

Instructor

Matthew Cole

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Office Hours

Wed: 2-4PM

One Bow Street

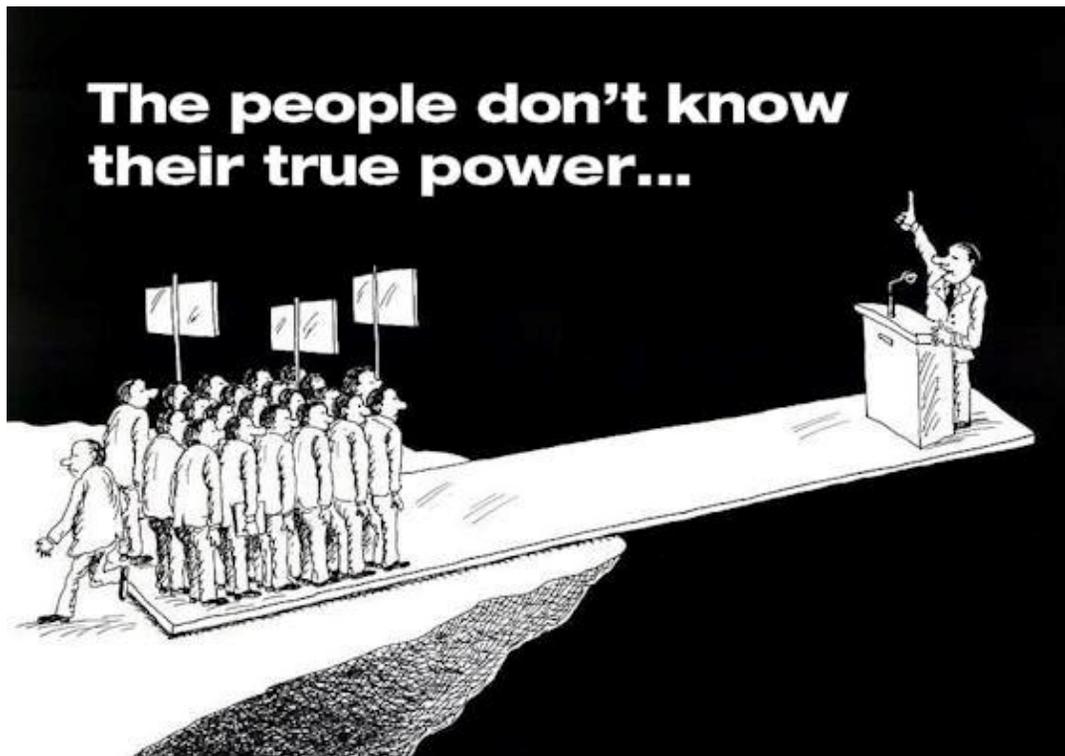
Room 234

Expos 20: Who's Got the Power?

Spring 2019

Sever 207

T/TH: 1:30, 3:00



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 by 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?

As the course progresses, we will converse with the dissident writers who confronted the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century, examine the student-led movements that toppled dictatorships in the 21st, and consider what these episodes can teach us about the techniques of domination and resistance in democratic societies like our own.

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. As each unit of this course introduces new voices, images, and ideas to our conversation about power, so too will each unit require you take on new dimensions of academic writing. Our goal is to prepare you put your own ideas, insights, and findings into writing – not only with respect to the particular topic of power, but to any number of debates, controversies, and 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 scholarly writing.

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.

To that end, each unit of the course will require you to tackle a different set of sources and to make a different kind of written argument, with the length and complexity of your work increasing as the course proceeds. You will find a brief description of the specific materials and assignments for each unit on the next page.

Unit 1: “The Voice of Dissent: Truth, Power and Politics”

During unit one, we will focus on interpreting and critically assessing a complex argument about power. Our major source for the unit will be Vaclav Havel’s 1978 essay “The Power of the Powerless,” an influential statement of dissent against Czechoslovakia’s repressive Communist regime by a leading revolutionary, and a classic work of political philosophy that touches on enduring questions about truth, power, freedom, and responsibility.

Your assignment for unit one is to write a **4-6 page close analysis** of “The Power of the Powerless” in which you pose an analytical question about the essay and develop a persuasive answer. **This essay will count for 20% of your final grade.**

Unit 2: “The Arts of Resistance: Power, Violence, and Revolution”

In unit two, we will consider in greater detail how a theory of power can be tested against evidence from the real world. Our theoretical sources for the unit will be Hannah Arendt’s 1970 essay *On Violence* and Gene Sharp’s 1993 manifesto *From Dictatorship to Democracy*, two works which concern the nature of power, its sources, and its relationship to violence – and which have inspired ordinary citizens to risk their lives in defiance of authoritarian regimes. We will test the theories and predictions put forward in these works against evidence from documentary accounts of two 21st century movements: the Serbian Otpor! campaign that successfully unseated Slobodan Milosevic, documented by Steve York in *Bringing Down a Dictator*, and the Egyptian uprising that succeeded in removing Hosni Mubarak from power only to confront a prolonged crisis of violence and unrest, documented by Jehane Noujaim in *The Square*.

Your assignment for unit two is to write a **6-8 page comparative analysis** in which you use the ideas advanced by Arendt and Sharp to interpret one of the documentaries *OR* test the ideas of one theorist against the evidence from both documentaries. **This essay will count for 30% of your final grade.**

Unit 3: “America Under the Lens: Documenting Power in the 21st Century”

In unit three, we will turn our attention to contemporary debates about power in the United States, using three recent, acclaimed documentaries as our points of entry into ongoing discussions of power, inequality, and democracy. As a class, we will discuss Craig Ferguson’s *Inside Job*, Laura Poitras’ *Citizenfour*, and Ava DuVernay’s *13th*, polemical films that engage, respectively, with the causes and consequences of the Great Recession, the NSA and its secret global surveillance programs, and the mass incarceration of black Americans. The questions provoked by these films, and the answers they suggest, will provide a starting point for your research on power in America.

Your assignment for unit three is to write an **8-10 page multi-source essay** about or inspired by one of these films. Your paper will incorporate independent research and present an original argument about power, either as it is depicted in the film itself or as it is manifested in the topic area that the film explores. **This essay will count for 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.

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 extra-curricular 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, in which case you should notify me in advance. 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.

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 class discussions and workshops will determine 10% of your final grade.**

Note that you will have opportunities to write and revise during class, and you may want to bring your computer/device for this purpose. **However, laptops, tablets, phones, and other electronic devices should remain unseen and unheard, except when being used for a class activity (you will know when this is happening).** This is for your own good 😊¹

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. **Late essays will be penalized by one third of a letter grade for each day past the initial deadline** (so a paper that would have earned an A would get an A- if it is one day late, a paper that would have earned an A- would get a B if it is two days late, a paper that would have earned would get a C if it is three days late, etc.). Extensions may be granted with my approval, however, in the absence of an emergency, extensions must be requested no less than 24 hours before the deadline, no extension of more than 48 hours will be

¹ See Mueller, Pam A. and Daniel M. Oppenheimer (2014), "The Pen is Mightier than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand over Laptop Note Taking," *Psychological Science*. 25 (6): 1159-1168.

granted, and no student will receive more than one extension during the semester. In the event that you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of an essay by its posted due date, you will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements and establishing a final deadline. The letter will be copied to your Resident Dean. **If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of the essay by the final deadline, and you have not documented a medical problem or other serious emergency, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.**

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.

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.”

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 and are acknowledged appropriately.** 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.

Final Grade

As has been noted in the individual sections of the syllabus, your final grade for the course will be determined as follows:

Unit 1 Essay (Final draft):	20%
Unit 2 Essay (Final draft):	30%
Unit 3 Essay (Final draft):	40%
Participation (In-Class):	10%