**That’s Just Cruel: Abuse, Unfairness, and Disrespect in Analysis and Learning**

**Abstract:** Whether we care to admit it or not, the realms of pedagogy and analytics are far from utopian. Even students at world-class schools have to deal with at least minor instances of unfairness, to say nothing of those who are worse off. Meanwhile, confirmation bias, misleading data, and outright lying to interested stakeholders plague analysis, not to mention the sciences, the news, and popular culture. Even when one has the freedom to speak out against these things, even when one has the money and other resources to carry out any sort of resistance to these things, it’s not anywhere near assured that such actions will be successful, or if those actions are successful, that the successes they bring about will remain active and viable.

In this two-credit course, students will read and respond to accounts and instances of abuse, unfairness, and lack of respect in primarily the areas of pedagogy, culture, and to a somewhat lesser extent, the sciences. A key aspect of this course is the fact that every other class meeting will take the form of a simulation in which students will, for the class period, work under artificially-unfair conditions. Any coursework performed under these conditions, if graded, will be graded purely for completion: the true goal of this course is to give students the opportunity to respond to, reflect on, and analyze such conditions.

Note: This syllabus contains information that will remain relevant throughout the semester. It will be referenced regularly, and a digital copy is available via the course website.

**Content Disclaimer and Disclaimer Regarding Simulations:** In addition to much of this class’ material covering potentially disturbing content, it is imperative to keep in mind how the simulations will work. A week or more prior to each simulation, students will receive information on the form the simulation will take: for instance, and exam, or a trip to a museum. When students arrive in class, prior to the formal beginning of a simulation, the instructor will hand each student a bright-orange sheet of paper with more detailed information on the simulation as to prevent anything in the simulation from causing unwanted psychological effects outside the simulation. Remember, student performance during a simulation, short of, for instance, physically assaulting the instructor and other students, has no impact on the course grade. Nothing, aside from student participation and attendance, during a simulation is real.

If, at any point a simulation causes a student to be uncomfortable, that student may exit the simulation with no consequence: indeed, reflecting on aspects of a simulation that made one uncomfortable is perfectly viable and even encouraged. Ideally, a student leaving in this manner should voice their concern to the instructor before leaving, but there is no problem if a student is unable or unwilling to do so.

In general, use caution and discretion; students should know and respect the limits of others in addition to their own personal limits. Students are encouraged to contact the instructor in the case that any course content is unacceptably upsetting to them.

**Course Requirements and Grading:** A student’s grade in this course hinges primarily on reflection, both on in-class simulations and on course readings.

**Attendance and Participation (20%)**

All students are expected to come to class prepared, ready and willing to participate in discussion and class activities, and on time. Additionally, students are expected to remain undistracted during class and to show respect towards one another as well as to the instructor. If a student is going to be absent, that student is expected to present a doctor’s note or other appropriate documentation excusing that absence. More than two unexcused absences during the duration of the semester will result in significant decrease in overall course grade.

Students are expected to make an effort to participate in simulations in some manner or another, but since these simulations will be a relatively subjective experience, there’s no way in good faith to set guidelines about how one “should” experience them. In brief, students are, at the very least, expected to show up to and acknowledge the simulations.

**Reflection and Other Assignments (50%)**

The bulk of this class’ grade hinges on reflection. By the end of each unit, students are expected to complete a semi-formal reflective analysis of the reading material and simulation from that unit. These analyses should be at least five pages in length, but can be longer if one desires.

**Final Paper (30%)**

Students are required to write a final synthesis paper to complete the class. This paper can be viewed as a more formal, extended version of the analyses written at the end of each unit: it should be at least ten pages in length, should explore a central question about the course’s themes of abuse, disrespect, and unfairness in pedagogy, culture, and/or the sciences, and should reference course material and the writer’s personal, subjective experiences. It is highly recommended that students begin work on their final paper during Unit 5 or Unit 6, but students may start earlier if they wish.

While it may appear that students could theoretically pass the course without completing this final paper, it should be noted that failing to turn in the final paper will render a student unable to pass the course. On a technical and mechanical level, it will result in significant decreases to a student’s participation grade, such that passing the course will become impossible.

**Course Material:** In the interest of accessibility, all required course material in this section will be made available either online on the course website, or through a course packet or handout.

* Roland Barthes’ “The Death of the Author” (.pdf available on course website)
* Mark Antliff “Fascism, Modernism, and Modernity” (.pdf available on course website)
* Excerpts from Michel Foucault’s *The Use of Pleasure* (available via course packet)
* Patrica B. Arinto et. al’s OER and OEP in the Global South: Implications and Recommendations for Social Inclusion (.pdf available on course website)
* Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (.pdf available on course website)
* Wayne Koestenbaum’s *Humiliation* (available via course packet)

**Recommended Texts:** These are suggested, mainly for the purposes of gaining background knowledge, but not required reading. Unlike the course material, these texts will not necessarily be provided by the instructor.

* Eric Berne’s *Games People Play*
* Roger Callois’ *Man, Play, and Games* (specifically its discussions of mimicry and ilinx)

**Course Schedule**

**Introduction**

* Consider: What are the foundations of abuse, unfairness, and disrespect? Why would anyone “be so cruel?” What are the greater implications of the word “fugue?”
* Read: *Humiliation*, Fugues 1 and 2.

**Unit 1: Classroom Unfairness and Textbook Tyranny**

* Consider: Cruelty can manifest from lack of resources: what else can cause it to manifest? What happens when not even an instructor can control what occurs in the classroom? What are the implications of a static text being the end-all-be-all in an educational setting?
* Read: “OER and OEP in the Global South: Implications and Recommendations for Social Inclusion”
* Unit Simulation: Exam.

**Unit 2: Abuse by Mistake, Unfairness in Form, Disrespect by Design**

* Consider: What can cause something to be condemned to being cruel from its inception? What forms can cruelty take inside, and how noticeable are these forms? How can something be intentionally designed to be cruel, and why would someone design something to be cruel?
* Read: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (pages 35-87)
* Unit Simulation: Project.
* Note: Feel free to think about this very course when pondering this week’s “Consider” questions.
* Other: This week, either meet with the instructor in person to arrange or arrange via email a time that you are available for next unit’s Unit Simulation.

**Unit 3: Antidialogics**

* Consider: What are the implications of antidialogics? What does conquest, division, and rule in a classroom look like, and is it a form of colonialization? Is there any benefit to pursuing antidialogics?
* Read: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (pages 88-167)
* Unit Simulation: Meeting.

**Unit 4: Internalization**

* Consider: As part of the normalization of cruelty, what role does desensitization play? What happens when one accepts cruelty as not merely a norm, but an ideal? On its own, or even in a vacuum, who, if anyone, does cruelty affect?
* Read: “The Death of the Author,” “Fascism, Modernism, and Modernity”
* Unit Simulation: Peer review.

**Unit 5: Cruelty on Display**

* Consider: What happens when cruelty is made public? What happens when public cruelty becomes normalized? What happens when normalized public cruelty becomes a commodity?
* Read: *Humiliation*, Fugues 8-11.
* Unit Simulation: Museum visit.

**Unit 6: Cruelty and Trauma**

* Consider: What are the lasting effects of cruelty? What is askesis, and is it beneficial enough to be sought out? When can cruelty be justified, if ever?
* Read: *The Use of Pleasure*, excerpts.
* Unit Simulation: Socratic seminar.