

Contemporary Issues Syllabus and Interest Inventory

Overview: Until several years ago, I had not taught Contemporary Issues since the 2007-2008 school year. When I found out I would be doing so again, I was thrilled. What could be more relevant than what is going on around us at present? I want to make this a very interactive and user-friendly course. While there will be times I put my foot down and insist we deal with a specific topic of my choosing on a given day, I also want to provide you with the latitude to have a say in what we learn about and discuss. As such, given the uniqueness of this course and the lack of predictability of world events, I can't give you an outline and timeline as to what we'll be doing in any given class period or week. With that said, there are some larger topics I know we will discuss over our ninety days together. These include, but are not limited to, **the Trump administration, terrorism, climate change, race relations, the economy and jobs, health care, the role of the government in the lives of the citizens, social media and its role in driving public opinion and placing issues in the national spotlight, teen issues in an out of school, how America educates its children, issues of ethics and morality, guns, the nuclear world, terrorism in all forms, free speech, LGBT issues, America's role in the world, economically, militarily and in other ways and no doubt many more topics as they arise.**

Grading and the Class on a Daily Basis

Grading will be based primarily on work completed in class. I envision analyzing articles and videos and answering questions related to those. Also, I anticipate assigning students topics, or allowing students to select topics of their own and lead the class on a given day, fomenting discussion. You will be given ample notice before this is put upon you. Also, I anticipate doing at least one debate per semester. I will introduce you to the debate format and to the grading rubric. You will be given plenty of class time to prep for the debate, which includes research, writing and practicing speaking.

Expectations

I expect you to be an active participant in the discussion and someone who asks thought-provoking questions and answers. I am requesting you bring a binder for handouts and something to write with each day. There may be times when you use your phones for research or taking polls or surveys. Thus, if you have a smart phone bring it daily. That said, it should not be used for non-academic purposes. Again, I don't anticipate assigning much work outside of the scope of the time we have together every other day. The tradeoff there is that, at the risk of redundancy, I expect heightened focus and attention to task when we are together. **Communications** is the academic expectation for this course. As such, there will be assessments that use the Literacy rubric for grading.

Materials

I expect you to bring something to write with and a loose-leaf binder with paper in it. There are times when notes can be taken and I tend to give a substantial amount of handouts. Also, bring your phones. There are times when you will need them. However, unless I tell you we are using them they should be off of your desks and silent.

Behavioral Expectations

With respect to behavior, I do not have a specific written policy, save for what is already covered in the handbook. I will know misbehavior when I see it and discipline accordingly. Use common sense, and treat your classmates and teachers as you'd like to be treated. Also, see the not above about the phones.

Attendance

I. Attendance Policy (BOE Policy #5113) – as stated in handbook:

The learning experiences that take place in the classroom are considered to be meaningful and essential parts of the education process. Absences tend to disrupt the continuity of that process. The time lost from class is irretrievable, particularly in terms of opportunity for interaction and exchange of ideas between students and between students and teachers. Knowing and abiding by the attendance regulations and procedures are student and parent responsibilities. On January 2, 2008, the State Board of Education approved the following definition of attendance for public school districts:

A student is considered to be "in attendance" if present at his/her assigned school, or an activity sponsored by the school (e.g., field Trip), for at least half of the regular school day. A student who is serving an out-of-school suspension or expulsion should always be considered absent.

Students attending the North Stonington Public Schools must remain on school property during the normal school day, unless the building principal authorizes a student to leave school grounds. Exceptions to this rule may be approved by the building principal for those reasons which would justify an excused absence under this policy.

1. There shall be no penalty for an excused absence. Students must bring a note from their parent or guardian to the main office on the day of return to school. For an illness, the student should provide documentation from a doctor. This note must specify the reason(s) for the absence and must conform to the Board of Education Policy # 5113. Excused absences will be listed on the morning bulletin of the day the note is received, and students will be allowed to make up all work missed. Excused absences as defined by the Board of Education are:

- a. Illness or injury,
- b. Death in the immediate family,
- c. Religious obligation,
- d. Court appearance,
- e. School sponsored activity,
- f. College Visitation (prior approval needed from building principal)
- g. An emergency, or
- h. Other exceptional circumstances.

2. For every unexcused absence, the student will not be allowed to make up or receive credit for work missed.

3. Students who are absent from school should make every effort to obtain their assignments during their absence. When a student is absent for extended periods of time--more than three days-- parents may obtain assignments from the teachers through the guidance office. Failure to make up assignments may result in a grade of zero for each missing assignment. A student may expect to have one day for each day of absence in order to make up missed work.

4. If a student is absent from school, he/she may not be on school grounds. Extenuating circumstances will be dealt with on a case by case basis by the administration.

5. IF A STUDENT MISSES MORE THAN 15 MINUTES FROM CLASS, OTHER THAN BECAUSE OF A SCHOOL SANCTIONED EVENT, THEY WILL BE CONSIDERED ABSENT FROM CLASS.

Limit on Total Number of Absences: No student will receive course credit for a full year course after having been absent from that course for more than 20 class periods (excused or unexcused) the school year for reasons other than school sponsored activities (i.e. field trips). The total number of absences will be pro-rated for less than full year courses and for courses which meet other than five times per week

Notification Procedures: When a student has accumulated one-half (ten (10) full year or five (5) half year) of the maximum allowed number of total absences for a particular course, excluding school functions, the teacher will notify the student, parent/guardian (by mail), administration, and the guidance counselor on a form designated for that purpose.

I. Final Assessment Policy

*For one credit or half-credit full year courses, course assessments (exams/activity) are given at the conclusion of each semester, a mid-term and a final. For half-credit courses, a course assessment (exam/activity) will be given at the end of the semester. All course assessments, except in selected classes, are one and one-half hours in length. All students must arrive on time and remain in class for the full duration of the period. Students taking the AP test will not be required to sit for a final exam. **Seniors are exempt from taking a final course assessment, in any course where the students have at least a 90 average.** Physical Education classes will not be required to give an exam, but there will be a health exam which could be given earlier. Normally, no excuse for missing a course assessment other than illness will be accepted. The principal must give such permission. In cases where an absence is unexcused, a "0" will be recorded for the grade, and no course credit will be given if it is the final course assessment.*

Grading

As it relates to grading, we will generally have the following types of evaluations: There will be questions answered from articles or opinion pieces. I expect these to be comprehensive and well-thought-out. We will also write several mini-papers of two to three pages. These will be opinion essays, but always well-supported by facts and research. We may also do oral presentations, based on issues and/or lessons in which the students do the teaching. We will discuss this during the first week. Answering questions is usually a **ten-point** assignment. Mini-essays are usually **sixty points**. Oral presentations and students doing the teaching will likely be approximately **seventy-five points**. Additionally, as I have always done, I will award three extra points at the end of each quarter to non-disruptive students who contribute frequently and substantively to class discussion.

I. Grading Policy

○ All assignments are due in class on the assigned due date. Late homework can be handed in for half credit no more than 2 days after the due date. After two days, late work will not be accepted. Essays and Projects are penalized 10% every day that they are late.

○ Assignments will be graded through a points system, as follows:

Homework/Classwork: 10

Quizzes – Varies by the quiz

Tests/Projects/Essays – 90-100 points each.

*Any additions or modifications to the grading/points system will be identified on the specific assignment.

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Academic Integrity Statement

The faculty and administration of Wheeler Middle/High School demand high standards of academic performance and academic honesty. Anything less would jeopardize quality education and allow our students to deny themselves needed skills and knowledge. For this reason students who cheat on their assigned work, reports, research papers, quizzes, tests or examination risk prompt and punitive action by both their teacher and the school. Examples of violations may include, but are not limited to:

- Giving or receiving aid on tests and graded assignments
- Unauthorized talking during tests
- Copying regular homework/exercises
- Unapproved discussion of examinations/assignments contents
- Cheating on peer reviews of student work
- Misuse of technology

Documentation of all sources is important to avoid plagiarism, which is the stealing of another's ideas, words, writing, or academic work, and implying that it is original. Both quoting and paraphrasing information from an outside source, including any technology without crediting that source is a form of plagiarism. Students who are found cheating or plagiarizing will be subject to the following guidelines:

First offense:

- Academic penalty up to and including zero.
- Parent contacted.
- Administration notified (by teachers completing a discipline form).

Subsequent offenses:

- Academic penalty up to and including zero.
- Parent contacted.
- Disciplinary action by administration which may include office detention or suspension

Teacher Availability

Mondays: Pers. 2,8

Tuesday: Pers. 2,5

Wednesday: Pers. 2,8

Thursday: Pers. 2,8

Friday: Per. 8

Interest Inventory

Using the aforementioned issues, please indicate your level of interest in learning about each, by rating each issue on a **1-5** scale. **1** is most interested and **5** is least interested. After doing so, please construct a paragraph discussing which of these you're most passionate about and why. If it is none, select something that is not on the list, but would be useful for us to discuss regardless.

The Trump administration

election process:

terrorism:

climate change:

race relations:

the economy and jobs:

health care:

the role of the government in the lives of the citizens:

social media and its role in driving public opinion and placing issues in the national spotlight:

teen issues in an out of school:

how America educates its children:

issues of ethics and morality:

guns:

LGBT issues:

America's role in the world, economically, militarily and in other ways:

immigration