



Books Behind Bars: Life, Literature, and Leadership (RUTR 3340/ LASE 3559)

Students in this course grapple in a profound and personal way with timeless human questions: Who am I? Why am I here? How should I live? They do this by facilitating discussions about short masterpieces of Russian literature with residents at a maximum-security juvenile correctional center. The integrated service-learning curriculum provides a unique opportunity for purposeful literature study, community engagement, and youth mentoring. The course can also help you develop essential professional and personal leadership skills.

Past students have expressed newfound appreciation of the ways that great literature can effect personal and social development. Many say that the course awakened their passion for reading and reconnected them with a sense of the purpose and relevance of literature studies. Through providing a first-hand experience of cultural diversity, students report that the course had a profound impact on their lives while allowing them to have a profound impact on the lives of others.

Authors read will include Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Pushkin, Chekhov, Pavlovla, Solzhenitsyn, Lermontov, Sharlamov, and others. This course is open to all students regardless of major. Enrollment is limited and by instructor permission only. You will receive 4 credits.

Times and Locations:

Tuesdays: For the first four weeks we will meet from 12:30 to 4:00, location to be determined. Beginning the fifth week of class, we will meet on Tuesdays from 12:30 to 5:00, and travel to Beaumont Juvenile Correctional Center (<http://www.djj.virginia.gov/ResidentialPages/Beaumont.aspx>).

Thursdays: We will meet from 12:30 to 1:45, location to be determined.

For more information, contact Ms. Monica Patterson at map9jw@virginia.edu

Information sessions about the course will be held on

Monday, October 10, 5:00 – 6:00 PM, New Cabell 232
Tuesday, October 18, 6:00 – 7:00 PM, New Cabell 232
Wednesday, October 19, 4:00 – 5:00 PM, New Cabell 332

COURSE OBJECTIVES

“Books Behind Bars” has a number of learning objectives. Some focus on tangible knowledge and skills while others are more abstract and of long-lasting benefit. Some of these objectives relate directly to the subject matter—Russian literature—while others are more broadly related to your professional and personal success in life.

Foundational Knowledge: What knowledge can you obtain in this course?

In this course you should learn to:

- Recognize key authors, works, themes, and characters from nineteenth and twentieth-century Russian literature
- Understand some of the social, economic, and cultural forces that shape the author’s world view
- Learn enough about classical Russian writers to decide which ones you might like to pursue further
- Effectively apply various forms of literary analysis
- Understand some of the salient issues, and challenges of juvenile delinquency and its treatment in the U.S.

Application: What skills can you acquire in this course?

This course will help you to:

- Analyze a literary text from the point of view of both a reader and discussion leader
- Gain practical professional leadership abilities including skills in diplomacy, planning, organization, and reacting to problems “on-the-spot”
- Build effective working relationships
- Gain an increased ability to interact respectfully, tactfully, and honestly with people from different backgrounds and with different life experiences
- Resolve problems creatively as you confront unforeseen challenges
- Take risks and initiative while working in a relatively unstructured environment
- Become a better listener, improving both your personal and professional life

Integration: How will this course help you see connections?

This course will help you to:

- Discover connections between your study of literature and real-world social issues
- Apply the themes in literature to your own life
- Make connections between the study of literature and other academic disciplines and areas of interest
- Experience how literature studies can help form connections between people from different walks of life

Human Dimension/Caring: Why should you care about this course?

In this course you will learn to:

- Be more self-reflective and gain a deeper understanding of yourself
- Discover, articulate, and commit to your own values
- Develop increased empathy for the experiences of others
- Gain confidence in your ability to work in a real-world, professional environment
- Discover personal and professional skills and talents that you might not have known you had

Learning How to Learn: How can this course help you be a better learner?

This course should help you to:

- Take more responsibility for your own education now and in the future
- Read literature in a way that is more personally useful and relevant
- Realize your creative potential as you explore teaching and learning from various points of view
- Discover how learning deepens when your job is to teach others as well as to educate yourself

COURSE STRUCTURE, ACTIVITIES, AND REQUIREMENTS

To prepare you for this experience, during the first several weeks of the course you will spend ample time gaining knowledge of the literature and practicing the skills necessary to lead discussions with residents.

First, you will be discussing the literature itself. You will focus on the themes and other aspects of each work, much in the way that you would expect in a traditional literature class. You also will spend time thinking about which characters or themes might resonate with the correctional center residents.

Once a work has been discussed, then you will practice facilitating discussions about that work in small groups. You will reflect on what makes for interesting, lively group discussions, and you will practice actually leading some. You will learn how to formulate stimulating questions, how and when to share personal comments, and how to handle practical classroom issues such as what to do if there is silence.

The third and final element of your preparation involves gaining some understanding of the people you will be working with. Towards that end, you will attend an orientation at Beaumont Juvenile Correctional Center, during which you will learn more about the residents and discuss specific issues that might come up during your meetings, such as how to set boundaries and deal with unforeseen circumstances. You also will be asked to submit your fingerprints for a required volunteer background check. We will also spend class time focusing on issues in juvenile justice.

Once these preparations are complete you will begin a series of ten weekly literature discussion meetings with residents of Beaumont Juvenile Correctional Facility. The meetings last approximately an hour and a half, and it takes about an hour to travel there each way. No student is expected to lead a discussion by him or herself. You will be paired with a facilitation partner for the duration of the course and the two of you will meet with the same group of 2-4 residents each week. The class will continue to meet on Thursdays at UVa to debrief and explore additional course material.

In addition to periodic response papers and regular group discussions, you will keep a reflective journal. This is the place for you to explore your thoughts and feelings about the readings and other experiences during this class. You will be asked to reflect frequently and explicitly on your interactions with the correctional center residents, as well as on other dimensions of your learning in the class.

At the end of the semester, you will produce a Learning Portfolio and a Reflective Essay. The portfolio represents your intellectual and personal evolution in this course. The reflective essay explains what this experience has meant to you and how your portfolio reflects your journey through the world of Russian literature and juvenile justice. Specifically, you will address changes in your thinking about literature, life, your education as a whole, you as a learner and as a person, the way you understand yourself and others, etc. In other words, you and your learning experience are the subject of this essay.

During the semester we will have guest speakers who will talk to us about various aspects of this learning experience. For instance, Professor Edith (Wynx) Lawrence, founder of the Young Women Leaders Program (which is cosponsored by the Curry School and the University Women's Center), has agreed to give a workshop on how to be a good listener. We also hope to have a representative from the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice speak to us about salient issues in the treatment of juvenile delinquency, and how the Books Behind Bars program fits into those efforts.

READINGS

We will be reading short classics of Russian literature. You may be familiar with them from your other classes. That is not a problem; these works could be read a hundred times, each time offering new insights. If you haven't read these works before, that is also not a concern, because you will have time in class to prepare, as described above.

From the bizarre to the beautiful, the gritty to the godly, these stories and the characters that inhabit them should inspire, challenge, and enlighten both UVa students and correctional center residents. The works have at least three features in common:

- (1) They are entertaining, powerfully written, and provocative classics that have stood the test of time.
- (2) They are short, and therefore able to manage easily.
- (3) They radiate with a moral-spiritual intensity and emotional boldness, and they encourage readers to ponder timeless human questions such as:

- What makes for a successful life?
- What is happiness?
- Is spiritual wealth more valuable than material wealth?
- Is selfless love possible?
- What does it mean to be a hero?
- How can I be true to myself?
- How much should I care what society thinks about me?
- What is my responsibility to others?
- Does evil exist?
- Given that I am going to die, how should I live?

The reading list will be chosen from among the following:

Stories

“The Death of Ivan Ilyich” by Leo Tolstoy.

Tolstoy’s most famous story is about a judge who spends his life pursuing personal and worldly ambition. Only when diagnosed with a terminal illness does Ivan Ilyich really start to live and to reexamine how he has spent his life and treated others. The story is both macabre and funny, and it expresses a profound faith in the human spirit.

“How Much Land Does a Man Need?” by Leo Tolstoy

This classic story tells the tale of a peasant who works himself literally to death in pursuit of more and more land. It is one of the world’s great short stories, and it encourages readers to ponder what is valuable in life.

“The Overcoat” by Nikolai Gogol

This is the story of a poor Petersburg civil servant who finally gets the overcoat of his dreams, only to have it snatched away by thieves. The story describes the dehumanizing effects of poverty and social injustice, and it invites readers to question what’s truly important in life.

“An Honest Thief” by Fyodor Dostoevsky

This loving short story written by Dostoevsky early in his career is about a man who is so embarrassed by his petty crime towards the person who has given him free room and board that he spends his last days trying to make amends for what he has done. The story invites readers to think about whether people are inherently bad, or inherently good, but led to do bad things by difficult circumstances.

“The Search” by Fyodor Sologub

“The Search” tells the tale of a poor high school student, Shura, who is put through a humiliating search at school because the principal believes that he has stolen a knife. Shura didn’t steal the knife, as the principal later learns, but all Shura can think about is how grateful he is that he at least came to school that day in a brand new linen shirt. This poignant story has uncanny parallels with contemporary schools in America, where kids are increasingly being put through metal detectors at school. But on a deeper level, it is about the “search” that Shura, and all of us, go through in pursuit of happiness and dignity in a sometimes-insensitive world.

“Handwriting” and “My First Tooth” from *Kolyma Tales* by Varlam Shalamov

These two short stories describe incidents in the life of a Soviet prison camp inmate. Shalamov, who spent many years in one of the harshest Soviet labor camps, draws on personal experience and reminds us of the capacity of the human spirit to transcend even the most brutal social and physical environment.

“A Hero of Our Time” from *A Hero of Our Time* by Mikhail Lermontov

The novel is about a young, charismatic womanizing rebel, who is controlling, manipulative, even cruel, yet charming, extremely sensitive, and passionate. A nineteenth-century Russian version of “The Rebel Without a Cause,” this classic story describes a young man’s search for identity and meaning in a world that often feels alien.

Chapter from *A Double Life* by Karolina Pavlova

A young, well-placed society woman searching for love must contend with the intrigues spun by her elders, who manipulate her into marrying the right man for their own social and financial ambitions. This is the only work we read in written by a woman and focusing on a woman’s perspective of love and relationship relationships. The author, Karolina Pavlova, is considered one of the great nineteenth century Russian novelists, and yet she was mocked and marginalized in her time for being an ambitious female writer in a man’s literary world.

“Matryona’s Home” by Alexander Solzhenitsyn

This story, by one of Soviet Russia’s most famous writers, tells the tale of Matryona, a wise old woman who has few material possessions, yet spreads spiritual wealth to those around her. Though others often take advantage of her, she refuses to be swayed by self-interest, and turns out to be the one force capable of holding together a morally disintegrating community. This powerful tale, influenced by the intellectual tradition of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, invites readers to think hard about what it means to live a good life, and what our responsibility is to the world around us.

“Ward No. 6” by Fyodor Dostoevsky

This is the story of an odd friendship between a doctor and a patient, named Gromov, at an insane asylum called “Ward No. 6.” Bored by life in a small town and unable to find interesting acquaintances, the doctor decides that Gromov is the most fascinating person around, and he begins visiting him regularly. By the end of the story, we find ourselves asking: “Who’s really insane—the doctor or the patient—and which one of them should be in the asylum?”

Poems

“To a Poet” by Alexander Pushkin

A short poem by Russia’s most famous poet advises a young artist to heed inspiration, and follow his private star, ignoring criticism of the “empty crowd.” “A king, then, live alone. You choose your destination, Go where your questing mind shall now elect to steer.” This uplifting poem raises questions about finding one’s inner truth and individuality, an issue that most young people deal with. It should stimulate interesting discussion.

“Native Land” by Mikhail Lermontov

Lermontov celebrates the beauty of his native country, but he focuses on the simple joys of nature rather than the grander glories of political power and military conquest. The poem will give a sense of how patriotic Russians are, and a chance to compare Lermontov’s version of patriotism with Americans’ love for their own country.

“The Sail” by Mikhail Lermontov

A simple lyrical poem about a sail, which becomes a metaphor for the way in which all of us, in our loneliness, sometimes seeks storms to make us feel alive:

“Silentium!” by Fyodor Tiutchev

This philosophical poem celebrates the joys of silence and listening to your own inner voice and exploring your inner world—a place that is uniquely their own, beyond the reach of others, and beyond the ability of words to capture.:

Within yourself learn to live—The soul that lies within can give/A world of secret magic joys;

Other readings

There will be other short readings some of which will be chosen from among the following books:

Randall Sheldon, *Delinquency and Juvenile Justice in America* (Waveland Press, Inc., 2006).

Scott, Steinberg, *Rethinking Juvenile Justice*, "Introduction: The Challenge of Lionel Tate" (Harvard University Press, 2008)

Thompson, James, "Doubtful Principles in Arts and Prisons" in *Teaching the Arts Behind Bars*, (Northeastern University Press, 2003)

Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (Jossey-Bass, 2007);

Ken Bain, *What the Best College Teachers Do* (Harvard University Press, 2004)

Anthony Kronman, *Education's End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up On the Meaning of Life* (Yale University Press, 2008)

Mark Edmundson, *Why Read?* (Bloomsbury, 2004)

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND HOW TO ENROLL

For more information, please contact Ms. Monica Patterson at map9jw@virginia.edu. Please download and read the Letter to Students and the Course Application available on SIS or by request. If you intend to apply for the course, please submit the application **by 9 pm, Monday, November 14, 2016.**

Note: Please be sure to request enrollment in the course through SIS as soon as possible so we have an electronic record of your interest.