

HNRS 1100.002: The Good Society

Spring 2026
TTH 5:00pm to 6:20pm
LANG 205

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Office Hours

I will be available after class meetings for any general questions. I have open office hours Thursdays from 3pm to 4pm. We can meet in-person or through Zoom. Email me with quick questions, or to set up an appointment outside of my normal office hour times.

Course Description

What makes a society “good,” and who gets to decide? How does it provide the things it needs? How does it take care of itself? How does it reproduce its customs, heritage, and laws? How does it deal with those who don’t follow the rules? It can be difficult to come to an agreement on the specific aspects that make a society good. For example, some suggest a good society should value individual rights and liberties above all else, while others prefer more collectivist approaches as the best way to tend to the needs of all society’s members. Examples of both approaches, for both better and worse, can be found throughout our collective history, as well as represented in contemporary events.

This course examines enduring debates about how societies balance individual freedom with collective responsibility, private interests with public goods, and moral ideals with political and economic realities. Drawing on philosophy, political theory, economics, history, and social science, students will explore competing visions of the good society through both classical texts, current research, and contemporary case studies.

A central feature of the course is a comparative framework that places the United States alongside Denmark, a social democracy often cited for its approaches to education, healthcare, sustainability, and criminal justice. In this course students will critically evaluate how societies organize power, distribute resources, and justify collective decisions. The course emphasizes critical thinking and effective communication, challenging students to engage deeply with complex moral issues while learning to listen, articulate ideas, and work productively with others.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Integrate ideas from multiple disciplines to analyze how different theories define a “good society,” focusing on the balance between individual rights, collective responsibility, and public and private goods.
2. Examine historical and contemporary case studies to understand how societies organize political, economic, and social institutions, and how these choices shape outcomes in areas such as education, healthcare, sustainability, commerce, and criminal justice.
3. Strengthen critical thinking and communication skills by participating in discussion, debate, collaborative activities, and reflective writing that require listening to others, articulating ideas clearly, and engaging respectfully with differing viewpoints.
4. Compare approaches to social organization in the United States and Denmark, evaluating how cultural values, institutional structures, and policy decisions shape social outcomes and definitions of collective well-being.
5. Develop cultural awareness and reflective practices that prepare students for meaningful participation in the Global Intensive Opportunity study abroad program to Denmark, supporting thoughtful and respectful engagement in cross-cultural settings.

Materials

We will be using the following texts throughout the semester. These are available in both print and digital form. Specific chapters will be assigned through a reading guide available at the beginning of the semester:

- History of Denmark by Jespersen, Knud J.V. (9781137611796)
- Environmental Science and International Politics by Henderson, David E. & Henderson, Susan K (9781469640303)
- Walden Two by BF Skinner (No DOI because it is an older book).

In addition to the books above we will be reading a variety of scholarly and academic journal articles. These will be posted in the course Canvas or distributed in class.

Assignments

All in-class writing, quizzes, and exams will be completed using a Blue Book (actually these are Green) provided by the instructor. These will be distributed at the beginning, and collected at the end of class each day by the instructed.

Any take-home assignment must be submitted via email prior to the start of class on the assigned due date. Late submissions may not be accepted without prior approval. All assignments should be completed/submitted by the due date. Late work should be approved by the instructor beforehand, and will receive a 5 point deduction for each day it is late.

Course Assignment Descriptions

Participation/In-Class Assignments

Daily participation is a core component of this course and may take several forms, including short individual writing prompts, small-group activities, structured discussions, or applied exercises connected to course readings. Most participation assignments will be completed in class using the Blue Book or a worksheet provided by the instructor. These activities are designed to help students practice critical thinking, communication, and collaborative problem-solving.

Unit Quizzes

The course is organized into six units, each lasting approximately two weeks. At the end of each unit, students will complete a unit quiz, typically administered on a Thursday. Quizzes will assess comprehension of key concepts, readings, and case studies from the unit and will be completed in class using the Blue Book.

Danish History & Culture Group Presentations

Students will be placed into small groups and assigned a chapter from *A History of Denmark* by Knud Jespersen. Each group will be responsible for leading the class session related to their assigned chapter. While all students are required to read the chapter, the presenting group will facilitate the day's learning through a combination of:

- Brief lecture or overview
- Interactive activity or discussion
- Short assessment or reflection

Groups should approach this assignment as if they are teaching the class for the day. In addition, each group must provide a small one page handout covering the major information, ideas, and themes for their chapter to each class member.

Group assignments and a presentation schedule will be distributed in class early in the semester.

Midterm Exam

The midterm exam will take place on **Thursday, March 5** (Week 8), prior to Spring Break. The exam will be completed in person and will include a combination of multiple-choice, short-answer, and essay questions. The midterm is designed to assess students' ability to synthesize theoretical frameworks, historical context, and comparative case studies covered in the first half of the course.

Final Exam

The final exam will take place during the final class meeting on **Tuesday, May 5th** during finals week. Like the midterm, the final exam will be completed in person using a Blue Book and will include multiple-choice, short-answer, and essay questions. The final exam will emphasize synthesis across the entire course, including theory, case studies, Danish history, and comparative analysis.

Grades

Final grades in this course are based on performance across multiple forms of assessment, including in-class writing, participation, quizzes, exams, and group work. The table below outlines the major assignments, their due dates, and the total points possible for each. Detailed instructions and grading criteria for individual assignments will be provided in class or through Canvas as appropriate.

Assignment	Due Date	Points
Participation/In-Class Assignments	On Going	200 points (10pts each, 20 total)
Unit Quizzes	Last Thursday of each Unit	300 points (50pts each, 6 total)
Danish History Group Presentations	On Going	100 points
Midterm Exam	Thursday, March 5 th	200 points
Final Exam	Tuesday, May 5 th	200 points
Total Class		1000 points

Grades will be determined by the following scale:

- A:** 900–1,000 points
- B:** 800–899 points
- C:** 700–799 points
- D:** 600–699 points
- F:** 0–599 points

Late Assignments

Assignments are due by the dates in the Course Outline. Late assignments will be penalized one grade level for each class period it is late.

Artificial Intelligence Usage

This course is designed to prioritize in-class thinking, writing, and discussion, with most graded work completed during class using Blue Books provided by the instructor. Because of this structure, students are expected to rely primarily on their own preparation, reasoning, and engagement with course materials.

For assignments completed outside of class, students may use AI tools (such as ChatGPT or similar platforms) only as a secondary support, similar to a peer reviewer or writing assistant. Acceptable uses include checking clarity, organization, grammar, or helping identify areas where an argument may need further development. AI tools may not be used to generate original ideas, arguments, or written responses that are submitted as the student's own work.

Any use of AI must be clearly acknowledged and cited in the assignment. Students should briefly describe how the tool was used (e.g., “AI was used to review organization and clarity”). Failure to disclose AI use, or using AI as a substitute for original thinking and writing, will be treated as a violation of academic integrity.

The goal of this policy is not to prohibit technology, but to ensure that students develop the critical thinking, communication, and analytical skills that are central to the purpose of this course and the Honors College.

This AI policy reflects the expectations for this course only and may differ from policies used in other classes. Students are responsible for understanding and following each instructor’s individual guidelines regarding AI use in all of their coursework.

Class Discussions

Discussion based courses are excellent opportunities to engage with material while learning about the experiences of others in the classroom. Discussing contemporary topics, especially those related to a good society, can be very powerful and hit close to home for many of us. I want all students to contribute and feel that their voice can be heard. To ensure we can accomplish this, here are a few class guidelines:

- Take care of yourself.
- Freedom of expression is a fundamental right and an essential component of any good society. But, any communication that is cruel and derogatory will not be tolerated.
- Respect each other and the instructor, especially when their opinions differ from yours. This includes in-person and online interactions.
- Treat others as you want to be treated.
- Use “I” statements to share thoughts and feelings.
- Use critical thinking skills to challenge other people’s ideas, as well as your own.
- Avoid individual attacks, instead engage with other people’s ideas.
- Proofread and fact-check your sources.
- What you put online can be permanent, so use good judgement and caution.

Academic Integrity

According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University. Please see the undergraduate catalog on [the Standards of Academic Integrity](#) for more information.

Course Flexibility

This syllabus is intended to provide a general plan for the course. As we move through the semester, the instructor may make adjustments to the schedule, readings, or assignments if it better supports the goals of the course or improves student learning and engagement. Any changes will be communicated clearly and in advance whenever possible.

ODA Statement

UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one's specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the ODA website at disability.unt.edu.

For information, call the Office of Disability Accommodation at 940-565-4323, TDD access: 940-565-2958 or 940-369-8652; the Office of Equal Opportunity at 940-565-2759. TDD access is available through Relay Texas: 800-735-2989 or 940-369-8652.

SPOT

Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPOT) is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. This short, anonymous survey will be made available to you at the end of the semester. This is an opportunity for you provide feedback about the class and instructor. I am very interested in this feedback as I continually work to improve my practice as a teacher. I consider SPOT to be an important part of your participation in this class.

Emergency notification and procedures

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Blackboard for contingency plans for covering course materials.

Retention of Student Records

Student records pertaining to this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records such as exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers submitted during the duration of the course are kept for at least one calendar year after course completion. Course work completed via the Canvas online system, including grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. Students have the right to view their individual record; however, information about student's records will not be divulged to other individuals without proper written consent. Students are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and the University's policy. See UNT Policy 10.10, Records Management and Retention for additional information.