



HON 301: Honors Seminar: Justice and the Common Good

Term: Fall 2026

Credits: 3.0

Lecture Times & Location: Tuesday & Thursday 11:00 a.m.–12:15 p.m., Lovell Hall 325

Modality: In-Person

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Instructor Information

- **Instructor:** Prof. Rebecca Stroud (Professor of Political Science)
- **Email:** rstroud@university.alkimi.ai
- **Office:** Lovell Hall 260
- **Office Hours:**
 - Monday & Wednesday: 1:30–3:00 p.m. (In person, Lovell Hall 260)
 - Tuesday: 3:00–4:00 p.m. (Virtual via Zoom; link posted in Canvas)
 - Also available by appointment.

Course Description

Philosophical, historical, and institutional investigations into concepts of justice, equality, civic obligation, and the public good across diverse cultural traditions and democratic societies. HON 301 is an advanced interdisciplinary honors seminar investigating the fundamental concepts of justice, political equality, civic obligation, and the public good. Drawing on political philosophy, constitutional jurisprudence, and contemporary democratic theory, we explore how diverse societies resolve tensions between individual liberty and collective welfare. Seminar discussions interrogate foundational paradigms from classical antiquity through modern deliberative democracy, examining distributive justice, human rights, structural injustice, and democratic institutional design. Honors scholars will rigorously assess primary texts, articulate nuanced written arguments, and debate the moral duties of citizenship in divided polities.

Prerequisites

Admission to the University Honors Program.

Measurable Student Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of HON 301, students will be able to:

1. **Analyze Theories of Justice:** Compare classical, utilitarian, libertarian, egalitarian, and communitarian frameworks of justice and the public good.
2. **Interrogate Constitutional and Legal Principles:** Examine how supreme court jurisprudence, civil rights statutes, and constitutional conventions negotiate individual liberties and common interests.
3. **Deliberate Public Controversies:** Engage in principled, evidence-based seminar debate addressing real-world policy dilemmas involving distributive equity, affirmative action, and environmental justice.

4. **Produce Advanced Analytical Scholarship:** Write sophisticated, thesis-driven papers that reconstruct complex political arguments, formulate objections, and defend normative positions.
5. **Evaluate Civic Responsibility:** Assess the duties, ethical dilemmas, and institutional mechanisms of democratic citizenship and public leadership in pluralistic societies.

Required Course Materials & Approximate Costs

1. **Michael J. Sandel. *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.** Approx. \$16 print purchase.
2. **John Rawls. *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*. Ed. Erin Kelly. Harvard University Press, 2001.** Approx. \$22 print purchase.
3. **Michael Walzer. *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality*. Basic Books, 1983.** Approx. \$20 print purchase.
4. **Alkimi Honors Reader in Jurisprudence and Political Ethics: Aristotle, Kant, Nozick, Young, and Landmark Supreme Court Opinions.** Free digital course reader provided via Canvas.
5. **Total estimated cost:** \$40 to \$58.

Generative AI Policy (AI Level 1: AI Not Permitted for Graded Work)

In accordance with Alkimi University Academic Policies (Student Handbook §5.8), HON 301 operates under **AI Level 1**.

- **What is permitted:** You may consult generative AI tools for contextual historical timelines (such as the drafting dates of constitutional amendments) or to verify standard bibliographic citation formats.
- **What is prohibited:** You may not use generative AI to synthesize philosophical arguments, write seminar reaction papers, generate drafts of policy analyses, or formulate essay thesis statements.
- **Disclosure:** All submitted papers must conclude with an explicit signed affirmation certifying that the work represents your own independent analytical prose and philosophical argumentation.

Grading Components and Weights

- **Analytical Essay 1: Distributive Justice & Individual Rights:** 20% (Due Thursday, October 1 at 11:59 p.m.)
- **Constitutional Deliberation & Policy Brief:** 15% (Due Thursday, October 29 at 11:59 p.m.)
- **Major Capstone Essay 2: Pluralism and the Common Good:** 25% (Due Thursday, November 19 at 11:59 p.m.)
- **Weekly Reading Critiques & Discussion Hypotheses:** 15% (Canvas reading critiques (400–500 words) evaluating the author's central claim submitted Tuesdays by 9:00 a.m.)
- **Seminar Colloquy & Deliberative Citizenship:** 10% (Regular, rigorous, and civil oral engagement in seminar debates, textual examinations, and peer critiques)
- **Comprehensive Seminar Final Examination:** 15% (Wednesday, December 16, 2026, 1:30–3:30 p.m.)

Grading Scale (Alkimi University Standard)

- **A:** 93–100% | **A-:** 90–92%
- **B+:** 87–89% | **B:** 83–86% | **B-:** 80–82%
- **C+:** 77–79% | **C:** 73–76% | **C-:** 70–72%
- **D+:** 67–69% | **D:** 60–66% | **F:** Below 60%
- **Extra credit:** None is offered.

Course Schedule (Fall 2026)

Week	Dates	Topics & Readings	Assignments & Deadlines
Week 1	Aug 27	Moral Dilemmas, Law, and the Concept of Justice: Introduction: What is justice? The trolley problem, price	<i>First day of classes: Wed Aug 26.</i>

Week	Dates	Topics & Readings	Assignments & Deadlines
		gouging, civic virtue, and conflicting conceptions of the right and the good. <i>Reading: Sandel, Ch. 1</i>	
Week 2	Sep 1, 3	Classical Virtue and Teleological Justice: Aristotle: Telos, honor, and distributive justice according to merit; civic participation and human flourishing in Aristotle's <i>Politics</i> (Book III). <i>Reading: Aristotle, *Politics</i> (selections); Sandel, Ch. 8*	<i>Wed Sep 2: Add/section change deadline.</i>
Week 3	Sep 8, 10	Utilitarianism, Welfare, and Aggregate Happiness: Bentham and Mill: Maximizing utility, cost-benefit analysis, pain and pleasure calculi, and individual rights critiques in Bentham and Mill. <i>Reading: Bentham, *Principles of Morals and Legislation</i> ; Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> ; Sandel, Ch. 2*	<i>Mon Sep 7: Labor Day (no classes). Wed Sep 9: Census date (last day to drop without a W).</i>
Week 4	Sep 15, 17	Deontology, Duty, and Human Dignity: Immanuel Kant: Autonomy, duty, categorical imperatives, persons as ends in themselves, and the rejection of instrumentalism in Kantian ethics. <i>Reading: Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> ; Sandel, Ch. 5*	—
Week 5	Sep 22, 24	Libertarianism, Free Markets, and Self-Ownership: Robert Nozick: Self-ownership, taxation as forced labor, the minimal state, and entitlement theory in Robert Nozick's <i>Anarchy, State, and Utopia</i> . <i>Reading: Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia</i> (Ch. 7); Sandel, Ch. 3*	—
Week 6	Sep 29, Oct 1	Justice as Fairness: The Social Contract and the Original Position: The original position, the veil of ignorance, and the rejection of moral desert; Analytical Essay 1 due Thursday. <i>Reading: Rawls, *Justice as Fairness</i> , Parts I & II; Sandel, Ch. 6*	Analytical Essay 1: Distributive Justice & Individual Rights due Thu Oct 1 at 11:59 p.m.
Week 7	Oct 6, 8	The Two Principles of Justice and the Difference Principle: Equal basic liberties, fair equality of opportunity, the difference principle, and addressing arbitrary natural endowments. <i>Reading: Rawls, *Justice as Fairness</i> , Part III*	—
Week 8	Oct 15	Communitarianism and Obligations of Membership (Fall Break Week): Communitarian critiques of the unencumbered self; moral ties of membership, loyalty, and civic solidarity; Fall break week. <i>Reading: Sandel, Ch. 9; MacIntyre, *After Virtue</i> (selections)*	<i>Oct 12–Oct 13: Fall break (no classes).</i>
Week 9	Oct 20, 22	Pluralism, Complex Equality, and Social Spheres: Michael Walzer: Complex equality, the autonomy of social goods, and preventing dominance across distinct spheres of social life. <i>Reading: Walzer, *Spheres of Justice</i> , Ch. 1–4*	—
Week 10	Oct 27, 29	Constitutional Jurisprudence, Equal Protection, and Fundamental Rights: Equal protection, strict scrutiny, due process, and constitutional deliberation on fundamental rights; Policy Brief due Thursday. <i>Reading: Landmark judicial rulings</i> (Brown*, <i>Carolene Products</i> Footnote 4, <i>Obergefell</i>)*	Constitutional Deliberation & Policy Brief due Thu Oct 29 at 11:59 p.m.
Week 11	Nov 3, 5	Corrective Justice, Affirmative Action, and Historical Reparation: Compensatory justice, historical injustices, diversity rationales, affirmative action, and the debate over reparations. <i>Reading: Sandel, Ch. 7; Coates, 'The Case for Reparations'</i>	<i>Fri Nov 6: Last day to withdraw (W) or elect Pass/No Pass.</i>
Week 12	Nov 10, 12	Structural Injustice and Political Responsibility: Iris Marion Young: The five faces of oppression, systemic injustice beyond individual blame, and the social connection model of responsibility. <i>Reading: Iris Marion Young, *Responsibility for Justice</i> , Ch. 2 & 4*	—
Week 13	Nov 17, 19	Public Reason, Deliberative Democracy, and Civic Disagreement: Disagreement, overlapping consensus, public reason, and institutional legitimacy in diverse democracies;	Major Capstone Essay 2: Pluralism and the Common

Week	Dates	Topics & Readings	Assignments & Deadlines
		Major Capstone Essay 2 due Thursday. <i>Reading: Rawls, *Justice as Fairness, Part IV; Habermas, 'Three Normative Models of Democracy'*</i>	Good due Thu Nov 19 at 11:59 p.m.
Week 14	Nov 24	Global Distributive Justice and Transnational Obligations (Thanksgiving Week): Do obligations of justice stop at national borders? Cosmopolitanism vs. nationalist priority in global poverty relief (Thanksgiving week). <i>Reading: Peter Singer, 'Famine, Affluence, and Morality'; Thomas Pogge selections</i>	Nov 25–Nov 27: <i>Thanksgiving break (no classes).</i>
Week 15	Dec 1, 3	Environmental Justice and Intergenerational Equity: Intergenerational equity, climate change burdens, ecological racism, and collective responsibility for the global commons. <i>Reading: Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm (selections); Bullard environmental justice readings*</i>	—
Week 16	Dec 8	A Politics of the Common Good: Seminar Retrospective and Synthesis: Cultivating civic virtue, democratic leadership, and the defense of the common good in polarized societies; Seminar retrospective. <i>Reading: Sandel, Ch. 10; Seminar synthesis prompt</i>	<i>Wed Dec 9: Last day of classes. Thu Dec 10: Reading Day.</i>
Finals	Dec 16	Comprehensive Seminar Final Examination: Wednesday, December 16, 2026, 1:30–3:30 p.m., Lovell Hall 325.	Comprehensive examination evaluating primary text arguments, jurisprudential principles, and normative theories of justice.

Course Policies

Attendance Policy

As an upper-division Honors Seminar, HON 301 is organized as an active intellectual laboratory and forum for democratic deliberation. Regular, prepared, and prompt attendance is mandatory. You are permitted up to two excused absences for health or university obligations with timely notice. Each subsequent unexcused absence lowers your final grade by one-third of a letter grade. Missing more than four seminar meetings will result in a failing grade for the course. Students who miss the first two class meetings without notifying the instructor may be dropped. Students may miss class for religious observance without penalty if they notify the instructor in writing within the first two weeks of the semester (by Wednesday, September 9, 2026). Absences for university-sponsored activities (athletics, performances, conferences) are excused with a letter from the sponsoring office at least one week in advance.

Late Work Policy

Essays and policy briefs lose one-third of a letter grade for each calendar day they are submitted past the deadline. No work will be accepted after three days past the deadline without prior documented authorization. Weekly reading critiques must be posted on time to inform classroom seminar discussion; no late critiques are accepted, but your lowest score is dropped automatically.

Final Exam Policy

The final examination (Wednesday, December 16, 2026, 1:30–3:30 p.m.) is scheduled by the University Registrar and can't be moved without the Dean's written approval (Faculty Handbook §5.5). A student with three or more final exams on the same calendar day may reschedule one of them. Requests go to the instructor of the middle exam by the last day of classes. For this term, send the request by Wednesday, December 9, 2026 (Student Handbook §6.4).

Academic Integrity

Alkimi University is an academic community devoted to rigorous scholarship, open intellectual inquiry, and uncompromising ethical conduct. All students are subject to the regulations of the Alkimi University

Academic Integrity Policy. Academic dishonesty—including plagiarism, cheating on examinations, unauthorized collaboration, fabrication of empirical data, and unauthorized submission of academic work generated by artificial intelligence—undermines the integrity of the university and carries severe disciplinary sanctions. Sanctions range from a failing grade on an assignment or exam to an administrative course failure recorded as an 'XF' on the official transcript, academic suspension, or expulsion. Suspected violations are formally investigated and resolved through the Office of Academic Integrity in accordance with Faculty Handbook §6. For detailed information, consult the Office of Academic Integrity, Lovell Hall 315, (555) 555-0163, integrity@university.alkimi.ai.

Accessibility Services

Alkimi University is committed to providing equitable educational access and reasonable accommodations for all students with documented disabilities, including physical, sensory, psychological, learning, and chronic health conditions. Students requesting academic accommodations must formally register with the Office of Accessibility Services, Harlan Hall 204, (555) 555-0155, access@university.alkimi.ai. Once approved, students will receive an official Faculty Accommodation Letter detailing approved accommodations. Students should present this letter to the instructor as early in the semester as possible, and at least one week prior to any exam or assignment requiring accommodation. Accommodations cannot be applied retroactively.

Student Wellness and Mental Health

Your physical health, psychological well-being, and mental health are essential to your academic success. If you experience heightened stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, personal trauma, or academic burnout, free, confidential counseling and medical care are available through the Hollis Health & Counseling Center, located in the Hollis Center. Routine appointments are available Monday–Friday 8:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m. and Saturday 10:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m. during the semester by calling (555) 555-0190 or emailing health@university.alkimi.ai. Urgent, 24/7 crisis psychological counseling is accessible immediately at (555) 555-0199.

Campus Student Support Services

- **Academic Advising Center:** Lovell Hall 101 | (555) 555-0158 | advising@university.alkimi.ai
- **Writing Center:** Whitcombe Library 3rd Floor | Free consultations on papers, reports, and research projects at any stage.
- **Whitcombe Library:** Whitcombe Library, Main Floor | (555) 555-0170 | askalibrarian@university.alkimi.ai
- **Hollis Health & Counseling Center:** Hollis Center | (555) 555-0190 | 24/7 Counseling Line: (555) 555-0199 | health@university.alkimi.ai
- **The Writing Center:** Whitcombe Library | Consultations on normative argument construction, constitutional policy briefs, and essay revisions.