

DANA FORUM (DNA 955)

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Fall 2008
Monday Evenings
5:00-6:15
Hoffman House

In November American citizens will head to thousands of polling places to cast their vote for the 44th president, members of Congress, governors and state offices. At stake are a host of issues that will affect our lives both domestically and internationally. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, terrorism, climate change, global trade – each of these are crucial issues regarding the U.S.'s place in the world, and issues that will be profoundly affected by the electoral outcomes. So too will a host of domestic concerns: the troubled economy, the decline in the housing market, the persistence of poverty, healthcare, gay marriage, immigration, privacy and civil liberties. With so much at stake, the responsibility placed on citizens is undoubtedly high.

The 2008-9 DANA Forum will focus on the meaning of citizenship in the contemporary United States. What are the rights and privileges of citizenship? What responsibilities do citizens have? To whom or what do citizens owe their allegiances? Do citizens of such a diverse nation as ours share a common national identity? If so, what is it and who defines it? What is the balance between a citizen's loyalty and criticism? What are the limits to the free speech exercised by citizens? How do citizens integrate their private and professional lives with their public responsibilities? How do religious beliefs and values inform the political and policy commitments of citizens? To what extent can science clarify important debates on public policy?

These are important questions to which there are no definitive answers. Yet, they are precisely the questions that citizens in a free society are obligated to make their own. Indeed, the goal of this Forum is to make these rather abstract questions “your own”. One of the goals of a liberal arts education – perhaps the fundamental goal – is to develop the ethical commitments and civic perspectives that enable students to live meaningful lives as citizens of their communities, their professions, their nations, and the world. Indeed, Muhlenberg's stated mission, as you all know, is to prepare you “for lives of leadership and service.” Our goal in the upcoming months is to discuss, argue and debate just what that goal means from your own personal perspectives. How, for instance, do your religious beliefs and values influence your views on public life? What insights into public policy does your academic discipline – whether it is in the sciences, humanities or social sciences – provide?

In this Forum, each of these questions will be subject to argument. Argument is in fact central to the public life of a free and democratic people. And much of American life, as Howard Fineman has written, is “an endless argument.” He also reminds us that

argument is really a healthy thing for a democratic society: “Silence is a greater risk than tumult ... Argument requires voices. Progress requires that they be heard, even if they are not obeyed.” So let us join in the argument ... as citizens, of course.

The DANA Forum is designed to promote collaborative interdisciplinary research among DANA students. The design of the Forum mandates that the collaborative project be tied to the Center for Ethics annual theme. This year the theme is “Politics, Ethics and Citizenship.” During the fall semester, DANA students will engage in a general discussion of the Center for Ethics themes in order to prepare for developing group research proposal. By the end of the fall semester, students will form groups of 3-4 individuals, select a research question, select a faculty member who will serve as research project mentor, and write a preliminary research proposal. Each group will present its proposal to the other DANA students in a forum at the end of the fall semester.

Reading list:

Daniel Lee Kleinman, Science, Technology, and Democracy

Noah Feldman, Divided by God: American’s Church-State Problem – And What We Should Do About It

Anthony Lewis, Freedom for the Thought We Hate: A Biography of the First Amendment

Kurt Vonnegut, Player Piano (free copies provided by Center for Ethics)

Course Requirements

Students will receive a final grade for the DANA Forum upon completion of the research project at the end of the spring semester, 2009. The components of the final grade are as follows:

Attendance and Participation (Fall Semester).....	20%
Four 1-2 page reflections on any Center for Ethics events.....	10%
Group Research Proposal and Presentation (Fall).....	10%
Final Group Project and Presentation (Spring).....	50%
Individual Peer Evaluations (Spring).....	10%

Topics and Schedule

August 25 Introduction to the DANA Forum

Purpose of the Forum – Dr. S. Mohsin Hashim
Center for Ethics Theme: Politics, Ethics and Citizenship
It's An Election Year: So What?
How do we talk about politics?
How should we talk about politics?
What research questions does the election campaign beg?

September 1 Talking Politics: The State of Contemporary Political Culture

Read: Susan Jacoby, The Age of American Unreason (Chaps. 1, 11)
What is the current state of American public culture, according to Jacoby? What is her evidence? Is there evidence that contradicts her claims? What is the quality of public discourse in the 2008 campaigns?

September 8 Discussion with Dr. Robert Musil: On Relating Science, Religion and Public Life

Robert K. Musil, Ph.D, MPH, is Scholar in Residence and Adjunct Professor in the School of International Studies at American University where he teaches in the Program on Global Environmental Politics and in the Nuclear Studies Institute. He is also a Visiting Scholar at the Churches' Center for Theology and Public Policy, Wesley Theological Seminary, where he is researching, writing, and teaching about religious responses to global warming and security threats. In his work with Physicians for Social Responsibility as well as through other avenues, Dr. Musil has organized educational and lobbying campaigns and led NGO delegations and coalitions on climate, toxic chemicals, and nuclear weapons in Washington, at the United Nations, and at various international summits and negotiations. A popular teacher and media spokesperson, he specializes in contemporary global security, sustainability, health issues, social change movements, and war/peace issues. He is the former executive producer and host of the nationally syndicated radio program Consider the Alternatives and the author of numerous articles as well as the forthcoming Hope for a Heated Planet: How Americans are Fighting Global Warming and for a Better Future (Rutgers Univ. Press)

September 15 ... A Nation United or Divided by God?

Feldman, Intro, Chaps 1-3

September 22 ... A Nation United or Divided by God?

Feldman, Chaps. 4-8
Obama Speech on Religion

September 29 Experts versus Citizens? Science versus Democracy?

Kleinman, Chapters 1-4

October 8 ... Making Science Democratic?

Kleinman, Chapters 5-8

October 13 ... Democracy versus Technology

Vonnegut, Player Piano

7:00 Center for Ethics: Terry Madonna Lecture

October 20 ... Obama versus McCain: The Issues

7:00 Center for Ethics Panel: "Politics, Ethics & Citizenship in 2008: What Matters and Why?"

October 27 ... Obama versus McCain: The Speeches

November 3 ... Election Eve Soap Box

Students are invited to voice their opinions on candidates, issues, the campaign, and just about anything else regarding American public life

November 10 ...What Does it all Mean? Making Sense of the Election

Dr. Chris Borick

November 17 ... Is the 1st Amendment Under Siege?

Anthony Lewis, Freedom for the Thought We Hate: A Biography of the First Amendment

November 24 Is the 1st Amendment Under Siege?

Anthony Lewis, Freedom for the Thought We Hate: A Biography of the First Amendment

December 1 ... Collaborative Project Presentations

(This meeting will be an extended class.)