

**GEIC 202**  
**MAKING SENSE OF BELIEFS AND VALUES:**  
**A GUIDED TOUR FOR GLOBAL CITIZENS**

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**Prerequisites:** Residency in Ashby Hall

### **ORIENTATION TO THE COURSE**

Over the past several years, many professional figures (e.g., scholars, religious leaders, educators, activists, politicians, journalists) have emphasized the need for a more enlightened citizenry that acknowledges its increasing global interdependence and is able and willing to address the concomitant sociocultural, economic, and political issues of our day (e.g., Henriques, 2005; Shealy, 2005). Although such calls are ubiquitous across the sociopolitical landscape, it is necessary to translate such sentiment into a deliberative and targeted educational program that is designed to achieve these goals. Through a series of lectures, readings, videos, and discussions, students in GEIC 202 have the opportunity to engage in a comprehensive and intensive process of examining the beliefs and values of self, others, and the world at large. This course is taught by an interdisciplinary team of faculty with expertise in this area, and is sponsored by the International Beliefs and Values Institute (IBAVI) at James Madison University (<http://www.jmu.edu/ibavi/>).

### **RATIONALE FOR THE COURSE**

Analysis of recent events and available evidence suggests that it is neither unreasonable nor alarmist to conclude that we are placing ourselves at increasing risk of causing negative and potentially irreversible consequences for humanity and our planet. As such, a critical mass of the world's population must come to understand that the actions, practices, and policies of individuals, groups, organizations, governments, and societies are mediated by beliefs and values that may be highly subjective, non-conscious, and self-serving rather than just, equitable, rational, and sustainable. Such understanding must be sufficiently achieved in the near future by a substantial proportion of the world's population - as well as those who are in positions of relative power and influence - and subsequently translated into relevant actions, practices, and policies. To accomplish these goals, the international academic community - in concert with allied individuals and organizations in the public and private sectors - must become much more proactive and deliberate, in order to organize and direct its vast analytic capacity toward an understanding of these real world issues, and subsequently translate what we discover and assemble into terms that can be readily apprehended by the academy, policy makers, and the public at large.

Toward these ends, and more specifically, we must establish a more just, equitable, rational, and sustainable world order, in which:

1. conflicts can be resolved through dialogue, reason, mutual understanding, and reconciliation;
2. human and minority rights are demonstrably respected and protected;
3. the ecosystem and natural resources upon which life depends are secured and preserved;
4. individuals and groups are neither persecuted nor denied equal access to education or social, legal, political, and economic resources for arbitrary and capricious reasons (e.g., of ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, political views, religious faith or lack thereof, social and economic status, or family lineage);
5. educational systems deliberately expose students of all ages to the perspectives and experiences of individuals, groups, and cultures around the world; and
6. tolerance and understanding supplant hatred and violence in matters of cultural difference and religious faith.

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

Consistent with the above rationale, the fundamental objective of GEIC 202 is for students to examine, describe, and explain the linkages between the implicit or explicit beliefs and values of individuals, groups, organizations, governments, and societies around the world and ascertain how those actions, policies, or practices are demonstrably grounded in or legitimized by these specific beliefs and values. Students will acquire substantial understanding of a number of religious, political, environmental, gender-based, artistic, cultural, and sociopolitical issues and events that are relevant to all global citizens. At an experiential level, students will come to appreciate and assess the processes by which beliefs, values, and worldviews—their own and others—are and/or are not modified or “transformed” as a result of these experiences. Ultimately, in the course of pursuing the above objectives, students will learn that human beliefs and values are:

1. central mediating processes for behavior at individual and societal levels, but they may or may not be "known" (i.e., may be implicit or non-conscious), and are not necessarily logically grounded;
2. determined by an individual's history, larger culture, and unique Zeitgeist, inculcated over time, and may or may not transcend (i.e., may be relative to) a specific time and place;
3. acquired and maintained via complex interactions among developmental, affective, and attributional processes; and
4. inextricably and ultimately linked to the actions, policies, and practices of individuals, groups, organizations, governments, and societies.

## **PAPER AND PRESENTATION**

Working in teams, students will select one of the six areas of focus from an upcoming IBAVI conference—*Sustainable Visions and Values: Calling the Global Academy to Action*—and develop a paper addressing objectives one and two (see <http://www.jmu.edu/ibavi/svconference.pdf>). Using APA style, students should develop their papers based upon targeted research (guidance to be provided in class) as well as readings, lectures, and class discussions; they are also asked to incorporate a minimum of three specific and illustrative examples from a list of topics to be provided in class (or identify other approved topic areas). Toward the end of the semester, teams will be expected to translate their paper into an interesting and relevant presentation, and to lead a discussion with the class (20 minutes total); although teams will be expected to submit a formal paper to the instructor, creativity is strongly encouraged for the presentation itself (e.g., use of audiovisuals). The paper and presentation are each worth 20% of your final grade (40 % total). More information about this assignment will be provided in class.

## **PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE**

This course is particularly interactive and participatory in nature. Therefore, it is very important that students not only attend class, but are prepared for each class meeting by completing readings and other assignments. It is expected that written and verbal contributions will represent a wide range of perspectives; in class discussions and on paper, students should strive to be critically minded and self-reflective, and to offer contributions that are grounded in sound scholarship and informed by reasoned dialogue. Because the issues and themes discussed in this course may be evocative, students should strive to listen hard to perspectives that may be very different from their own. Although agreement with others is not required for this course, thoughtful inquiry and respectful dialogue are. Participation and attendance are worth 30 percent of your final grade (students are permitted two absences; each additional absence results in a loss of 5 percent of your final grade).

## **FINAL EXAM**

This course includes one comprehensive final exam. Possible exam questions will be circulated to students in advance of the final exam, which will be completed on a take home basis. Specific questions for the final exam will be selected and/or developed from these possible questions. The final exam is worth 30 percent of your grade.

## **ASSESSMENT OF INTERNATIONAL LEARNING**

As part of a larger grant project in which JMU students are participating, students in this class will also be asked to complete an inventory of beliefs and values at the outset of this course and at its conclusion. This assessment project is coordinated with the Office of Office of International Programs at JMU, and has been approved by the JMU Institutional Review Board. Participation is completely voluntary and confidential. More information about this project will be provided in class.

## **COURSE READINGS**

Specific readings corresponding to various topic areas will be assigned in class and made available (e.g., via Blackboard) to students.

## **GRADING**

Grades will be assigned on the following basis:

Paper and Presentation	= 40%
Participation	= 30%
Final Exam	= 30%
	_____
	= 100%

Grades will be awarded according to the following scale:

- A = 90-100%
- B = 80-89%
- C = 70-79%
- D = 60-69%
- F = below 60%

**NOTE:** This syllabus (including the course schedule) is subject to change. Students will be notified of any changes in class. All aspects of the JMU Honor Code are applicable to this class. If you have any questions about the relevance or applicability of the JMU Honor Code, please ask your course instructor.

## GEIC 202: COURSE SCHEDULE

- Week 1: Making Sense of Beliefs and Values: A Guided Tour for Global Citizens (Overview and Introduction) (Shealy)
- Week 2: Principles and Paradigms of Enlightened Discourse: Some Rules for the Game (Linder)
- Week 3: Why We Believe What We Believe: Making Meaning of Meaning Making (Shealy)
- Week 4: Organizing Human Knowledge: Why it Matters to All of Us (Henriques)
- Week 5: Who Learns What and How: A Comparative View of International Education (Sternberger)
- Week 6: Paper Development and Discussion (Shealy)
- Week 7: In The Name of God: Historical Precedents and Current Events (Hawk)
- Week 8: Fiddling Around While the World Burns: Hot Environmental Issues Facing Planet Earth (Coffman & White)
- Week 9: “Bad Genes” and “Poor Stock”: The Ancient Art and Dismal Science of Defining and Eradicating Outgroups (Nash)
- Week 10: “Good Girls” and “Bad Boys”: The Construction and Consequences of Gender Around the World (Henriques & Linder)
- Week 11: *Art Around the World*: Expressing and Experiencing a World of Views (Coffman)
- Week 12: Sociopolitical Lessons from the Liberal Left and Conservative Right: In Search of Common Ground (White)
- Week 13: Putting it All Together: Belief-Value Applications to Self, Others, and the World at Large (Shealy)
- Week 14: Paper Presentations (Shealy)
- Week 15: Final Exam (Shealy)