

INST 1550 Transformative Justice: Abolition in Practice

Mon 3:30PM - 5:20 PM in Pavilion VIII 108

Tasia Courts



Office Hours: By appt

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"Transformative Justice (TJ) is a political framework and approach for responding to violence, harm, and abuse. At its most basic, it seeks to respond to violence without creating more violence and/or engaging in harm reduction to lessen the violence. TJ can be thought of as a way of 'making things right,' getting in 'right relation,' or creating justice together (Mingus, 2019)."

Course Description

What does abolition *really* look like? How can we live in a society without prisons or policing? When and how can all of this be accomplished? How does transformative justice start with us? In this course, we will answer these questions by exploring the topics of racial capitalism, criminality, abolition, transformative justice, and more. Together, we will create a learning environment that models the principles of transformative justice and considers the ways in which we can put these principles into practice, specifically in the United States. In this classroom, we will all come together for the purpose of expanding our understanding and imagination, because the work of abolition is simply not possible without imagination. We will also consider the ways in which we can open up other people's minds to the possibilities and potential for a future without prisons or policing. This work is not easy, but it is not impossible. The keys to success for this course are: having an open mind, being optimistic, participating actively, and asking questions of yourself and your classmates. That is how we learn and grow as a community! That is how we practice abolition!

Objectives

By the end of the course, you will be able to...

- Collaborate with your peers in creating a learning community that models transformative justice
- Consider the ways in which you can implement the practices of harm reduction in your communities
- Analyze how racial capitalism, prisons, and policing differentially impact different populations
- Practice transformative justice alongside local groups and organizations
- Develop a robust vocabulary repertoire for discussing abolition
- Demonstrate a multifaceted approach to the study and implementation of abolitionist principles

Course Requirements

Participation

Students must demonstrate consistent attendance and engagement throughout the span of the semester. Please come to class prepared to participate actively in our discussions. You can also post course notes for your participation grade, but this is fully optional.

Value: 20%

Weekly Media Journal Entries

These weekly assignments will track your engagement with the course concepts and discussions. The main goal is to bring outside media and resources into conversation with each week's readings. By *noon every Monday*, you will upload a 150-200 word journal entry to your Digication ePortfolio that connects one piece of digital media of your choosing to that week's assigned readings, past week's readings, or class discussions. Some examples of media include, but are not limited to, a YouTube video, a Tik Tok, a Ted Talk, a news article, a painting, etc. *You can find more information about this assignment on Digication and Canvas.*

Value: 20%

Leading a Class Discussion

Every student in the class will be responsible for leading one class discussion. This is an opportunity for you to practice facilitating conversations about abolition and take a communal approach to envisioning and understanding transformative justice. You will sign up for discussion dates during the second class meeting. You also have the option to lead a discussion in pairs if that is your preference. *You can find more information about this assignment on Digication and Canvas.*

Value: 20%

Community Engagement

A requirement of this course is to engage with at least one local initiative that aligns with the principles of transformative justice or abolition. The most important aspect of this assignment is that you *participate!* This engagement allows you to see the importance of the existing efforts to make our communities safer and more peaceful for everyone involved. In order to complete this course requirement, you will also write a reflection on this experience. *You can find more information about this assignment on Digication and Canvas.*

Value: 20%

Capstone Group Project

As a class, we will decide on a project that we will execute as a community! This is a choose-your-own-adventure assignment. The main goal of this project is to bring together all of the learning objectives of this course in a way that is tangible and empowering. *You can find more information about this assignment on Digication and Canvas.*

Value: 20%

Grading Scheme

It is important to recognize how grading schemes commodify learning. I present the *equal-weight grading scheme* as an alternative to the traditional approach to grading. You will note that each course requirement, or assessment bucket, is equally weighted at 20%. I hope this encourages you to shift your focus away from grades or particular course requirements and redirect it toward learning. You will pass this course so long as you meet the following basic requirements:

- Attend class regularly.
- Participate actively during class discussions and activities.
- Complete course assignments (weekly media journals, facilitating one class discussion, community engagement, and contributing to the class project).

Your primary responsibility will be to keep up with the assigned readings from the course materials and participate in class discussions as described above.

Important note on credits: INST courses are considered as ‘outside the College’ and are taught only on a CR/NC basis. A student may count no more than 3.0 credits of INST course work among the 120 credits offered for the B.A. and B.S. in the College. However, this class can be counted towards completion of the American Studies major.

Attendance Policy

As we only meet once a week, it is important that you attend class. Please communicate with me if you cannot attend class, but don't feel obligated to explain your reasoning. I only ask that you reach out to me because I want to help you get up to speed on any missed content. Remember, earning credit for this course is based on a holistic review of your contributions to our learning environment, not just one sole factor, such as attendance.

Late Work Policy

If you have to submit something late, let me know and we can figure out a new submission date. I am very flexible about deadlines because I understand how much unnecessary stress deadlines can create for students. The only caveat is that if you are scheduled to facilitate a class discussion, please *try* to let me know 24 hours in advance and we can figure out a date to reschedule your discussion. As with attendance, there is no need to explain why you need an extension.

Honor/Academic Integrity Policy

If you quote or paraphrase the words of another in any writing assignment you submit for this course, you must cite your sources responsibly. I trust that you will always adhere to the [UVA Honor Code](#), but I am happy to answer any questions you might have. If you are experiencing stress about completing an assignment on time, it is better to reach out to me than to present someone else's work as your own.

Accessibility

If you have questions or concerns about disability accommodations, please visit <https://www.studenthealth.virginia.edu/SDAC>. If there is any way that I can accommodate you further in this course, please let me know and I will do my best to make your experience in this course as safe and accessible as possible. Also, if you would like some guidance when it comes to receiving accommodations through SDAC, please feel free to reach out to me with any questions.

Sensitive Material

This is a trigger warning. In this course, we will cover heavy materials and topics that may be triggering to you. These topics include, but are not limited to, sexual assault, suicide, incarceration, racism, and other forms of violence. If you feel uncomfortable with the course material at any point, please feel free to skip an assigned reading or exit the classroom. With that said, abolitionist work can be very uncomfortable; I urge you to lean into that discomfort, while prioritizing your mental and emotional wellbeing. I will check in with the class as much as possible and build in some opportunities for more lighthearted interactions throughout the course. In a similar vein, I want to make it abundantly clear that *I cannot guarantee confidentiality in this space because I cannot control what is repeated outside of the classroom*. Therefore, it is vital that you do not share anything that you would not like repeated elsewhere. Please communicate with me or Lisa Marie Cacho (Faculty Sponsor) if you have any questions or concerns.

Mental Health

Your mental health comes first; please take care of yourself. If you are feeling overwhelmed, stressed, or isolated, there are many individuals here to help:

- The Student Health and Wellness Center offers [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) for its students; call 434-243-5150 to speak with an on-call counselor and/or schedule an appointment.
- If you prefer to speak anonymously, you can call Madison House's [HELPLine](#) at any hour of any day: 434-295-TALK.
- Alternatively, you can call or text the [Disaster Distress Helpline](#) (1-800-985-5990, or text TalkWithUs to 66746) to connect with a trained crisis counselor; this is toll-free, multilingual, and confidential, available to all residents in the US and its territories.

Course Calendar

The following schedule is an outline of discussion topics, assignments, and deadlines. While you should use this as a guide, please note that I reserve the right to make changes to this schedule based on how the class is progressing. Any changes will be announced in class and on Canvas.

Date	In-Class Agenda	In Preparation For Next Class... [C]- Canvas, [V]- Virgo
08/28/2023	<p>Start of Unit 1: Understanding</p> <p><i>Guiding Question: who are we and what work are we doing here?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Course/Syllabus Overview ➤ Icebreakers ➤ Personalize Your ePortfolio 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Racial Capitalism and Prison Abolition Zine [C] ➤ Is Capitalism Racist? ➤ <i>Are Prisons Obsolete?</i> (Ch.1-2) [C] ➤ Finish Personalizing Your ePortfolio ➤ Media Journal 1
09/04/2023	<p><i>Guiding Question: What is racial capitalism?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Discuss Assigned Readings ➤ Watch & Discuss: Geographies of Racial Capitalism with Ruth Wilson Gilmore ➤ Select Your Discussion Date ➤ Media Show & Tell 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Transformative Justice: A Brief Description ➤ Explore TransformHarm.org website and bring in 1-2 discussion questions ➤ <i>Are Prisons Obsolete?</i> (Ch.3-4) [C] ➤ Media Journal 2
09/11/2023	<p><i>Guiding Question: What is transformative justice?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Discuss Assigned Readings ➤ Read & Discuss: Bay Area Transformative Justice Case Studies ➤ Media Show & Tell 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ "The Only Freedom I Can See: Imprisoned Queer Writing and the Politics of the Unimaginable" [C] ➤ Prison Abolition Should Be the American Dream [C] ➤ "Is Prison Necessary? Ruth Wilson Gilmore Might Change Your Mind" [C] ➤ <i>Are Prisons Obsolete?</i> (Ch.5-6) [C] ➤ Media Journal 3

09/18/2023	<p><i>Guiding Question: Why don't we need prisons and police?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Discuss Assigned Readings ➤ Media Show & Tell 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Are Prisons Obsolete? (<i>Finish</i>) [C] ➤ Davis- I Am a Revolutionary Black Woman [C] ➤ Media Journal 4
09/25/2023	<p><i>Guiding Question: Are prisons obsolete?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Discuss Assigned Readings ➤ Media Show & Tell 	
10/02/2023	<p>NO CLASS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ We Do This Til We Free Us (<i>So You're Thinking About Becoming an Abolitionist; Hope is a Discipline</i>) [C] ➤ Book Review of Emergent Strategy [Make a free Medium account] ➤ New Books Network- Community Building and How We Show Up (1:30-27:20) ➤ Media Journal 5 (due 10/9)
10/09/2023	<p>Start of Unit 2: Alternatives</p> <p><i>Guiding Question: Why and how should we build communities?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Discuss Assigned Readings ➤ Media Show & Tell 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope (<i>Ch. 16</i>) [V] ➤ Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black (<i>Ch.10</i>) [V] ➤ Ella Baker- We Need Group Centered Leadership [C] ➤ Media Journal 6
10/16/2023	<p><i>Guiding Question: How do we create space for abolition in academia?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Discuss Assigned Readings ➤ Read & Discuss: Guide for Racial Justice & Abolitionist SEL ➤ Media Show & Tell 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 10 Strategies for Cultivating Community Accountability ➤ Explore the B.U.C.K. Squad site ➤ Media Journal 7

10/23/2023	<p><i>Guiding Question: What abolitionist work is being done locally?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Discuss Assigned Readings ➤ Watch & Discuss: Dads on Duty News Clip <p>Guest Speaker: Herb Dickerson (B.U.C.K. Squad Executive Director)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Indigenous Restorative Justice: Approaches, Meaning, & Possibility [C] ➤ Media Journal 8
10/30/2023	<p><i>Guiding Question: What is the potential for activism (art + activism) in abolition?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Discuss Assigned Readings ➤ Activism Exhibit Activity ➤ Media Show & Tell 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ We Do This Til We Free Us (<i>Justice: A Short Story</i>) [C] ➤ How Norway's Prisons Are Different From America's ➤ What a World Without Prisons Could Look Like ➤ Media Journal 9
11/06/2023	<p><i>Guiding Question: What does a world without prisons look like?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Discuss Assigned Readings ➤ Envision Abolition Activity ➤ Discuss: Class Project And Divide Up Responsibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Work On Capstone Group Project
11/13/2023	<p>Start of Unit 3: Class Project</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Work On Capstone Group Project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Work On Capstone Group Project
11/20/2023	<p><i>ASYNCHRONOUS CLASS</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Work On Capstone Group Project
11/27/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Work On Capstone Group Project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Finish Capstone Group Project
12/04/2023 Final Class!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ End of Semester Symposium ➤ <i>Celebration!</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Submit Project/Course Reflection

Distinguished Majors Program Research Notification

I will be doing research for my American Studies Distinguished Majors thesis. I will be the Principal Investigator for this research and Lisa Cacho will be my Faculty Sponsor. My topic is *Understanding Abolition* and I will be exploring the ways in which we can practice living and teaching abolition. In this class, we will be discussing the tenets and foundations of abolition, deepening our understanding together. In my research, I hope to consider the ways in which my teaching experience transforms myself and you all, as students, with regards to our perceptions and understanding of abolition and related topics. I hope to demonstrate a connection between the course design, assignments, general themes I draw from discussions, and my personal experiences with implementing the practices of abolition into my everyday life. I will not be using quotes from class nor your written assignments, but I will be making broad observations about the class and analyzing these observations. This research project does not require your participation in any way, shape, or form. You will not do anything outside of our normal class activities for this research study, and there is no risk to you as a participant in this study. This will not affect your grade in the class nor your experience as a student. This is only to notify you about my observations of our class for research purposes. For anyone who is under 18 years old, your contributions will not be referenced in any way in this research. If you have any questions or concerns, or if you don't want to be included in my research observations, please reach out to me or Lisa Cacho, the Faculty Sponsor for this course and my DMP research. You may also report a concern about a study or ask questions about your rights as a research subject by contacting the Institutional Review Board listed below.

Tonya R. Moon, Ph.D.

Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Social and Behavioral Sciences

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