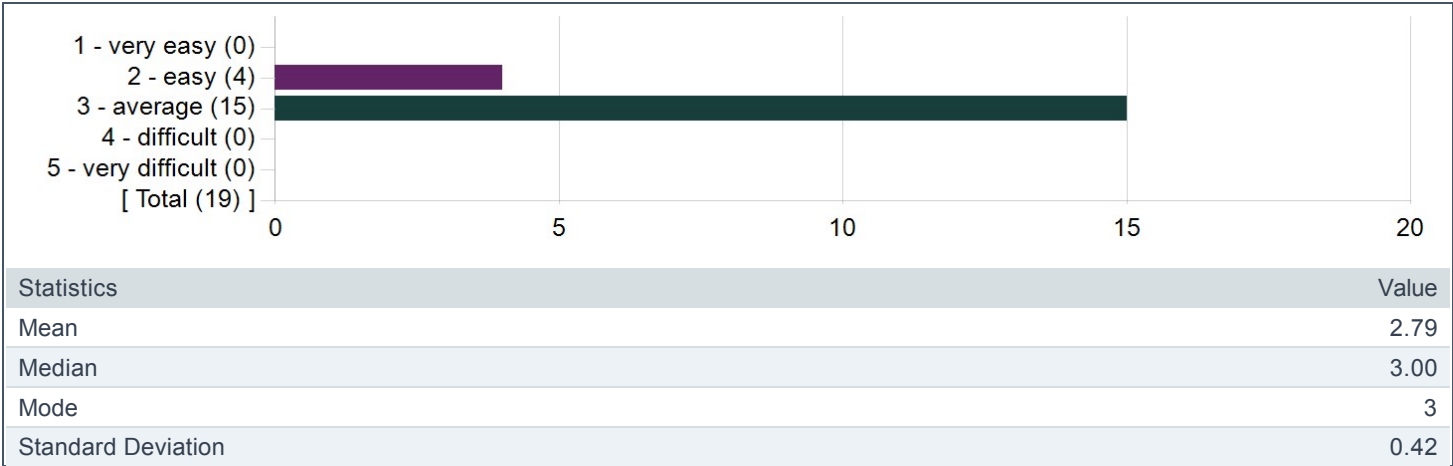
Comparison Detail for Course and Instructor Evaluation



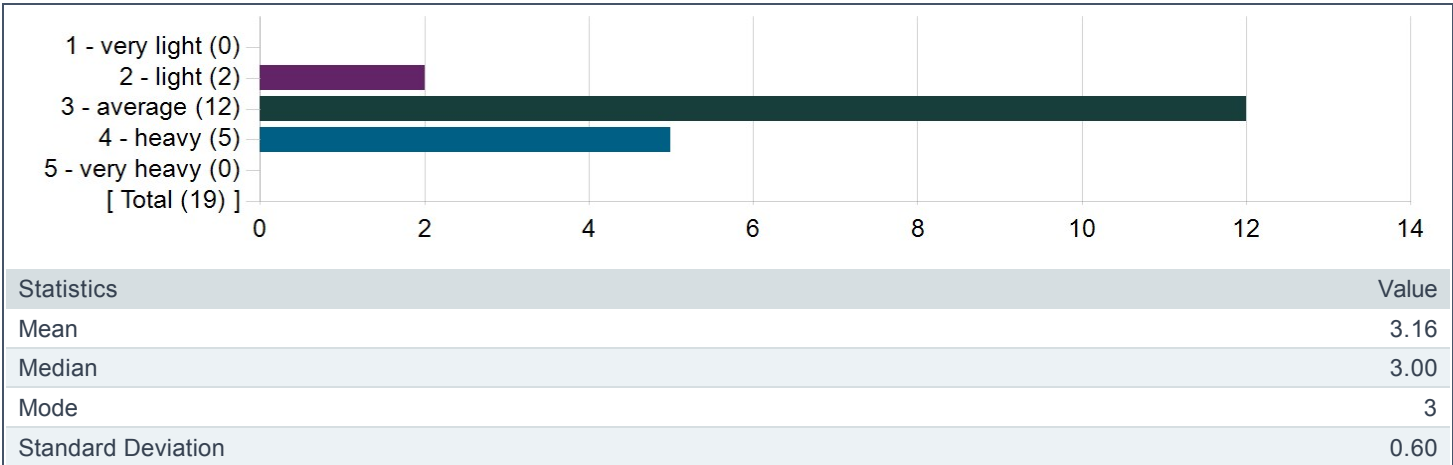
Varied Rating Scale Responses

The varied rating scale responses are statistically reliable as individual questions.

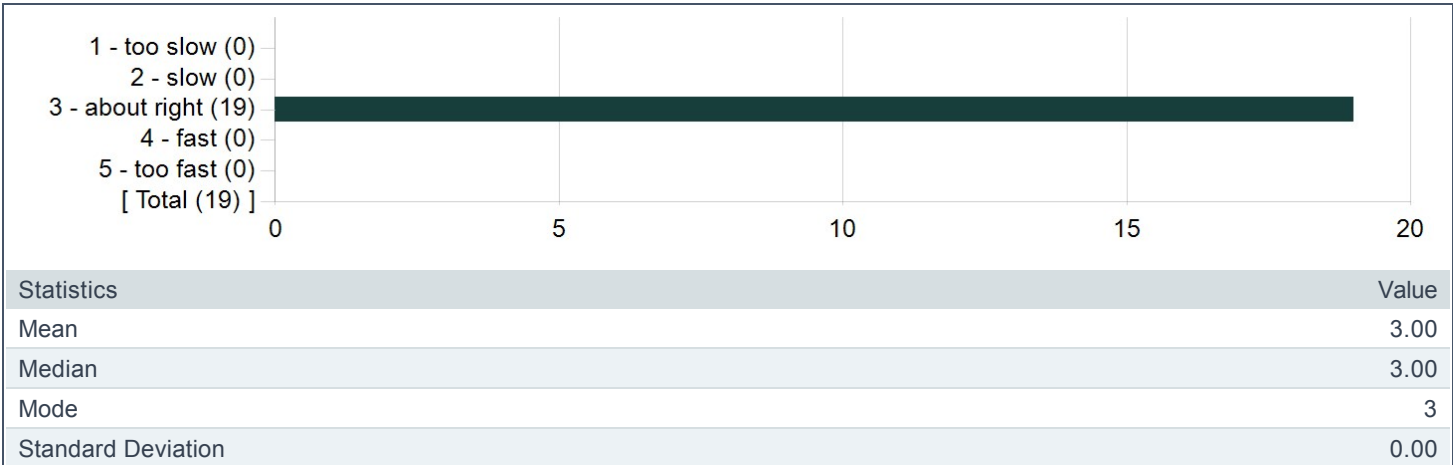
Course difficulty relative to other courses was



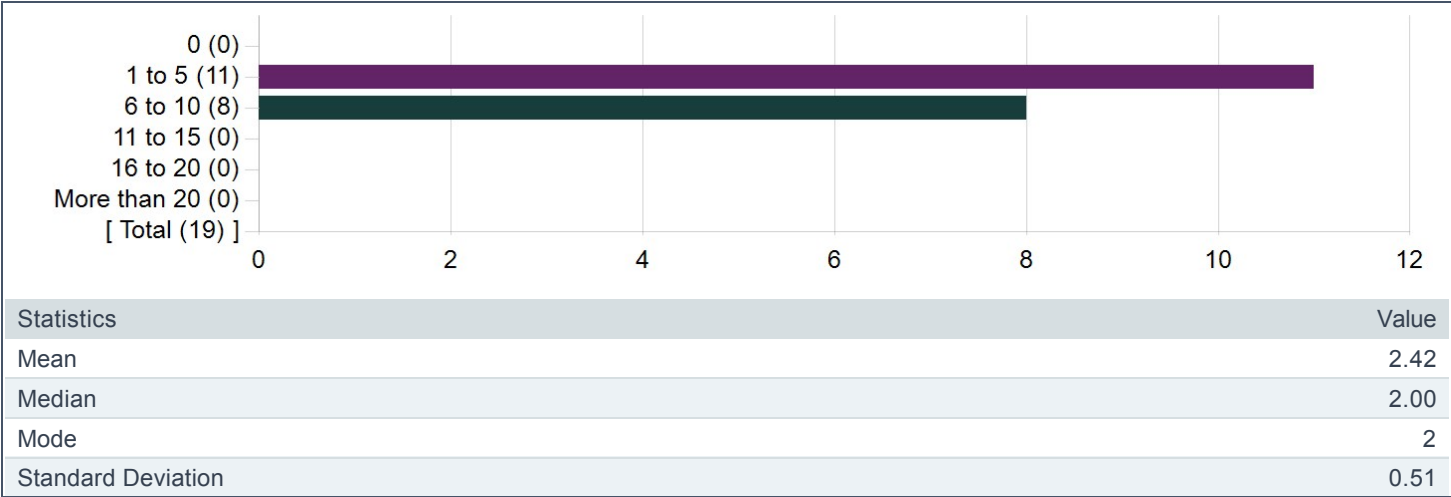
Course workload relative to other courses was



Course pace was

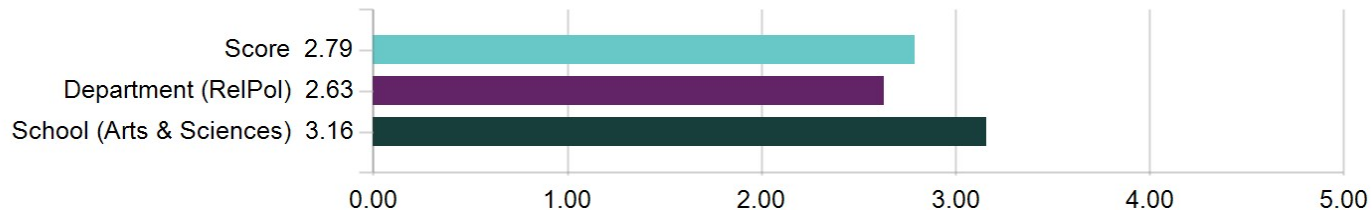


Hours per week required outside of class

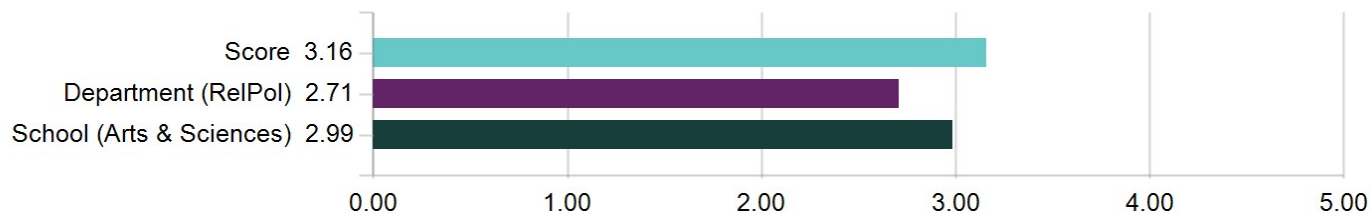


## Comparison Detail for Varied Rating Scale Responses

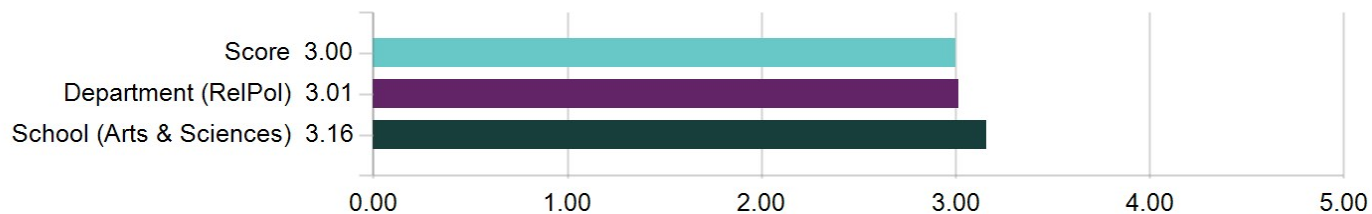
### 1. Course difficulty relative to other courses was



### 2. Course workload relative to other courses was



### 3. Course pace was



### 4. Hours per week required outside of class



## Short Answer Responses

What would you like to tell other Wash U students thinking about taking this course?

Comments
Great course! Professor O'Brien is a great teacher and teaches the class so well! Because it's a fairly small course, we were able to have a lot of smaller class discussions, which helped us learn from each other, as well as from him. We discussed a lot of different topics and he was very amenable to discussing topics that the students were passionate about.
I'm truly amazed by what I got out of this class. I don't really know what I was anticipating going into it, but the material is unlike anything I have ever studied before, because it encompassed so many other components besides just religion, crime, and punishment. I was also continually blown away by Cyrus O'Brien. Such a fun, quirky, and extremely intelligent guy that has a genuine passion for the subject. He could probably talk about religion in the criminal justice system forever and I would listen the whole time.
I would definitely recommend this course it was very enlightening and professor O'Brien does a very good job of tying the themes of the course together as you analyze religions influence throughout American politics
Makes connections between crime, punishment and religion that you would not normally think of
Great class, very informative
Take it! It is fun and interesting.
It is an amazing class that is filled with interesting readings that prompt great class discussions and make you see present day differently.
Professor O'Brien is a phenomenal teacher dedicated to his work, and wants nothing more than for his students to actually understand the concepts he puts forth. I highly recommend this class to anyone who is interested in learning about new ways to understand politics.
Professor O'Brien is a saint! This class is very much discussion based, so if you want to hear more from your peers, I highly recommend this course
It is a great course putting a lot of modern problems in perspective
It was a super interesting class! Very reading-heavy and it wasn't always necessary to read the entirety of the readings. The class itself was fun and conversation style.
The course, while very interesting, isn't a blow off course.
Keep up on the readings, pay attention in class, cherish Cyrus.
Take it! I think it is a potent and engaging introduction to the intersection of religion and politics in American history.

## Describe at least one thing about this course that helped you learn.

Comments
Cyrus was really proficient in what he was teaching, which helped him to explain our more difficult/nuanced topics really well so that everyone understood and could engage in our conversations. Our twitter feed was also a great way to have the students engage in current events and discuss things that were important to them.
The writing pieces, like Blog posts, done outside of class really allowed me to synthesize my ideas before coming to class and enabled me to participate much more. I also really enjoyed the small group discussions because of the guided questions that helped me realize the purpose of the reading on my own.
The course is very discussion based which helped me to better develop and articulate ideas about the topics covered while also seeing how others interpretations differed.
I really liked the connections to current events and current issues
The nature of the American penal state as inseparable from American conceptions of religion
I liked how much the students were able to discuss the content.
The structure of the class helped me learn a lot and the fact that it was so small allowed me to get to know my teacher and my fellow students who are interested in the same topics.
Professor O'Brien facilitated our understanding of topics by having students contribute their own opinions and perspectives on a regular basis.
The discussions were amazing, listening to different people's perspectives.
Small groups
This course helped me learn what is really happening in our punishment system as a society.
Professor O'Brien was flexible throughout the course and adjusted his teaching method part way through the semester to accommodate the learning needs of the class. These changes were effective and brought about a visible difference in the level of engagement from students. He also personally helped me get back on track and catch up when I got behind in the class which I am so so grateful for.

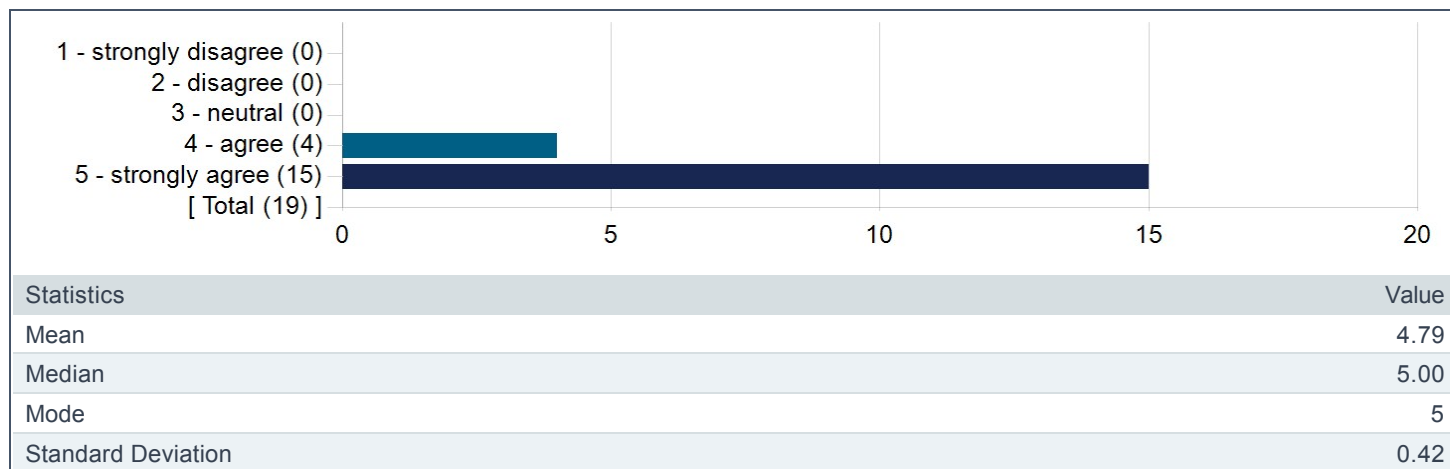
## Describe at least one thing that could be changed about this course to help you learn.

Comments
Maybe incorporate more time to discuss current events
I think if you had those guided questions for more of the readings, perhaps even posting them to canvas beforehand so people had the option of knowing what they should be looking out for before beginning the reading, would be extremely beneficial for comprehension. I also think that these readings had a lot of extra unnecessary information. They amount of reading could have been reduced to improve comprehension as well.
The one recommendation I would have is to have a little more lecturing in the class especially for some of the more complicated topics
It would be helpful to have a timeline of the themes and events, especially in the beginning when it is hard to tell what the timeline would be
Lectures, more facilitation to conversation
I would have enjoyed more lectures to provide a bit of direction to the discussions. While I enjoyed them, the large group discussions sometimes felt a little off topic/out of hand and hard to follow.
I think the readings could be spread out a bit (at least when they are longer readings). I think we could have done more interactive things in class, moving around and doing activities relating to the course material.
I think this course could be a little more organized in its structure, but the content is very informative and important.
More compact readings — readings that get across the message in fewer pages
Maybe less reading, a lot of information may be too much information to handle.
Professor O'Brien asked this half-way through the course and then made changes based on the response of the students! I think discussions in the second half of the class were also more directed and on topic than some of the discussions in the first half of the course.



## Classroom Environment

The instructor **Cyrus O'Brien** promoted an inclusive learning environment with regard to the diversity of student personal backgrounds and identities.



Where relevant, please give specific examples to explain your answer above.

Comments
We explored how the discussions in class affected all people.
I have academic accommodations from cornerstone and some professors look at those and don't really make any adjustments but Professor O'Brien was understanding and helpful in making appropriate adjustments to the structure of the assignments/course for my personal learning needs.

## Personalized Questions

What are the three most important ideas, sets of facts, concepts, skills, theories you learned in this course?

Comments
The discussion of the Panopticon, government surveillance, and prison movements was really interesting and important to understand the state of religion and politics today.
1. This course really taught me how to read critically and annotate, which became much more beneficial to my comprehension as the course progressed. 2. The relationship between the state and organized religious groups was an extremely important facet of this course for me. It was by far the most intriguing and makes me more passionate about the subject. 3. Finally, I think the idea that we have had this overarching notion of Civil Religion in America since its creation really took me by surprise, because of how heavily separation of church and state is enforced and talked about. Seeing how paradoxical Civil Religion was really opened my eyes to the presence of religion in our lives today.
Themes of crime, punishment and religion and politics and how religion and politics can never really be completely separated
I learned mostly about the interconnectedness between punishment and the history of our country and how religious groups were prosecuted. An interesting set of facts was the guidelines that we read in class about communism and the crazy set of facts. There were many concepts that we covered throughout the semester that helped us learn the origins of punishment and how religion began to be prosecuted.
Race and Religion, Criminalization, and Solitary confinement/ campaigns against vice
Prison conditions, Mass Incarceration, & Criminalization, Repentance and Reformation in prisons, Social Gospel
1. Our country is racist 2. People are always trying to change the racist structure of our society 3. Religion influences basically everything
Incarceration system, injustice, and religion's effect on them both.

**What classroom activities (large group discussion, small group discussion, outlining, mini&ndash;lectures, student&ndash;led discussion, the way I sometimes used images to contextualize an aspect of the discussion) have been effective ways for you to learn?**

Comments
I really enjoyed the large group discussions, mini&ndash;lectures, student&ndash;led discussions, and media to help us further understand the concepts. I thought that the small groups were interesting but could sometimes be difficult if we didn't fully understand the readings from the night before.
I really liked mini&ndash;lectures and small groups with guided questions, because it enabled me to focus in on the main take&ndash;aways of the reading, which was sometimes hard to do because they were so lengthy. I also really liked #RelPolt because so much of the in class work was not too recent, so it was nice to see how this is applicable on a day to day basis.
mostly the large group discussions and outlining
My favorite classroom activity that we did basically everyday was large group discussions. I loved this because it was a way to hear from everyone and allow connections to be made regarding our thoughts or reactions after reading the readings.
I enjoyed all the different styles you used in the class, because I never got bored in class since we would change things up every so often.
large group discussions
small and large group discussions, student&ndash;led discussions, videos, the class theme songs
Large group discussion the most.
Guest speakers were very helpful in bringing concepts from the class into the real world.
I enjoyed large group discussions, especially those led by students towards the end of the year. I think that could be a cool thing to incorporate into future classes in a more structured way.

**What changes would you suggest for the next time I teach this class?**

Comments
Maybe incorporate more modern topics and integrate the current events more.
More blog posts. Other than that, I don't have any suggestions. Keep doing what you're doing!
making a timeline of terms and events and the readings would be helpful to contextualize everything in the beginning
I think the only thing I would change would be the length of some of the readings because sometimes it was overwhelming and scary to know there could be a quiz on it.
Absolutely nothing this class is my favorite.
I think you could lead group discussions a little more.
Lighter readings! It was really hard for me to get the readings done when they were 40&ndash;60 pages long and I also had 30 pages for each of my other two classes that I had on the same day as this class.
Maybe less reading.
Change small groups each time
the small group discussions were helpful in engaging everyone but sometimes I think we spent too long in small groups and conversation drifted away from the topic