



# PPPA 6000

## Perspectives on Public Values

### Summer 2019, Session 1

#### Professor

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#### Class Meetings

Monday, 6:10-8:20  
2115 G St., NW (Rm 114)

#### Office Hours

By appointment (email or sign-up at:  
<https://elizabethrigby.youcanbook.me>)

*“The most obvious, ubiquitous, important realities are often the ones that are the hardest to see and talk about.” - David Foster Wallace*

*“Until the lion has his or her own storyteller, the hunter will always have the best part of the story.” - Ghanaian proverb*

#### Course Description

This intensive and participatory course is focused on the values underpinnings (and skills necessary for) a functioning democratic society. Students are asked to reflect on the values they bring to their role as public servants, as well as develop the tools necessary to understand others' values and engage in productive civil discourse. A particular focus is on the role of stories—those that are dominant and well-accepted, as well as those that often go unheard (or misunderstood). The aim of this course is to move each of our thinking beyond the single story—to better understand the complexity of human life, identity, and interactions. This type of nuanced understanding of oneself and one another is needed to effectively create, analyze, manage, critique, implement and evaluate the policies and institutions that shape our public life.

## *A little background on this course...*

As you may notice, this is not a typical course for a MPA or MPP program. Core courses usually cover statistics, budgeting, economics, evaluation, management, and so on. But, effective use of these skills and area of expertise requires a deep understanding of our own values, as well as an ability to hear, learn from, and understand the values of others holding different viewpoints, identifies, and life experiences. The inclusion of this course in the core curriculum came about after hearing from many TSPPPA alumni about the need for public servants to spend spent time asking and engaging in discussion about basic and fundamental questions that will be confronted in any career in public service.

We have observed that, at least in recent years, what is lacking in public life is the ability to have meaningful conversations on difficult topics. In part this is due to what appears to be a lack of empathy and a seeming unwillingness to reach across boundaries to those who are very much unlike us. The contemporary environment exacerbates this problem as we all live within our respective media, political, and consumption bubbles. As a result, we have a collective tendency to craft over-simplified stories of those unlike us, project them onto others, and then, based on those projections, develop solutions that face ideological resistance or simply fail to work well for all members of society. Without an explicit effort to develop empathy, seek out different perspectives, and engage in meaningful conversations on important and controversial issues, we will not make progress on matters of policy and administration.

This class is designed to challenge students—to better recognize your own values (personal and public), recognize where they come from, develop a more nuanced understanding of values held by others unlike yourself, and improve their ability to engage in difficult conversations with those who hold different values and views. To do this, we will focus on the lives of ordinary people and investigate how these individuals understand the world and navigate their place in it. We will do this through discussion of peoples' stories presented through literary fiction. The novels selected were choose to help foster discussions about values as they emerge in discussion of controversial issues, as well as efforts to create inclusive environments and promote equity in *all* its forms (socioeconomic, religion, race, gender identity, and more). Novels, studies show, help us move beyond our own perspective and values.

One thing that is likely to be frustrating in this class is that we will not be able to solve the problems that we identify and discuss in this course. We will not end poverty or economic dislocation or racism, political polarization or ignorance. But, by taking a step back and considering a broader range of perspectives on these issues, you will be able to better identify which aspects of those problems are within your control and how you might address them over the course of your career. These discussion may also help us identifies places where we think we are helping, but may actually be doing damage.

To make the most of this course, we must create together a rigorous and lively marketplace of ideas. This will require everyone in the room to stay engaged and speak your truth. This opportunity to speak freely and know that you will be heard, even if not agreed with, is crucial. We must be careful to approach our discussions with empathy and mutual respect, regardless of ideology political views, or identity. At the same time, we must recognize the impact of our words, actions, and views on the other people in the class and allow others to name that impact. The goal is an inclusive classroom community that permits and encourages intellectual, personal, and professional exploration and growth. This will not always be comfortable or familiar—in fact it will be uncomfortable and unfamiliar—but it should be worth it.

## Course Workload & Effort

PPPA 6000 is a one-credit course. Across the 6 week session, students should expect to devote an average of 7-8 hours per week to this class. This includes a two hour class session, as well as an average of 5-6 hours of out-of-class time spent on: assigned reading, class preparation, and assignments.

## Learning Objectives

- *Identify and understand* the complexity of multiple perspectives, identities, and interactions.
- *Use* empathy to reach across boundaries in order to understand and engage with the perspectives of those who are unlike us.
- *Recognize* your own values (personal and public) as well as the assumptions that animate them, their sources, and their implications.
- *Imagine and articulate* how others might see you and your place in society.
- *Reflect* on how to transfer learnings from this course to other courses in the program.
- *Create and develop* a sense of community among Trachtenberg School students in order to support continued appreciation of and engagement with complex and multiple perspectives.

## Course Materials

- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009), *TED Talk: The Danger of a Single Story*. Available at: [https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story)
- Dinaw Mengestu (2007), *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*. New York: Riverhead Books
- Kamila Shamsie (2017), *Home Fire: A Novel*. New York: Riverhead Books

## Course Schedule

Class	Date	Class Topics	Assignment
1	5/20	Our values and our stories The danger of a single story Approaching differences	Watch TED talk and list private/public values (bring to class)
2	6/03	Having difficult conversations Conflict at the neighborhood level	Read novel 1 Upload response paper #1
3	6/10	Community norms and standards (Whole class simulation game)	
4	6/17	Moving beyond the single story How the state shapes our stories	Read novel 2 Upload response paper #2
5	6/24	Putting values into action Radical conversations Bystander intervention Culturally-responsive evaluation	Deadline to upload “other person’s story post” (don’t forget to comment on others)
n/a	7/8	n/a	Upload final paper

## Assignments & Assessment

Your effort to address the learning objectives will be assessed through the following assignments:

- **Attendance and Participation (25%).** Class participation, in class and via blackboard, should demonstrate that you have read/engaged with learning resources (readings, class discussion, in-class activities, outside activities, other students’ engagement and participation, and anything else you’d like to include) in a thoughtful, analytic, and reflective way. Your participation should be relevant, on-point, and crafted to move along our discussion and thinking. In addition, it should reflect the four agreements of courageous conversations: (1) stay engaged; (2) experience discomfort; (3) speak your truth; and (4) expect/accept non-closure on these hard issues.
- **Someone Else’s Story Post (15%) and Responses (10%).** At some point before the end of the six-week course, seek out a “less often told” story that is new to you. This can be reading an article or book, seeing a movie, attending a play, going to a museum, hearing a lecture/talk, or almost anything else. Write and post a short 2-3 paragraph post that (a) describes what you read/saw/listened to (and a link to it if possible) and (b) names your key take-aways from this less often told story (e.g., how does it reinforce or challenge the dominant story, what else does it help us know, how does it relate to things we discussed in class?) If you choose the same story as someone else, post your narrative as a reply to their post. Before the end of the semester, take some time to read over and comment on a few (at least 2) other students’ posts.

- **Response Paper I (10%).** At least 10 hours prior to class session 2, students should carefully read the assigned novel and upload a short 1-2 pg. single spaced response that addresses the following questions: (1) How did the characters' experiences shape their values? (2) What stood out as most interesting/challenging/incorrect (choose at least one of those) in the novel (provide short quotes and/or page numbers to specific passages you references)? (3) What about this book would you like to discuss in class?
- **Response Paper II (15%).** At least 10 hours prior to class session 4, students should carefully read the assigned novel and upload a short 1-2 pg. single spaced response that addresses the following questions: (1) In what ways are these characters' stories similar or different from one another? (2) What stood out as most interesting/challenging/incorrect (choose at least one of those) in the novel (provide short quotes and/or page numbers to specific passages you references)? (3) What about this book would you like to discuss in class?
- **Final Paper (25%).** Select as a topic something that you really believe and hold dearly (e.g., a particular policy position, your concern about a specific social problem). Write a short essay (4-6 double spaced pages) addressing each of the following three parts. Upload your essay to Blackboard before July 8<sup>th</sup>.
  - Part I. Reflect on why you feel the way you do about this topic (What is the story of your belief? Where did it come from?, What is the role of personal and public values?), in what ways are you conflicted and/or unsure (be honest!) about your belief/position?
  - Part II. Seek out different voices, including (a) people who hold a different view or different experience related to this topic and (b) people with different identifies than you, what are the assumptions and values (and stories) held by these different voices? What other positions are there (Can you identify complexity beyond the simplified left and right position)?
  - Part III. What are areas of potential fruitful dialogue, policy analysis, interventions, research, focus, etc. on this topic? Do you see any opportunities to use bystander intervention, radical conversations, or other tools/techniques we have discussed in this class? Personally, do you want to engage in efforts to engage/reconcile conflicting views/groups on this topic? Why or why not? If so, what could that look like? If not, what are other actions/efforts you would prefer to take related to this topic? Be as specific as you can.

## More Information on Academic Policies @ TSPPPA

### Standard Trachtenberg School Policies

1. **The Syllabus:** This syllabus is a guide to the course. Sound educational practice requires flexibility and the instructor may therefore, at her/his discretion, change content and requirements during the semester.

2. **Incompletes:** A student must consult with the instructor to obtain a grade of “I” (incomplete) no later than the last day of classes in a semester. At that time, the student and instructor will both sign the CCAS contract for incompletes and submit a copy to the School Director. Please consult the TSPPPA Student Handbook or visit the website for the complete CCAS policy on incompletes.

### 3. Submission of Written Work Products

**Outside the Classroom:** It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that an instructor receives each written assignment. Students can submit written work electronically with the express permission of the instructor.

4. **Policy on Late Work:** All work must be turned in by the assigned due date in order to receive full credit for that assignment, unless an exception is expressly made by the instructor.

5. **Academic Honesty:** GW’s Code of Academic Integrity is at [studentconduct.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity](http://studentconduct.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity). All exams and other graded work products are to conform to the Code. Its definition of “academic dishonesty” includes “cheating of any kind” and “misrepresenting one’s own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information.”

6. **Changing Grades after Completion of the Course:** No changes can be made in grades after the conclusion of the semester, other than in cases of clerical error.

7. **Religious Holidays:** Religiously observant students should notify the instructor the first week of classes regarding any session that will be missed; the courtesy of an absence without penalty will be extended.

8. **Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:** To receive accommodations on the basis of disability, please provide documentation from the GW’s Disability Support Services, Rome Hall 102 (202-994-8250). See also: [gwired.gwu.edu/dss](http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss).

9. **Mental Health Services:** This GW office 24/7 assistance to address students’ personal, social, career, and study skills problems. Services include: crisis and emergency mental health consultations, and counseling services as well as referrals. See: [counselingcenter.gwu.edu](http://counselingcenter.gwu.edu)