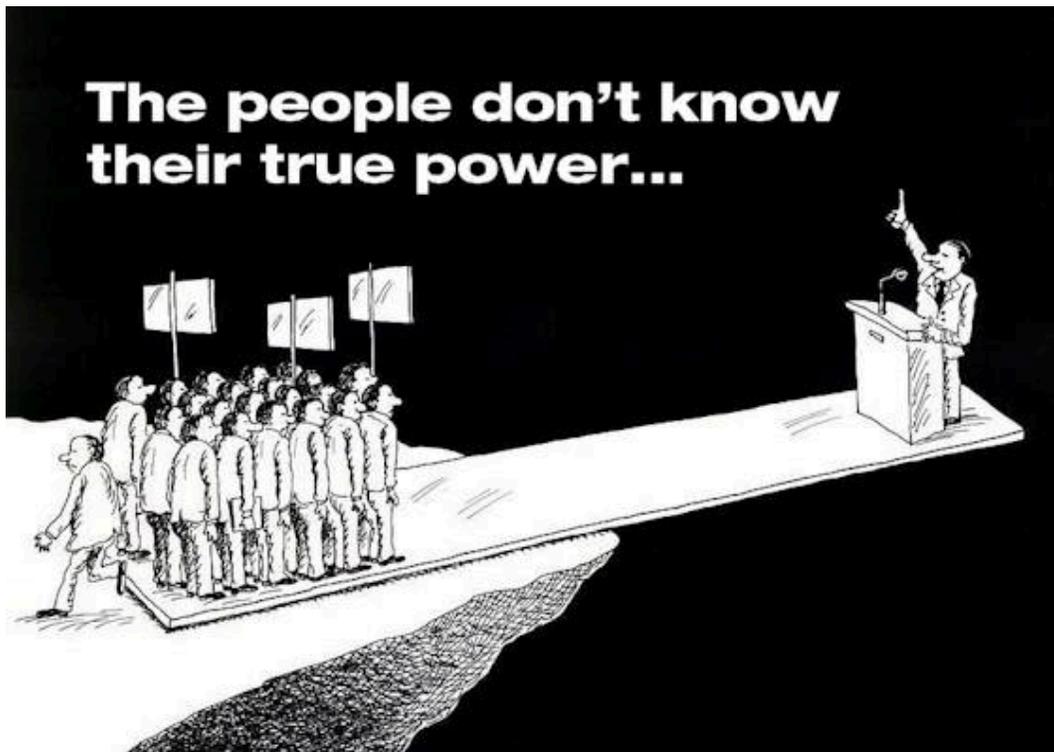


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Expos 20: Who's Got the Power?

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MW: 1, 2



“Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together. When we say of somebody that he is ‘in power’ we actually refer to his being empowered but a certain number of people to act in their name. The moment the group, from which the power originated to begin with (*potestas in populo*, without a group there is no power, disappears, ‘his power’ also vanishes.”

– Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*

I. Course Description

Our news feeds today present a panorama of struggles over power, from elections and peaceful protests to riots, revolutions, and civil wars. In each case, those who hold power cling to it at all costs, while those who feel oppressed or excluded fight to attain some power of their own. In most societies, power is concentrated in the hands of a select few, and even in the world's

democracies, many citizens continue to feel powerless—the playthings of some distant and shadowy elite, or of grand political and economic forces beyond their control. In this course, we will consider some of the fundamental questions regarding the nature of power: Does power always have to be "power-over," with one group dominating the rest? Or is it possible for groups of people to generate "power-with," empowering themselves to act in pursuit of shared goals? Is power ultimately synonymous with violence, or wealth, or political authority? Is it possible to exercise power over culture and ideas in addition to people and resources?

We will approach these questions through the methodological lenses of political science, sociology, anthropology, and history, while also considering examples drawn from documentaries and current events. In our first unit, we will establish working theories of power-over and power-with, and consider their application to both democratic and non-democratic contexts. In the second unit, we will refine our concept of power-over, testing it against studies of power and resistance in Appalachian mining communities, Malaysian peasant villages, and American low-income urban schools. We'll also take an in-depth look at a headline-making study that claimed to prove that America is more oligarchy than democracy. In the final unit, we'll revisit the concept of power-with by exploring the strategies that social movements like the Civil Rights Movement use to develop and exercise power, and conduct further research into contemporary movements like the Tea Party, Occupy Wall Street, and Black Lives Matter.

II. Course Objective, Format, and Assignments

The objective of this course is not just to get you writing *about* power; it's to get you writing *with* power. To that end, each unit of this course will introduce a new facet of the academic conversation on power, as well as to a new dimension of academic writing. Our goal is to prepare you put your own ideas, insights, and findings into writing – not only with respect to this particular conversation about power, but to any number of scholarly debates, intellectual controversies, and academic research programs. If the course succeeds, you will leave feeling more confident in your ability to take your ideas on the journey from a faint flicker of inspiration to a substantial piece of scholarship.

In order to achieve this goal, it will be necessary to decode the argumentative and rhetorical maneuvers that show up in so many forms of academic writing. This is because the way scholars write is integral to the way they think and do research. How do scholars come to working definitions of concepts like power amid controversy over just what the term does or should mean? Why do scholars accept some theories and reject others? What kinds of evidence can scholars appeal to in order to support their arguments, and how should they go about using it? What steps go into preparing and conducting research that will break new ground in a field? Mastering the various steps of the academic writing process will, at the very least, help you in writing stronger papers during your time at Harvard, but it should also equip you to read more

carefully, think more critically, research more rigorously, and argue more persuasively.

You will find a brief description of the assignments for each unit below.

1. Theorizing Power: Power-Over and Power-With

During unit one, we will focus on unpacking and critically assessing complex arguments. We will explore the concept of power as it is formulated by the political philosopher Hannah Arendt in her essay *On Violence* and the sociologist Steven Lukes in his study *Power: A Radical View*. We will also test these theories against two documentaries about power: *Bringing Down A Dictator*, which concerns the Serbian resistance movement against Slobodan Milosevic, and *Street Fight*, which takes a behind-the-scenes look at a mayoral election in Newark, NJ.

Your assignment for unit one is to write a 4-6 page **critical analysis** of one of the two theories of power, and to incorporate evidence from one of the documentaries into your analysis. Your performance on this assignment will determine 20% of your final grade.

2. Studying Power: Domination, Agency, and Resistance

In unit two, we will consider in greater detail how a theory or concept can be tested against evidence, and how diverse bodies of evidence can be synthesized in order to support an argument. Our readings will be drawn from three ethnographic studies: John Gaventa's *Power and Powerlessness*, James Scott's *Weapons of the Weak*, and Clarissa Hayward's *De-Facing Power*. Each study considers the dynamics of power and resistance in a new context.

Your assignment for unit two is to write a 6-8 page **comparative analysis** of any two of these three studies, considering their choice of cases, their observations, and their conclusions. Your performance on this assignment will determine 30% of your final grade.

3. Researching Power: Social Movements and 'People Power'

Finally, in unit three, we will work towards an original research paper in which you will join in the academic conversation on power in the context of social movements. We will consider some best practices for conducting and incorporating research into an argumentative paper, including strategies for identifying, synthesizing, and building off of academic research. We will get our orientation toward the field of social movement research from Suzanne Staggenborg's *Social Movements* and Sydney Tarrow's *Power In Movement*, and talk about how you can build off of the work they discuss to assess a new case, using the American Civil Rights Movement as an in-class example.

Your assignment for unit three is to write a 8-10 page **research paper** which incorporates substantial scholarly research into an original argument about power in the context of a

contemporary social movement. Suggested topics include the Tea Party, Occupy Wall Street, and Black Lives Matter; however, I am open to alternative topics, especially from students interested in writing about a topic from outside the American context. Your performance on this assignment will determine 40% of your final grade.

III. Course Policies

The following portions of the syllabus describe the course policies on matters related to **attendance, completion and submission of work**, as well as **collaboration and academic honesty**. Please familiarize yourself with the course policies and let me know as soon as possible if any of these policies need to be clarified.

A. Attendance

Because Expos has a shorter semester and fewer class hours than other courses, and because instruction in Expos proceeds by sequential writing activities, your consistent attendance is essential. *If you are absent without medical excuse **more than twice**, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.* On the occasion of your second unexcused absence, you will receive a letter warning you of your situation. This letter will also be sent to your Resident Dean, so the College can give you whatever supervision and support you need to complete the course.

Apart from religious holidays, only medical absences can be excused. In the case of a medical problem, you should contact your preceptor before the class to explain, but in any event within 24 hours: otherwise you will be required to provide a note from UHS or another medical official, or your Resident Dean. *Absences because of special events such as athletic meets, debates, conferences, and concerts are not excusable absences.* If such an event is very important to you, you may decide to take one of your two allowable unexcused absences; but again, you are expected to contact your preceptor beforehand if you will miss a class, or at least within 24 hours. If you wish to attend an event that will put you over the two-absence limit, you should contact your Resident Dean and you must directly petition the Expository Writing Senior Preceptor, who will grant such petitions only in extraordinary circumstances and only when your work in the class has been exemplary.

B. Participation

Because the goal of Expos is to help students improve as individual writers through conversation with both their instructors and their peers, it will only yield its greatest rewards for students who participate actively in all exercises, discussions, and workshops. Though the vast majority of your grade in the class will be determined by the quality of your final papers, **participation is a graded component of this course.** Only students who contribute actively to class discussions and workshops, and who

complete all response papers, class exercises, and revisions thoughtfully and thoroughly will receive full credit for participation. Your participation in the class will determine 10% of your final grade.

C. Completion of Work

Because your Expos course is a planned sequence of writing, you must write all of the assigned essays to pass the course, and you must write them within the schedule of the course—not in the last few days of the semester after you have fallen behind. You will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements, therefore, if you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of an essay by the final due date in that essay unit. The letter will also specify the new date by which you must submit the late work, and be copied to your Resident Dean. *If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of the essay by this new date, and you have not documented a medical problem, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.*

D. Electronic Submission of Work

You will submit at least some of your work electronically this semester. As you send or upload each document, it is your responsibility to ensure that you have saved the document in a form compatible with Microsoft Word. It is also your responsibility to ensure that the file you are sending is not corrupted or damaged. If I cannot open or read the file you have sent, the essay will be subject to a late penalty.

E. Collaboration

This course will provide opportunities for you to improve your work through collaboration with your peers. At the same time, you are responsible for completing your own writing and revision exercises on your own. **All work submitted for this course must be your own: in other words, writing response papers, drafts or revisions with other students is expressly forbidden.**

On the other hand, the following kinds of collaboration are permitted in this course: developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students and through peer review of written work (including feedback from Writing Center tutors). If you would like to acknowledge the impact someone had on your essay, it is customary to do this in a footnote at the beginning of the paper. As stated in the *Student Handbook*, “Students need not acknowledge discussion with others of general approaches to the assignment or assistance with proofreading.”

F. Academic Honesty

Throughout the semester we’ll work on the proper use of sources, including how to cite and how to avoid plagiarism. You should always feel free to ask me questions about this material. **All the work that you submit for this course must be your own, and that**

work should not make use of outside sources unless such sources are explicitly part of the assignment. Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and to be subject to review by the Honor Council, including potential disciplinary action.