NCLC 203 Inquiry for Action: Facilitating Change
(Spring 2015, 6 credits)
M 10:30-1:20, W 9:00-1:20, R 10:30-1:20

Course Introduction:

As citizens in a fast-evolving society, we are constantly confronted with the need to make significant decisions with far-reaching consequences. How will we address social problems in our local, national, and global communities? Which commentators or news sources do we trust to inform us about national and international events? Which scientific research helps us reach informed decisions and which research rests in faulty assumptions and inadequate samples? In this era of abundant sources of information, where anyone with the time or inclination can publish her "take" on the world, how might we, as citizens, critically evaluate the credibility of information to make educated decisions, whether we are planning our meals for the next week, or trying to decide whether to provide health care for our fellow citizens? And, how can we make interventions and engage others around issues that we care about in ways that are effective, informed by evidence and ethical?

Over the next seven weeks, our learning community will examine the complex interplay between academic research, society's political and social structures and individual decisions and acts. For educated decision-making is not simply a matter of finding the "right" information. We have to ask ourselves exactly how we "know" what we think we "know" and learn to subvert the cultural and cognitive barriers that can impede even our most dedicated quests for knowledge. How often, for example, might we fall victim to the halo effect or confirmation bias? Or succumb to the lure of the filter bubble, or the illusion of truth? And how well can we really distinguish between personal beliefs about a subject and judgments based on evidence?

These questions leads us more deeply into the *Discovery of Scholarship*, part of the university's Students as Scholars program (OSCAR), designed to provide all students with the practical and intellectual skills to succeed in upper-level learning communities, and to undertake independent creative work or research. The university's Students as Scholars program (OSCAR) will support your scholarly work through more advanced courses and learning communities, grants to work with faculty members on original research, and opportunities to present your work to the Mason community and beyond.

Your investigations will continue in NCLC 103, and you should complete your first year in New Century College with a rich understanding of how scholars, at Mason and beyond, undertake research, and generate new knowledge. You will also know how that research is communicated both to professional communities and to each citizen, and be able to explain why scholarly research is so important to the flourishing of our society.

Finally, throughout this semester, you will continue your practice, begun in NCLC 101 and NCLC 102, of critical reflection, the application of relevant information and communication technologies, and the presentation of your findings and ideas through multiple media formats.

Texts:
- Bullock, R., & Goggin, M. D. (2010). *The Norton field guide to writing* [2nd ed.]. NY: WW Norton & Co.
- Gladstone, B. (2011). *The influencing machine*. NY: WW Norton & Co.
- Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. NY: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux.
- A collection of additional readings will be available on Blackboard.

Faculty Team:

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Learning Community Objectives:
The overarching goal for this learning community is for you to become a wise consumer of information, a critical thinker, and an informed active citizen. Through active engagement with the course, you will:

- Critically evaluate, using criteria appropriate to the context, information shared in various forms including: academic journals, traditional news outlets, and online sources;
- Demonstrate understanding of the fundamentals of social science research and evaluate the application of research methodologies to problems;
- Expand your ability to learn and apply information communication technologies [ICTs] for more effective research, collaboration and communication;
- Demonstrate understanding of the essential role of ethics in research and information sharing; and
- Practice oral, written, and technologically-mediated communication skills.

Principles Grounding a Learning Community:
A learning community differs from most other courses in several specific ways. As YOU are an important part of the learning community, it is important that you understand the basic principles. Learning communities emphasize:

- Learning from experience and reflection
- Multiple sources of knowledge
- Collaborative group work
- Integration of knowledge
- Learning competencies to facilitate self-directed learning
- Learning through evaluation and assessment

Year-long Theme of Sustainability

Sustainability was defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987 as "meeting the needs of society of today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." In Cornerstones, we will introduce you to the crucial principles and practices of sustainability, examining the three "E's": Equity, Environment, and Economy, with an additional look at the role of Education. Because the achievement of sustainability necessitates an interdisciplinary approach, the Cornerstones core classes will be examining each of these components from a variety of perspectives, with a focus on how to protect the environment, while also ensuring economic viability and equitable opportunities for all people. Understanding the interdependence of social systems, environment, economy, and education will help us learn to make the changes necessary to become effective stewards of our world.

NCC Competency Development:

Civic Engagement a practice based on an informed understanding of communities and the roles and responsibilities of individuals within those communities.

Communication the process of creating and sharing meaning through human interaction.

Critical Thinking a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts and events before accepting or formulating a judgment or conclusion.

Group Collaboration the process of working toward a shared agenda and/or common purpose while capitalizing on the diversity within the group.

Digital Literacy the ability to apply and critique existing and emerging technologies.

Mason Core (General Education) Learning Outcomes
General Education at George Mason University is designed to complement work in a student's chosen area of study. These classes serve as a means of discovery for students, providing a foundation for learning, connecting to potential new areas of interest and building tools for success in whatever field a student pursues. NCLC 203 satisfies the Social and Behavioral Sciences and Information Technology requirements by meeting the following learning outcomes:

Social and Behavioral Sciences
Students will be able to:
- Explain how individuals, groups or institutions are influenced by contextual factors;
- Demonstrate awareness of changes in social and cultural constructs;
- Use appropriate methods and resources to apply social and behavioral science concepts, terminology, principles and theories in the analysis of significant human issues, past or present.

Information Technology
Students will be able to:
- Use technology to locate, access, evaluate, and use information, and appropriately cite resources from digital/electronic media.
- Understand the core IT concepts in a range of current and emerging technologies and learn to apply appropriate technologies to a range of tasks.
- Understand many of the key ethical, legal and social issues related to information technology and how to interpret and comply with ethical principles, laws, regulations, and institutional policies.
- Demonstrate the ability to communicate, create, and collaborate effectively using state-of-the-art information technologies in multiple modalities.
- Understand the essential issues related to information security, how to take precautions and use techniques and tools to defend against computer crimes.

The Writing Intensive Requirement: Successful completion of this course fulfills in part the general education and writing-intensive requirements. Consult with your major advisor about specific program requirements.

Course Expectations and Policies:

Attendance policy: The University does not require students to attend class and you cannot be graded based specifically on attendance. However, class participation is fundamental to a learning community and your active participation is essential, both for your success and for the success of the whole class.

Late policy: All work must be presented on time (defined as turning in all assignments by the specified date and time). Please allow sufficient time for technological and printing snafus as these will not be considered valid excuses for late assignments. For each day an assignment is late, the paper will be marked down five points for each day they are past due, including Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. Due dates are clearly indicated throughout the syllabus. Readings are due the date they are assigned; because they are assigned primarily to encourage seminar discussion, you are expected to demonstrate your careful reading and consideration of materials.

Evaluation concerns: If you feel that you have been evaluated inaccurately, please provide the instructor with a written statement, with facts and supported reasoning, within 48 hours after the grade has been posted.

Statement on technology: Since a quality learning experience in this course rests heavily upon interaction and exchange of ideas among students and the instructors, items that discourage this interaction may not be welcome in class. There may be specific instances when these items are allowed, but your instructor will expressly tell you in advance. Remember, your ability to listen and engage with your peers and to contribute to class discussions thoughtfully will be heavily weighted in determining your final grades.

Mason Email: In keeping with university policy, we will correspond only with your Mason email account. Expect communication from the instructors and class members between class times via e-mail.

Religious or Cultural Observances: Some class times are in close proximity to religious or cultural observances. If a class date or assignment creates a conflict, please let us know in advance so we can make appropriate arrangements.

Commitment to Diversity:
New Century College, an intentionally inclusive community, promotes and maintains an equitable and just work and learning environment. We welcome and value individuals and their differences including race, economic status, gender expression and identity, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, national origin, first language, religion, age, and disability. NCC's diversity commitment is found at:
http://ncc.gmu.edu/about/diversity

- We value our diverse student body and desire to increase the diversity of our faculty and staff.
- We commit to supporting students, faculty and staff who have been the victims of bias and discrimination.
- We promote continuous learning and improvement to create an environment that values diverse points of view and life experiences.
- We believe that faculty, staff and students play a role in creating an environment that engages diverse points of view.
- We believe that by fostering their willingness to hear and learn from a variety of sources and viewpoints, our students will gain competence in communication, critical thinking and global understanding, aware of their biases and how they affect their interactions with others and the world.

Policy on Honor Code and Academic Integrity: The integrity of the University community is affected by the individual choices made by each of us. This is especially true in New Century College. GMU has an honor code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity.

Three fundamental principles to follow at all times are: 1) all work submitted must be your own; 2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and 3) if you are uncertain about citation rules or assignment guidelines, ask an instructor for clarification.

No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct. If you feel unusual pressure or anxiety about your grade in this or any other course, please let an instructor know and also seek help from University resources. The University provides a range of services to help with test anxiety, writing skills, study skills, personal issues, and related concerns.

Some projects are designed to be undertaken individually. For these projects, you may discuss your ideas with others or ask for feedback; however, it is not appropriate to give your paper to someone else to revise. You are responsible for making certain that there is no question that the work you hand in is your own. If only your name appears on an assignment, your professor has the right to expect that you have done the work yourself, fully and independently.

As in most learning communities and in many other classes, your final integrated group project is designed to be completed collaboratively. With group work, the names of all the participants should appear on the work. While you may find it necessary for different group members to take the lead on various assignments leading up to the integrated final group project, faculty expect that all group members will contribute equally and that the pieces will be conceptually integrated in the final product.

Using someone else's words or ideas without giving them credit is *plagiarism*, a serious offense. If you wish to quote directly from any text, you MUST use the exact words (including punctuation) just as the words, phrases, and sentences appear in the original text. Additionally, you must follow proper citation rules to indicate that you are quoting directly from a text (e.g. quotation marks, quote indentation, source identification). If you want to paraphrase ideas from a source, that is, convey the author's ideas in your own words, you must still cite the source, using an established citation format.

The re-use of papers, presentations, and other materials from one course in another course is not appropriate or acceptable. In every NCC course, faculty expect that submitted work has been prepared for that class only. Violations of the University Honor Code will be referred to the University Honor Committee for review and action.

For more information on the honor code: http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/

Student Support:

Office of Disability Services: If you have a learning or physical difference that may affect your learning and academic work, you will need to furnish appropriate documentation to the Disability Resource Center (SUB I, Rm. 222; 993-2474; www.gmu.edu/student/drc). If you qualify for accommodation, the DRC staff will give you a form detailing appropriate accommodations for your instructor.

In addition to providing your professors with the appropriate form, please take the initiative to discuss accommodation with us at the beginning of the semester and as needed during the term. Because of the range of learning differences, faculty members need to learn from you the most effective ways to assist you. If you have contacted the Disability Resource Center and are waiting to hear from a counselor, please tell us.

Office of Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) provides a wide range of services to students, faculty, and staff. Services are provided by a staff of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors. The Center provides individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs -- experiences to enhance a student's personal experience and academic performance.
http://caps.gmu.edu/

Writing Resources: The University's Writing Center, Robinson room 114A offers free, expert tutoring to writers at all levels who want to improve their writing. Each individual session lasts for 45 minutes, and you should try to book an appointment in advance. Also, please use NCC's online writing guide,
http://classweb.gmu.edu/nccwg/

Student Technology Assistance and Resources (STAR) Center: This resource is available to assist you with questions about technology. Johnson Center 229, (703)993-8990.
http://doit.gmu.edu/studentSection.asp?page=multimedia_lab

Collaborative Learning Hub Computer Lab (CLUB): This walk-in lab features workstations ready for digital imaging, video editing, web development, scanning and many other applications. CLUB has a full schedule of free workshops as well as walk-in and prearranged consultation on how to use these resources. (703) 993-3141 http://doit.gmu.edu/studentSection.asp?page=club

Assignments:
Specific components for the assignments will be provided in a separate assignments packet.

Final Group Project: Inquiry for Action Documentary (200 points)
Small groups will research a topic related to the seminar's chosen social issue and create a 5-7 minute documentary along with supplementary materials that inform and persuade others about that issue.

Integrative Assignments (600 points)
Each week of the seminar, your learning will draw upon academic study and texts, discussions and simulations, films, and field trips. Through a mix of individual and group assignments, you will be asked to make connections across the various experiences to demonstrate and deepen your knowledge of the topic.

Class Engagement & Connections (200 points)
Your active class participation is fundamental to a learning community and essential both for your own success and for the success of the whole class. To that end, attendance and constructive participation are expected. Throughout the course, your participation in activities, discussion, and assignments will be assessed through several class accountability assignments, including (but not limited to) the following:

- Class attendance and active class participation,
- Innovative connections with the material outside of the classroom,
- Individual in-class writing prompts,
- Small group in-class projects, and
- Reading journal entries (refer to your assignment packet for more details).

Course Evaluation:
Please note all assignments and dates are subject to revision by the course instructors.

Due Date	Assignment	Total Points	
Ongoing	**Class Engagement & Connections**	**200**	
Jan. 26	**Integrative Assignment 1:** *Individual Ways of Knowing Paper*	**100**	**970-1000= A+**
Feb. 2	**Integrative Assignment 2:** *Group Collaborative Research Report*	**100**	**936-969= A** **900-935= A-**
Feb. 9	**Integrative Assignment 3:** *Individual Media Diary/Newseum Paper*	**100**	**870-899= B+** **836-869= B**
Feb. 16	**Integrative Assignment 4:** *Group Digital Activism Tool-Kit*	**100**	**800-835= B-** **770-799= C+**
Feb. 18	**Integrative Assignment 5:** *Group Story Board*	**100**	**736-769= C** **700-735= C-**
Mar. 2	**Final Group Project:** *Inquiry to Action Documentary*	**200**	**600-699= D** **Below 599= F**
Mar. 9	**Final Integrative Assignment:** *Individual Reflection Paper*	**100**	
TOTAL		**1000 points possible**	